

**U-RLP MANUAL
THE ADVENTURES
OF SOCIUS AT
PLAN EINSTEIN**

**LESSONS
LEARNED**

Written by Layla Kramer supervised by Ton van Rijswijk
Former Socius Project Coordinators Plan Einstein

UIA | URBAN
INNOVATIVE
ACTIONS

FIND COMMON GROUND BY JUST LIVING TOGETHER

PLAN EINSTEIN: living, learning and working together

The city of Utrecht offers an innovative and inclusive approach to facilitate integration from day 1, involving asylum seekers and local residents into urban communities and social networks within the neighbourhood. Simultaneously Plan Einstein seeks a futureproof approach to the complex and insecure situation in which asylum seekers find themselves. Neighbourhood residents and refugees live, learn and work together in the U-RLP project: an Urban Innovative Action funded by the European Regional Development Fund during 2016-2019.

Creating a community

The concept and vision behind the Plan Einstein U-RLP project is based on the principle of activation from day 1, with opportunities for people to have meaningful encounters from the start. The Dutch Council for Refugees (VluchtelingenWerk) supports refugees, e.g. to identify their social, educational and professional background, skills, current interests and possible obstacles. Local (young) residents and refugees work on their future together: by participating in courses and activities such as business English and international entrepreneurship courses and through (individual) coaching and personal and professional development events. Creating a community has been central to this urban project's success. Spontaneous social initiatives have sprung from the project, such as the community radio station 'Radio Einstein'. Residents have started businesses, taken their studies further and contribute to society as a volunteer.

A positive example

The project illustrates Utrecht's wider refugee integration approach, in which volunteers, professionals and stakeholders work together within the inclusive Utrecht society. Lessons learned from the project contribute to the development of the central reception facility in the city as well as migration policy in Utrecht and elsewhere. The Plan Einstein partners University of Utrecht, Socius Wonen, City of Utrecht, Dutch Council for Refugees, Social Impact Factory and People's University of Utrecht are keen on sharing best practices, e.g. with municipalities, political leaders and sister organisations in the Netherlands and abroad. This is why the project partners wrote their own manuals in which they share their experiences, lessons learned and recommendations for the future. These manuals can be read alongside the independent research by Oxford University and University College London. Their expert researchers evaluated the 2016-2019 project from the start. These final results and manuals can be downloaded on UIA-initiative.eu. For more information about Plan Einstein, please visit www.plan-einstein.nl

Future

The Dutch government is currently researching the possibility to use U-RLP's integration model in all Dutch cities with refugee reception facilities. The project was also presented to representatives of other local authorities from the EUROCITIES Social Affairs Forum and Intercultural Cities Network as an example of how to strengthen social cohesion in cities.

Utrecht Municipality is proud to present you these manuals.

"Cities play a crucial role in the integration process of asylum seekers.

The way we receive newcomers into our society has an impact on its future shape and prosperity."

Maarten van Ooijen, Deputy Mayor of Utrecht

October 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
CO-HOUSING	6
EXPECTATIONS	6
PREPARATIONS	8
UP AND RUNNING	14
RECOMMENDATIONS	24
THE INCUBATOR	26
EXPECTATIONS AND PREPARATIONS	26
UP AND RUNNING	27
RECOMMENDATIONS	30
CONCLUSION	31

COA

Central Organ Asylum Seekers: Dutch semi-governmental organisation that is responsible for the caretaking of refugees when they first arrive in the Netherlands.

Management Team

Team consisting of multiple tenants paid an hourly wage. These managers are responsible for the goings in their housing project.

Overvechters

Inhabitants of the Overvecht area

Project Borrel

Informal evening meeting with drinks and snacks that allowed the Socius tenants and project coordinators to bond and discuss PE related topics.

SIF

Social Impact Factory: Organisation that focuses on socially sustainable entrepreneurship.

Status Holders

Refugees with a temporary asylum residence permit.

U-RLP

Utrecht Refugee Launch Pad: Official, all-encompassing term to describe Plan Einstein or PE.

ZWH/Zelfwerkzaamheid

Socius concept: In exchange for a ten percent discount on monthly rent, tenants are involved in the construction and remodelling of the housing project.



UTRECHT



SOCIUS

**WHAT WE WANT IS TO
GIVE PEOPLE FROM
DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS
THE SAME OPPORTUNITY**

INTRODUCTION

Back in 2010, when Socius was still a vague idea, Socius board members were running the foundation Stichting Tijdelijk Wonen. That is where our first experiment with co-housing started.

Adolescents from youth care who - due to circumstances outside their influence - could no longer live in their parental homes, moved into a building that housed around 200 people varying from students to artists and everything in between. Here, the so called 'vulnerable youngsters' had to share their hallway and cooking and sanitary facilities with about thirty other tenants.

On some floors friendships blossomed whilst other floors were disappointed in the lack of engagement the vulnerable youngsters displayed and vice versa. We always tackled this by explaining to tenants that they should be realistic. After all, Life is not a Disney Movie. The Vagabond not always befriends the Lady to become an outstanding citizen. And for us, that has never been the objective of co-housing. What we want is to give people from different backgrounds the same opportunity: To experience that it is not at all that difficult to coexist with people you perceive as being totally different from yourself.

Thus, when the opportunity for co-housing **project Plan Einstein** came along, we did not hesitate for one moment and applied. Since then we have shown society that amongst others, elderly people, starters, vulnerable youngsters, refugees and students can bond and find common ground by just living together. We might have started this experiment somewhat naive and learned so much throughout its course. For that we are thankful. Thus we have written this manual in order that others may learn from our missteps and become inspired. The manual is divided in two chapters that cover the most important parts of Plan Einstein from a Socius viewpoint: First off, the co-housing in itself and the organised activities. Secondly, the communal space named The Incubator where most interactions took place. Each chapter is concluded by recommendations for future initiatives similar to Plan Einstein.

