



EFL DESIGN COMPETITION 2020-21

# AFFORDABLE COMMUNITY LIVING IN KALASATAMA, HELSINKI



EUROPEAN FEDERATION  
FOR LIVING



# ABOUT EFL

The European Federation for Living (EFL) is a European network of over 70 housing associations, companies and experts working to create more affordable, sustainable housing in 19 European countries, with a joint portfolio of more than 1.300,000 dwellings and business units across Europe. The EFL network offers easy access to relevant insights, information and expertise from the European housing sector. Through events, research, and projects, we make sure our members and associates are at the forefront of innovating property and community development in Europe.

## About EFL Design Challenges

At EFL, we believe international, interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral collaboration is the key to driving innovation in the housing sector. EFL Design Challenges bring together the brightest minds to solve the most pressing design-related issues facing housing and the built environment today. Working with our interdisciplinary network of housing actors, we set challenges for student and professional teams across the globe, offering them the chance to come up with innovative solutions to multidimensional problems. With EFL Design Challenges, we aim to unleash the power and creativity of interdisciplinary expertise both within and beyond our member community.

## Authors:

Lily Maxwell, formerly working at EFL  
Lucie Lescude-Plaa, EFL  
Joakim Breitenstein, TAFKAOO

With contributions from the project members:  
Village Co-Living, Living in Metropolises (LiM), the City of Helsinki, TU Tampere and project sponsors the European Federation for Living (EFL) and The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA)



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# EFL DESIGN CHALLENGE #1: AFFORDABLE COMMUNITY LIVING IN KALASATAMA, HELSINKI

## 1. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE COMPETITION

**The European Federation for Living (EFL), a European wide network of over 70 housing actors from 19 European countries, launched its first ever EFL Design Challenge: Affordable Community Living in Smart City Kalasatama in collaboration with Village Co-Living and Living in Metropolises (LiM) in Autumn 2020.**

About the site: Kalasatama is a 175-hectare mini city where a total of 1.200.000 m<sup>2</sup> residential and 400.000 m<sup>2</sup> commercial spaces have been planned. By 2030, living spaces for 25.000 residents and 10.000 jobs are to be provided. The area is located by the sea with 6 km of seaside promenade, parks, playgrounds, and sports fields, and is equipped with AAL and smart technologies, such as innovative waste and urban-level energy management. The area has a long history as an industrial harbor which can still be observed in its built environment, although the district is going through an important process of transformation.

This Design Challenge offered student teams around the world the chance to design a concept for a real site near the center of Helsinki, Finland in the 175-hectare Kalasatama neighborhood. The Competition is part of a think-tank program for housing innovations led by the City of Helsinki called "RETHINKING URBAN HOUSING". The winning designs will serve as inspiration for the future project, which will be developed by Village Co-Living and eventually inhabited by a co-living community.

Teams were asked not only to design a building – the hardware – but also to envision local networks, services, and value streams – the software and the blockchains – that could support affordable community living on and around the site. Designs needed to accommodate diverse types of households across their life cycles, include community and shared facilities, and address the urgent need to mitigate and adapt to climate change. EFL also asked student teams to incorporate sharing, learning, working, co-living, and other support scenarios and promote residents' well-being, privacy, and social and economic inclusion.

Teams had to be student-led, although they could include professionals, and needed to have at least one member with architectural design skills to create a plan to scale. Participants were strongly encouraged to think across disciplinary boundaries within their design process, where possible.

This Design Challenge thus offered participants the unique chance to explore opportunities for smarter, healthier, greener, and more digitally connected patterns of living, and build them into people-centered designs for a real community.

For students, it represented a unique opportunity to design for a real-life project, win a cash prize, gain experience and recognition for their CV and/or portfolio, explore their creative side outside their academic studies, and develop their team-working and design-thinking skills.

*"I am very happy that we were able to organize this design competition in a year marked by the Covid pandemic. With a depressing global situation in the last two years, this competition has shown that young designers look to the future with confidence and positive energy"* Joost Nieuwenhuijzen, jury member and Managing Director of EFL

### Project Members and Sponsors

This competition was organised in collaboration with Village Co-Living, Living in Metropolises (LiM), the City of Helsinki, and Tampere University. It is sponsored by the European Federation for Living (EFL) and The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA).