Whilst reading, keep in mind that this is not a manual about helping refugees. It is a manual about a co-housing experiment.

ENJOY!

CO-HOUSING

This chapter focuses on a concept that has been one of the pillars of Plan Einstein: the co-housing of students and refugees. Throughout this chapter the whole process of recruitment, selection and eventual interactions between the inhabitants is portrayed.

EXPECTATIONS

According to the Utrecht Refugee Launch Pad (U-RLP) funding proposal, the aim of the #URLP included the following SOCIUS combined living concept:

To add value to the refugee shelter with benefits for the city, the neighbourhood Overvecht and the refugees. One important element is the addition of a housing project for young people from the neighbourhood: affordable housing is scarce in Utrecht and clearly adds value. In order to get the carefully selected tenants engaged and involved with the project, Socius will apply self-management: the tenants will manage the housing project themselves. Both in formal functions and in formal roles the residents are responsible for all aspects of practical housing management.

Taking own responsibility in a well-proven combination with professional support by Socius will allow and stimulate the tenants to make the project their own and build a community. Second, we aim to expand the community by involving the neighbourhood and the refugees. Socius will facilitate and organise a program around the housing project in order to connect tenants, refugees and the neighbourhood. Along the lines of self-management the program will be organic and bottom-up and will focus on connecting people by cooking,

eating, cultural activities, sports, education and entrepreneurship. To facilitate this program Socius provides the necessary organisation. Also, in the refugee shelter well-equipped common spaces will be made available to all participants to meet up and engage in all sorts of activities together. (Socius, March 2016)

TAKING OWN RESPONSIBILITY

Plan Einstein was located in Overvecht. A neighbourhood that its own inhabitants describe as ‘the most unsafe and socially incohesive of all Utrecht neighbourhoods’.¹ Due to this, some inhabitants of Overvecht strongly opposed the opening of a refugee center in their neighbourhood. Their argument being that the municipality should invest in citizens that were already there instead of focusing on these ‘newcomers’.

Thus, one of the objectives of Plan Einstein was to make it of value to the people that were already living in Overvecht. For Socius this meant this meant that we aimed to house as many youngsters from Utrecht Overvecht as possible.

¹ <https://omgevingsvisie.utrecht.nl/gebiedsbeleid/overvecht/beschrijving-van-de-wijk/>

To achieve this, Socius partnered up with municipal organisations such as the Overvecht district office and social district teams. The assumption was that the youngsters would be accessible actors to refugees as well as 'Overvechters'. Through informal, everyday encounters the connection between the different groups would be deepened. These small but more frequent contact moments are supposed to be the foundation of community building.

Apart from the informal encounters, Socius tenants were asked to organise activities. The activities would be open to Overvecht inhabitants and their neighbouring refugees. To accomplish attendance by Overvecht residents, Socius partnered up with municipal neighbourhood advisors and community center De Dreef that was - very conveniently - located next to Plan Einstein. Furthermore, some activities were promoted by good old printed leaflets that our tenants delivered to the mailboxes of our neighbours.

In addition to the attendance of Overvecht residents, the activities that Socius residents organised, should add to the cohesiveness between Overvecht citizens and the refugees housed by COA. Therefore, COA agreed to communicate about Socius activities to their residents. The first COA residents that moved into Plan Einstein, were carefully selected. The group consisted of forty, male refugees that travelled to the Netherlands without their families. The group varied in age between 18 and 35. Among several criteria, the men were selected on their proficiency in English. To establish this, Socius collaborated with actors from the municipality, Overvecht itself and COA to succeed in their goal to make Plan Einstein of added value to the neighbourhood.



I PREPARATIONS

At the head of every Socius Project you will find a project coordinator. The project coordinator is assigned as soon as preparations for a project start.

Plan Einstein was lucky since two project coordinators were assigned due to the innovative and experimental nature of the project. The first coordinator was in her twenties, had been working for Socius for a couple of years and was assigned at PE to manage all internal affairs that stem from dealing with tenants and self management. The other coordinator named Ton was hired externally. Ton and Socius go way back until the first housing project that Socius ever facilitated. Back then a collaboration was formed between Socius and the youth care facility Ton has managed for years. Ever since, Socius has housed vulnerable youngsters from that facility together with mainstream youngsters in their projects.

At PE Ton facilitated and took part in all partner contact, contact with external organisations such as neighbourhood committees and on the spot policy making. Due to his experience in working with vulnerable youth, Ton already had a lot of contacts in Overvecht. And where blanks appeared in his social network, he made a lot of effort to get to know Overvecht gatekeepers such as neighbourhood mediators and loitering street youth before Plan Einstein was up and running. In our opinion, this laid a great foundation for the two years to come. However, Ton himself only views this as a partial success due to the vast amount of facility management tasks, meetings within the U-RLP project structure and #U-RLP events. We will elaborate on this in Chapter three.

I RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

In the period from the 8th of August to the 8th of October, Socius started with the recruitment and selection of tenants for the building that we came to know as Plan Einstein.

From the first of November in 2016, Plan Einstein offered 38 Socius tenants student rooms varying from 16,4 m² to 32,3 m². To an outsider, sixteen square meter sounds small. However, if you take into account that many students live in a room that is about six square meters, this is actually a huge room for a student in the Randstad area. The rooms were divided over three floors. Every floor housed between ten to eighteen tenants. Every floor contained a communal living-kitchen of 50m² to facilitate social connection.

To succeed in recruitment, we informed neighbourhood organisations about Plan Einstein and our goal to house as many youngsters from Overvecht. In addition we spread leaflets and started recruitment campaigns on social media. Applicants could register through the Socius website. The first information gathering for future tenants took place on the 18th of August. During this gathering they were informed about the project and its possibilities.

These information gatherings are also used by Socius employees to observe the behavior of its participants. Between the 22nd and 25th of August the questions for the application letter were prepared by Socius. On the first of September the second information gathering was held. Afterwards, tenants that were still interested in inhabiting Plan Einstein wrote an application letter that elaborated on future residents' motives, input and ideas for the project.

SOCIUS IS OFTEN ASKED ABOUT THE KEY TO OUR SUCCESS. TRUTH IS, THERE IS NO KEY OR FORMULA.

Questions included: 'Why do you want to live in this specific project?', 'What would you bring to this project?' and 'Are you an organiser or an attender?'

The letter also focused on candidates' views up on negative aspects of cohabiting with refugees. We perceive this as important, since proper expectation management makes up for half of the work. Socius received over one hundred applications.

As with every Socius project, some applicants sufficed by stating: "I really need this housing opportunity, so please let me in. Okay bye." Obviously, those did not make the cut.

After a first selection based on their application, appropriate candidates were invited to a final information gathering on the 29th of September. At this point it already became clear that the majority of the applicants were not from Overvecht. A phenomenon that stuck with us throughout the duration of the project. During the selection period we focussed on the development of a group of people that would complement each other. Not everybody has to be an organizer, since you also need people to attend the activities that are organised by others. Eventually, a group of 38 suitable youth were invited to an introduction day on the 8th of October, 2016. This would be the first time that new neighbours and the people with whom they would develop their future housing were met.

Co-housing remains an experiment time and time again, because we depend upon the tenants who register and the nature and floorplan of the already existing buildings. Thus, we make due with the ingredients we get like we did with Plan Einstein. As our ingredients are people, every project differs from the previous one. And in our opinion that's a good thing.

However, two aspects are unchanged throughout every project. Firstly, our goal is to let our projects evolve organically. Thus, we never obligate our tenants to participate. They know what is expected of them and that should be enough. Policing everyone into an equal contribution would mean a death blow to the comfortable vibe we want to establish within our housing arrangements.

Secondly, all of our projects contain a hard core of enthusiastic youngsters with unique personalities and competences. Since every leader needs followers, our recruitment process consequently focuses just as much on the selection of people that do not qualify as ringleaders. Sometimes we feel that we are just very lucky that this hard core evolves so organically. In reality, other dynamics are at play. As is shown through the personality traits of Belbin², varying individuals complement each other and will therefore seek each other's company to obtain their objectives.

² <https://www.belbin.com/about/belbin-team-roles/>

| ZELFWERKZAAMHEID

When we say we developed Plan Einstein together with its residents, we really mean together. As in every project, Socius used zelfwerkzaamheid (ZWH).

This means that - in exchange for a ten percent discount on monthly rent - we involved the tenants in the construction, remodelling and management of the housing project. All that can be done by tenants, was done by tenants. Together with the contractor, Socius had a supporting and supervising role. Over all, Socius remained responsible for the entire realisation, management, exploitation and result of the housing project. We provided the necessary organisation and staff, both tenants and professionals, so they could guide our future tenants through the process of building their own homes. This concept contains lots of own responsibility for the tenants and that is precisely the idea.





It is our opinion that “**zelfwerkzaamheid**” creates psychological ownership of the project. According to Dawkins et al.(2017:64), psychological ownership (PO) is a form of emotional attachment.

PO serves three fundamental human needs: efficacy, self-identity, and belongingness (a sense of ‘place’).



Thus, a sense of ownership of living space provides an individual with a sense of place or belongingness. This is essential to provide feelings of comfort, pleasure, and security (Heidegger in Dawkins et al., 2017:165). In addition, other scholars state that PO reflects a sense of responsibility for the object.

Parker, Wall, and Jackson (in Dawkins et al., 2017: 165) suggest that individuals have a stronger sense of ownership when they have concern for and perceived responsibility for their project which is in this case their home. In addition to being responsible for the construction of their home, our tenants are also responsible for the recruitment and selection of new tenants, maintenance, social cohesion and security of their housing project. The next section will expand on that.

SELECTION OF THE SELF-MANAGEMENT TEAM

Every Socius project is lead by a management team. Within each project, the team consists of multiple tenants that earn an hour wage for their services.

Since Plan Einstein consisted of only 38 tenants because of the special nature of the project, the management team included three managing tenants. One manager responsible for everything concerning rent administration and internal communication to tenants, one for all external communication regarding Plan Einstein and one for maintenance, social cohesion, security and hygiene.

The manager concerned with social cohesion, security and hygiene was also in charge of the floor managers. Floor managers are appointed tenants that receive a financial compensation to ensure that tenants live up to the Socius Management Model that contains our housing code of conduct.

As mentioned, Socius organised an introduction day on the 8th of October to develop team spirit and social cohesion within the group.

Throughout the day, our new tenants interacted with each other and #U-RLP partners such as municipality officials and employees from VluchtelingenWerk. Apart from this, several of the attendants were refugees themselves.

During this event, the youngsters were also informed about the management vacancies and observed with the aim to preselect suitable candidates. That day, each attendant received the job offer on paper. All tenants also received the job offer by email. Those who were interested, responded before the due date of 17 October. Together with the Socius head of each division (Administration; PR & Communication; Maintenance; Cohesion, Safety & Hygiene), the project coordinator interviewed the applicants.

After the interviews a team consisting of three members was established. **Lot** filled the position of Rent manager. Her tasks entailed all internal communication aimed at tenants, mutations in rent administration, taking of minutes and administrative management of the Incubator. **Jeroen** became our PR & Communication manager. He was responsible for all external communication about (activities at) Plan Einstein. He managed the social media accounts, wrote content for the website and designed posters to recruit attendees for activities. **Dewi** took on the combined job of Maintenance manager and Cohesion, Safety and Hygiene manager. Additional to their activities for the management team, all members attended college.

You might wonder why we chose to mention these administrators by name. The answer is simple and we cannot stress this enough:

SOCIUS
THE MEMBERS OF
THE MANAGEMENT TEAM
ARE THE ONES WHO TRULY
MAKE THE PROJECT.

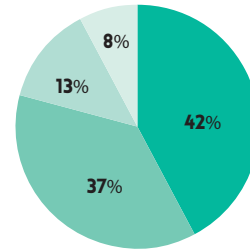
Without their immense sense of responsibility and ownership, none of the Socius projects would have been as successful as they are. Of course, such responsibility in hands of inexperienced tenants sometimes leads to complications. In this case we had more than a fair share of hassle with the PR function. Jeroen quit after a few months, because the position was not quite what he expected and took up too much of his time next to his studies and other job.

Passionate **Mohammed** took his place. He aimed at changing the world whilst on the side fulfilling his tasks for the management team. Since his work for Socius did not always coincide with his personal motivations, he was encouraged to lay down his tasks and became a local politician instead. Meanwhile, rent administrator **Lot** was working overtime to fill the gap that kept being left behind and none of the tenants seemed to be eager for the PR position anymore.

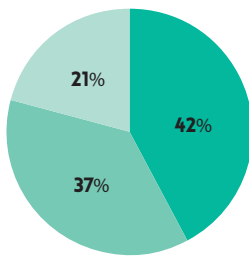
As a result, all PR related stuff that was not majorly urgent, was put on hold. At the same time, the female project coordinator went on sick leave for an extended period of time. She was replaced by a female Socius twentysomething veteran. **Ton** and she had previously collaborated on multiple Socius projects, so this turned out to be a perfect match. We became a tad desperate with regards to the PR position and half jokingly said it might be cursed. Until nineteen year old **Beaudine**, who moved to PE from another Socius project, finally pandered to our pleas. With her arrival in the team, at long last it felt like we were able to pick up the slack and put things right again.

I UP AND RUNNING

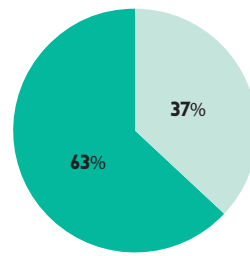
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FIRST 38 RESIDENTS



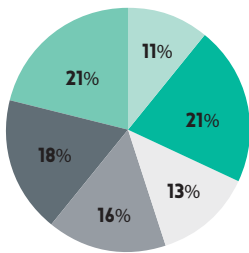
● STUDENT ● WORKING ● WORKING STUDENT ● UNEMPLOYED
EMPLOYMENT STATUS



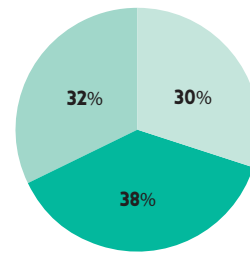
● 18-21 ● 22-25 ● 25 >
AGE



● FEMALE ● MALE
GENDER



● VMBO ● HAVO ● VWO ● MBO ● HBO ● UNIVERSITY
EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND



● 0 YEAR ● 1-5 YEARS ● > 10 YEARS
LENGTH OF TIME CONNECTED TO OVERVECHT



After months of hard work and preparations the glorious November first day of 2016 arrived at which Plan Einstein was filled with all sorts of youngsters.

They eagerly anticipated the arrival of refugees and made all sorts of plans to interact with them. After a while, the news arrived that the refugees were long in coming. The youngsters perceive this postponement with a mixture of feelings.

Former resident Beaudine states:

Eventually it took until February 2017 for the first refugees to move into their part of the Plan Einstein compound. As stated before the original group of refugees consisted of single men with a proficiency in English, varying in age from 18 to 35. The following section elaborates on the period of co-housing between 2017 and 2018.

It was quite annoying to be kept waiting this long. Our group was very diverse and some tenants really struggled to pick up the ideas and plans that were formed when we just moved in.

However, it did give us an opportunity to bond and become close as a group of Socius tenants. Still, in my opinion this postponement period could have been a lot shorter.

(Personal communication, 13 August, 2019)

I INTERACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

The first few months that tenants from Socius as well as COA resided in Plan Einstein were crucial for the bonding between both groups.

The organised activities obviously made up for a substantial amount of interaction. Those will be described in-depth further on. Apart from this, #U-RLP partners and stakeholders organised events for professionals where the attendance of refugees and our tenants was needed to illustrate what it meant to live at Plan Einstein. Besides from the organised activities there have been numerous spontaneous interactions between Socius tenants and refugees such as communal barbecues, playing soccer or volleyball, trips to the city center and 'just' hanging out.

For the most part, this happened the first half year after the refugees moved in and often without our knowing. We think this is due to the fact that the ratio between tenants and refugees was 50/50. One unforeseen element was also extremely helpful in all of this: Not all COA-facilities were ready yet. This meant that all residents shared the same front door and garden facilities. Because of this, there were many casual daily interactions as salutations, chats about the weather, or for example the borrowing of a lighter and/or cigarette. This might not seem much, but the studies mentioned in the framework illustrate that frequent social interaction with one's neighbours has a positive effect on well-being.

HIGHER LEVEL OF WELL-BEING

Cramm, van Dijk and Nieboer (2013) researched Dutch adults aged seventy and older. They concluded that exchanging favours with neighbours and greetings among neighbours were associated with higher levels of well-being. In their turn, Balaswamy and Richardson (2001) studied widowers over the age of 60 years.

They found that more frequent social contact with friends and neighbours was associated with more positive affect and higher well-being, whereas contact with children and siblings was not.

Subsequently, according to Taylor et al. (2001), African Americans who had higher frequency of contact with neighbours, experienced more life satisfaction and happiness. Obviously, contemporary refugees differ from the average Caucasian senior and/or African American. However, this does not mean that no similarities in experiences of wellbeing can exist between these groups.



**FREQUENT SOCIAL CONTACT
WITH FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS
IS ASSOCIATED WITH MORE
POSITIVE AFFECT AND HIGHER
WELL-BEING,**



| EINSTEIN EATS

Besides from the temporary communal entrance, the refugees had to use the cooking facilities in the 'Incubator' when they just moved in, because the cooking facilities in the COA part of Plan Einstein were not up and running yet.

Since chapter three is dedicated entirely to the Incubator Space, it is only introduced briefly in this current section.

The Incubator was a communal space, located on the ground floor of Plan Einstein. The Incubator had a multitude of purposes and a gigantic kitchen built in. Throughout the first period, Socius tenants organised a weekly activity named Einstein Eet ('Einstein Eats'). Residents from Socius and COA registered on a list. Socius contributed one euro for each participant and every participant laid in two euros extra themselves.

Each week, a different cuisine starred. This meant that signature dishes from the Netherlands as well as amongst others Pakistan, Iran and Syria were prepared. Socius tenants rated Einstein Eats as one of the most valuable activities, because 'everybody has to eat' and it was easy to contribute. They also mention that residents from COA as well as Socius both truly felt part of something bigger.

| ONE TENANT EXPLAINS:

The treshold to participate was low. During cooking as well as dinner, conversation flowed very naturally. Highlight being when Paul came back from the homage of Feyenoord [soccer club] and everyone learned Feyenoord club songs. (Personal communication, August 2019)



Sadly, Einstein Eats died a premature death. In the Summer of 2017 the intended amount of about 400 refugees were housed at Plan Einstein.

With this influx, the demographics changed drastically. Instead of individually travelling, young refugees with a proficiency in English, a multitude of families moved in. These families were, understandably, preoccupied with each other instead of outsiders and often unable to speak English. Apart from this, the organisation of Einstein Eats in itself became difficult. Socius tenants were unable to organise this activity for more than 25 people at a time. They worried that refugees would feel left out if they were unable to participate. This led to an impasse. Consultations with COA to find a solution for these apprehensions did not lead to a satisfying solution. After the influx of the refugee families, activities changed from small scale and unorganised to bigger, organised events.

Subsequently, one of the Socius go-getters who took a major role in the organisation of Einstein Eats, moved out of the project. This is due to the short duration of Plan Einstein. Since tenants knew they would have to move out by October 2018 and the student housing market in Utrecht is seriously tight, most of them kept an eye on the future and started searching for new housing right away. The untimely migration of Socius tenants had a real impact on all residents.

This is illustrated by a quote from Dewi, who worked as a member of the management team:

When she [the go-getter who organised Einstein Eats] moved out in March 2017, my heart broke. It truly felt like the beginning of the end, because I realized that more housemates were going to feel the heat and leave. Even though we had more than a year to go, I just knew things weren't going to be the same again.

(Personal communication, February 2019)

It turns out that Dewi was right. Despite that there was never any vacancy in the student rooms, the migration of tenants from the first hours meant that continuity deteriorated. During the project, the self-management team as well as the project coordinators spent many hours organising information gatherings, reading motivation letters and finding new suitable tenants. When Plan Einstein closed, a total of fifty-seven unique youngsters had been housed. At least five of those tenants came from a refugee background. Some of them moved from COA facilities to the Socius residency. Throughout the whole period PE existed it kept being difficult to attract tenants with ties to Overvecht. Also, not all new tenants were able to fill the gap that was left by Socius tenants who inhabited Plan Einstein from the start. This had an impact on the tenants as well as the organised activities.

| SOCCER TOURNAMENT


Another activity our tenants appreciated, was the soccer tournament they organised in 2018. Like other activities that our tenants organised, the tournament was mainly subsidized by the EU funding for the #-URLP project.

The practical aspect of being part of a EU subsidized project regularly led to frustrations. Our proactive youngsters wanted to get things done sooner rather than later. They had no patience for bureaucracy. At times they would come up with a plan for a specific period only to hear that the plan needed adjustments after their set due date had already passed. Thus, several activities were not executed at all, since our busy students and starters planned for the activities to happen in their scarce moments of free time that had already passed by the time they learned their plan of action was approved or needed some adjustments.

GET THINGS DONE SOONER RATHER THEN LATER

To tackle this, Socius decided to set a bar. In case an activity needed funding, the amount could be advanced up until € 5000,-. This sum had to be spread over the PE duration of two years. If deemed necessary, the project coordinator had to be able to justify the costs to the municipality. Therefore, propositions still had to be submitted.

Luckily, the long awaited soccer tournament eventually did happen. On the twelfth of May, teams from Socius, refugee teams from COA and teams consisting of neighbourhood residents and neighbourhood mediators competed. The tournament ended with a communal barbecue. The fact that neighbourhood residents also competed is one of the reasons tenants appreciated this activity so much:



This was my favourite, because the neighbourhood, refugees and we all came together and had heaps of fun when we got our asses kicked.

(Personal communication, August 2019)

This remark is of significance, because it shows how important it was for feelings of social cohesion to not only include refugees, but also Overvechters. This is something Socius tenants kept struggling with throughout the whole project. Many of our activities were promoted energetically in Overvecht and still failed to attract any neighbourhood residents. We think this might have to do with the fact that it takes more time to become part of the neighbourhood than the two years PE was given, but since Socius is uncertain of the exact cause, we will not elaborate on the subject.

I EINSTEIN COFFEE OF THE WORLD

Towards the end of the project Socius and PE partner Social Impact Factory (SIF) joined forces to revive the Incubator which had become a bit of a snooze fest at that point.

This activity was named the Incubator Challenge³. The main problem was that the Incubator became solely occupied by refugees to do homework for their language and entrepreneurship courses when it was supposed to be a vibrant meeting place for Socius tenants, their refugee neighbours and Overvechters. SIF hired an external coach³ to guide the process. Using playful methods, he extracted a concrete idea from the somewhat abstract visions (such as an indoor adventure garden) that a group comprised of refugees, Socius tenants and the Overvechters came up with.

After two months of hard work, this resulted in the opening of Einstein's Coffee of the World in June 2018. With a tiny budget, a lot of free stuff and some help from friends, the team drastically reformed the look and feel of the Incubator. It became a place where visitors found 'a cultural experience in a cup'.

³<https://jorisroovers.nl/>



At Einstein's Coffee of the World it was possible to order Dutch filter coffee, coffee prepared conform Syrian methods and Iranian tea served with snacks that traditionally accompany coffee, such as popcorn in Eritrea. Socius tenants perceived this activity as rewarding, because it was a co-production of the target groups of PE and the outcome was something that could last if PE continued to exist:

This was one of the high points for me. Especially because it was an absolute co-production with the refugees and someone from the neighbourhood. A pity that this didn't happen earlier so we could've all benefited from it longer.

(Personal communication, August 2019)

As the Coffee project progressed, more and more PE actors became enthusiastic and joined to help the original team. It became clear to us that the same dynamics as with zelfwerkzaamheid were at play: By giving the users of the Incubator responsibility for its use and appearance, their feelings of psychological ownership and thus belongingness grew.

WINTER FUN

Although none of the tenants mentioned the following activity, to us it definitely deserves an honorable mention.

In December of 2017, the Netherlands endured a blizzard that covered the country in a blanket of snow. This happened at the same time our monthly Project Borrel took place. This was an informal evening meeting with drinks and snacks that allowed the Socius tenants and project coordinators to bond and discuss PE related topics.

Apart from Socius actors the #U-RLP partners were regularly invited for bonding and discussions. When this particular Project Borrel was finished, the female project coordinator became enthusiastic by all the fun tenants and refugees had whilst building a gigantic snowman and she decided to stay and participate. Unplanned encounters and activities like these are illustrative of what we envisioned PE to be and what it turned out to be: spontaneous and casual. This has to do with the overall feelings of equity that made tenants as well as refugees feel at home.





Unplanned encounters and activities like these are illustrative of what we envisioned PE to be and what it turned out to be: spontaneous and casual.

I RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this chapter, some of the highlights and points for improvement were mentioned. Since we want any future attempt at a Plan Einstein like situation to be even more successful, we conclude this chapter with some brief recommendations.

The most important one being that a project like this should last longer than two years.

Due to the short duration, unforeseen events, such as the postponement at the onset, weighed much more heavily. This was noticeable in the fact that some Socius tenants had mentally checked out before the experiment truly began. Subsequently, our tenants did not organise activities or events near the end, because they were too busy finding new living arrangements and/or they felt like it would be a waste of time, since COA was transferring the refugees to other asylum seeking centers.

Thus, for a period of several months our tenants were 'turned off'. This was everybody's loss, since multiple months on a total of only twenty-four is quite a lot of time to just tick away without any action. Therefore, we advocate for a project like this to last at least five years.

A practical recommendation is to start the preparations as soon as possible and work with a clear time scheme:

Decide when tenants and the self management team will be selected, agree upon a solid time frame for the construction work etcetera. Socius started preparations in March 2016. This meant that we had half a year to get everything ready and sometimes it still felt like we were running late due to unforeseen events.

In addition to this, we are of the opinion that a successful co-housing project with refugees is inhabited by groups that should at least have one common ground such as age. Thus, if you house solely youngsters, be sure to house refugees from a corresponding age group. If you have an asylum seekers centre filled with families, their neighbour tenants should also be families. Instead of just focussing on a high number of tenants with ties to the neighbourhood, the aim should be to house tenants from the neighbourhood as well as highly motivated tenants that register in general. And when the time comes that refugees become status holders (refugees with a temporary asylum residence permit), allow them to apply for a living space with regular tenants.

Further, we advise future endeavours to facilitate casual interactions by making sure these occur naturally through shared spaces such as a front door and communal yard.

Besides from this, we also opt for a set amount of money to be available for activities without interference from municipality and/or officials from the housing organisation.

These latter parties should mostly function as advisors. This, and priorly set up guidelines would make the organization of events that much easier. Something that is important, because the pace of the project should coincide with the fast pace of the lives contemporary youngsters live. Additionally, we advise to make sure that the people who work with the tenants are available in the evening and weekends, since these are the occasions when most tenants would be able to attend the monthly Project Borrel and other activities.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

And this one might seem obvious, but we cannot stress this enough: Throughout the duration of the project we saw professionals and volunteers treating the refugees like pitiful, vulnerable beings. Of course, refugees have vulnerabilities.

However, by reducing them to their status of refugee, their agency is taken away. Our tenants treated the refugees like every other and made them feel human instead of stateless.

SOCIUS

OUR TENANTS TREATED
THE REFUGEES LIKE
EVERY OTHER AND
MADE THEM FEEL HUMAN



THE INCUBATOR

This chapter elaborates on the Incubator space in which most of the PE activities took place. Throughout this chapter the original and eventual outcome are discussed.

EXPECTATIONS AND PREPARATIONS

In the U-RLP funding proposal form, we defined the purpose for the Incubator space as follows:

The tenant responsible for PE rental affairs, also administered the use of the Incubator space and its kitchen. This way #U-RLP partners could make reservations to use the spaces and allow important stakeholders to occasionally use the location for events they found contributing to the #U-RLP and neighbourhood. The next section focuses on the period between November 2016 and October 2018 and the changes the concept of the Incubator underwent.



PURPOSE INCUBATOR SPACE:

The community engagement program will take place in common spaces inside and outside the refugee shelter. Also, the Incubator space necessary for the programs and activities as described in WP5 [programs and activities organised by partners such as SIF and Utrecht University and office spaces for partners and stakeholders] will be realised in these common spaces. Together with HIK Designers as external expert Socius designs, furnishes and maintains the common spaces and provides the necessary equipment. (Socius, March 2016)

UP AND RUNNING

The original plan was that every partner and stakeholder would be responsible to ascertain a pleasant use for all PE actors:

The Socius coordinator develops a facility management plan together with the URLP-partners and Socius tenants to ensure a pleasant use for all participants at the location. (Socius UUIA Application Form, March 2016)

What happened in reality was that some of the other partners and stakeholders assumed that project coordinator Ton was the Incubator's Jack of all trades. As a result annoyances between the different parties occurred, since some of the Incubator users tidied up after themselves where others did not. Another difficulty with this communal space was that all #U-RLP partners and stakeholders had a say in its policy.



This meant that throughout the duration of the project there were numerous meetings with six and sometimes even eight parties trying to agree whilst upholding their own goals. Half of the time our project coordinators were given, was spent on meetings. At times these meetings felt unfruitful, because we would debate in circles for extended periods of time without anyone having the authority to make the final decision.

This left all parties feeling unsatisfied. In our opinion, this ship sailed by too many captains was definitely a point that needed improvement. Apart from this, partners did not hold up to the rules and agreements they collectively decided upon in the facility management meetings. Due to this, (too) many hours and thereby euros were spent by Socius on facility management, because the Socius project coordinator had to function as a liaisons officer.

I HOSTS

Ultimately, #URLP partners and stakeholders decided that the use of the Incubator should be overseen by a paid, full time host. That way, all agreements upon its use could be guaranteed.

Subsequently, this offered a possibility for set opening hours instead of only being open when activities took place. The idea behind set opening hours was that it would enhance the welcoming vibe that the Incubator was supposed to have. Refugees, Socius tenants and Overvechters should feel more welcome to make use of the Incubator. The host would be responsible for the welcoming of guests, administering of reservations, preparing and serving of coffee, tea and water at events and activities and making sure that all Incubator users returned the space to its proper state after use. Subsequently, the hosts had to keep an eye on things to guarantee safety in and around the project. Candidates for the vacancy were interviewed in July 2017. For practical reasons, two hosts who relieved each other were hired.

The intensified use meant that the hosts were burdened more than expected. Given that some events took place in the evenings, Socius decided to hire two extra part time hosts. Both were Socius tenants. One female student in her early twenties, living at Plan Einstein. The other male host lived at a different Socius project and was a musician in his early thirties. For several months, he collaborated with volunteer organisation and PE stakeholder Welkom in Utrecht to give refugees guitar lessons at the Incubator. Apart from this, two status holders who both lived at the COA part of Plan Einstein also performed host duties until the end of the project duration in October 2018.

PEOPLE WANDERED IN FREELY

Eventually, one male and one female host were hired. Both were around their sixties and tied to Overvecht. After two months, the female host had to lay down her tasks, because the position was too demanding. Another host was hired. This time we decided upon a female Overvechter in her thirties. She bursted with ideas and partook in the Incubator Challenge that led to Einstein's Coffee of the World.

As we expected, the set opening hours intensified the use of the Incubator. People wandered in freely. Mostly refugees, the occasional Socius tenant and at rare times an Overvecht inhabitant would visit to enjoy some multicultural *gezelligheid* and a free cup of coffee or tea.

ACTIVITIES

When PE started, some partners worried that Socius tenants would view the Incubator as their chill out, leave the space untidy and cause problems with the next door Overvecht neighbours. Thus, clear boundaries were set.

Just like other PE activities organised by our tenants, all Incubator activities had to be approved in advance by a Socius project coordinator. Apart from this, the use of alcohol was forbidden in the Incubator. Therefore, the proposal for a big Incubator party intended to increase social bonding between tenants was vetoed by us.

Ironically, certain partners, stakeholders and refugees disobeyed the house rules of PE by being very loud after ten o'clock at night in the yard and leaving a mess. In addition, alcohol was allowed at some of the events they hosted. In contrast, our tenants were drilled to the extent that they knew not to let us down when using the Incubator.

Also, the only real trouble that ever occurred at the Incubator was caused by loitering youth from the neighbourhood and a thing no one foresaw: Due to the faulty WiFi connection at the COA living area, refugees preferred to use the Incubator connection. This resulted in nightly, loud and lengthy Skype conversations outside the front door of PE to an extent that disturbed even our tenants. More than once tenant manager Dewi - responsible for social cohesion and safety - had to go outside to ask them to be more quiet. Luckily, this problem was solved quickly by putting a time lock on the Incubator WiFi.



SOCIUS

**CERTAIN PARTNERS,
STAKEHOLDERS AND
REFUGEES DISOBEYED
THE HOUSE RULES**

I RECOMMENDATIONS

Like the previous chapter, this section is also concluded by some brief recommendations.

First off, we advise any future attempt at a Plan Einstein like situation to designate one partner or person that overarches all interests to have the final say in every situation. This way, the project can be managed much more effectively. Additionally, it would be wise to involve the executors early on in the preparations instead of just congregating with directors, managers and other big shots.

This way, bumps in the road can be corrected beforehand instead of having to be dealt with when the train is already on the move. Apart from this, we think it would be wise to decide upfront what the purpose of the communal space should be and to who it should appeal. Because we as #U-RLP partners only decided half way through that the Incubator had to be open at set times for visitors and that this concept needed full time hosts, a lot of time was wasted that could have been used by making it into what it was after the Incubator Challenge we mentioned in Chapter two.

That being said, we have seen how valuable it was to involve the people who actually used the space daily in the decision making about its purpose and the way it was furnished. As with our concept of zelfwerkzaamheid, ownership and belongingness emerged from this process.

Also, the Incubator rules that applied to our tenants seemed very sensible at the time they were constituted. However, in retrospect we feel like we missed out on an opportunity, because the latent message that the youngsters received was that they were not to be trusted with this communal space. This made them feel unwelcome and that is one of the reasons why they chose to not hang out in the Incubator.

As a result, the group of youngsters who was supposed to bridge the gap between Overvechters and refugees lacked from the space that was specifically designated to facilitate encounters between Overvechters and refugees.

Thus, we advocate for a bit more credit for inhabitants and users. Many situations that were regarded as problematic or troublesome on forehand were prepared meticulously. Only to turn out to be not in the least problematic when they actually occurred. Subsequently, we advise for Incubator type spaces to be as much of an independent part of similar projects as possible. This way, the daily affairs can organically be managed by paid actors and volunteers who stem from the user group. Hence, the objective should be to employ refugees, status holders, tenants from the co-housing project and neighbourhood residents as employees, whilst the officials guard the process in the background.

I BIBLIOGRAPHY

Balaswamy, S., Richardson, V.E. (2001). *The cumulative effects of life event, personal and social resources on subjective well-being of elderly widowers*. *Int J Aging Hum Dev*, 53(4): 311-27.

Cramm, J.M., van Dijk, H.M., Nieboer, A.P. (2013) *The importance of neighborhood social cohesion and social capital for the well being of older adults in the community*. *Gerontologist*, 53(1):142-52.

Dawkins, S., Tian, A. W., Newman, A., & Martin, A. (2017). *Psychological ownership: A review and research agenda*. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 38(2): 163-183.

Taylor J., Chatters M., Hardison B., Riley A. (2001). *Informal social support networks and subjective well-being among African Americans*. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 27: 439–463.

Websites

Belbin Associates
<https://www.belbin.com/about/belbin-team-roles/>
(visited: 13-08-2019)

Gemeente Utrecht Wijkwijzer 2017
<https://omgevingsvisie.utrecht.nl/gebiedsbeleid/overvecht/>

CONCLUSION

The objective of this manual was to let others learn and be inspired through our trials and tribulations at Plan Einstein. Therefore, we conclude with a summary of what we deem our most important lessons learned.

First off, we advocate for a project like this to last at least five years instead of the two years PE lasted. This way, unforeseen events such as postponement or an unclear idea about communal spaces would have less impact on the overall outcome of the project.

Secondly, executors should be involved earlier on in the preparations instead of having PE like policy only being created by directors, managers etcetera, since this will smooth out folds earlier on.

Additionally, we opt for a set amount of money to be available for activities without interference from municipality and/or officials from the housing organisation. These latter parties should mostly function as advisors. This advice is given, because we fairly enjoyed the bottom-up approach that our youngsters faced upon us, since it made for some memorable surprises

SOCIUS

LET OTHERS LEARN
AND BE INSPIRED
THROUGH OUR TRIALS
AND TRIBULATIONS

As mentioned, we think it would be wise to decide upfront what the purpose of the communal Incubator space should be and who will use it. This is best done together with the actual foreseen users. For us this is important, because throughout the duration of PE and others projects, we saw how valuable it is to give tenants ownership.

We also advocate for a bit more credit for inhabitants and users. Situations that were regarded as problematic or troublesome on forehand, were prepared meticulously only to turn out to be not in the least problematic when they actually occurred.

Subsequently, we advise for Incubator type spaces to be as much of an independent part of similar projects as possible. This way, the daily affairs can organically be managed by paid actors and volunteers who stem from the user group. Hence, the objective should be to employ refugees, status holders, tenants from the co-housing project and neighbourhood residents as employees, whilst the officials guard the process in the background. Further, we advise future endeavours to also facilitate casual interactions by making sure these occur naturally through shared spaces - apart from a designated Incubator - such as a front door and communal yard. And when the time comes that refugees become status holders, allow them to apply for a living space with regular tenants.

**THAT WAY, THE IDEA OF
CO-HOUSING IS TRULY
SUCCESSFUL.**

MORE INFO



PLAN EINSTEIN

Website

uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/utrecht
plan-einstein.nl

Follow us on Twitter or Facebook

Plan Einstein

Email planeinstein@utrecht.nl

PARTNERS

The innovative approach to reception and integration, the Utrecht Refugee Launch Pad (URLP), was developed by the municipality of Utrecht together with the housing corporation for young People SOCIUS, the Utrecht Center for Entrepreneurship (Utrecht University), the Utrecht Council for Refugees, the Utrecht People's University and the Social Impact Factory. The Universities of Oxford University and University College London are responsible for the research and evaluation of the impact and results of the project on the district, its participants and the city. Wherever beneficial, the municipality also involves other district parties in the implementation of Plan Einstein.



This project is co-financed by the European Regional and Development Fund through the Urban Innovative Actions Initiative



UIA | URBAN INNOVATIVE ACTIONS