**The European Federation for Living (EFL)** is a European network of housing associations, companies and experts working to create more affordable, sustainable housing. We have over 70 members and associates from 19 European countries, with a joint portfolio of more than 1.300.000 dwellings and business units across Europe. We combine the shared knowledge of social housing providers – our members – with the cutting-edge thinking of leading universities, and the innovative work of private sector companies – our associate partners. The EFL network offers easy access to relevant insights, information and expertise from the European housing sector. Through events, research, and projects, we make sure our members and associates are at the forefront of innovating property and community development in Europe.

The **Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA)** is a government agency operating under the Finnish Ministry of Environment, with a major responsibility for the implementation of Finnish housing policy. ARA grants subsidies, grants and guarantees for housing and construction and controls and supervises the use of the ARA housing stock. In addition, ARA participates in projects related to the development of housing and expertise in the housing market and produces information services for the industry. ARA is an expert partner, developer and modernizer of housing and promotes ecologically sustainable, high-quality and reasonably priced housing. ARA's operating principle is: everyone is entitled to comfortable housing.

**Village Co-Living** is a cooperative founded by design and construction professionals with extensive experience in participatory design and housing development both in Finland and abroad. Its purpose is to enable sustainable communal living in accordance with its constitution:

- We solve the problem of expensive and lonely living.
- We do it by building housing projects that have a socially, environmentally, economically and architecturally sustainable impact on the world.
- We prioritize the community, which allows efficient use of resources.

Village Co-Living's role in the housing market is to grow the market share of holistically sustainable co-living. In specific locations, Village Co-Living is charged with the professional

Photo by: Tapio Haaja, Unsplash

implementation of community-based, affordable and high-quality projects delivered for the residents, and with their active participation.

**Living in Metropolises (LiM)** with its first European housing cooperative founded in 2018, aims to strengthen the idea and practice of the cooperative legal form, which is part of UNESCO's intangible world heritage, and to implement it with forward-looking projects. For almost 150 years, such housing

cooperatives have stood for self-help, self-determination and self-responsibility. Under the motto of Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen: "What one person cannot do alone, many can do", they became pioneers in the field of housing reform. Beyond the national or regional cooperative type within the housing market, LiM is characterized by its European competence. It can initiate cross-national initiatives while at the same time realizing construction projects with local partner organizations or managing them with general rental agreements.

## 2. THE COMPETITION PROCESS

### 2.1 THE STUDENT TEAMS

Working with a number of universities and press outlets from across the world, EFL sought out interdisciplinary, co-creative student teams who wanted to push the limits of creativity and bring forth new ideas for sustainable urban communities on a real-life site.

The results: 57 students from 15 countries and 27 universities - from Colombia to China - signed up to the competition and 14 final entries were submitted. 4 of the entries were awarded with a prize.

### 2.2 PRESS COVERAGE

The Design Competition was advertised in a number of press outlets and architecture-related websites. This helped to spread the word about the Competition and to receive submissions from a great variety of countries.

### 2.3 THE JUDGING PROCESS

The judging process in itself was a reflection of one of the competition objectives - to play a part in helping the European housing community reach the ambitious goals for sustainable living set by the EU and The New European Bauhaus.

Currently, European cities use different approaches to evaluate the sustainability of new build projects and through that aim to build sustainable housing. For the competition, things were mixed up and a Vienna-inspired evaluation system was used in a Helsinki setting. The so-called 'Vienna Model' is famous for producing high quality, sustainable and affordable housing and part of

the project's agenda in the 'Re-thinking Urban Housing' project with the city of Helsinki is to explore how a 'Vienna Model' evaluation approach would work in a Helsinki setting.

In practice, the 'Vienna Model' means that the city of Vienna requires each new residential building to address the so-called '4 columns of sustainability' equally. Through 100+ standardized benchmarks, the city evaluates the '4 columns of sustainability' ie social, ecological, economical and architectural aspects as equally important, when deciding which projects will get built.

The judges used a scoring guide based on the real-life criteria used by the City of Vienna in their '4 columns of sustainability' assessment model. Based on the scoring guide, the judges assessed the entries separately between June - September 2021 and came together for two jury meetings in September 2021 to decide the competition winners.

The Jury was chaired by Anni Sinnemäki, Deputy Mayor for Urban Environment, City of Helsinki. In addition, the jury included Otto Höller, Co-Founder/ CEO of LiM, Joakim Breitenstein, Co-Founder/ Chairman of Village Co-Living, Oliver Scheifinger, Co-Founder/Director of Tafkaoo architects, Joost Nieuwenhuijzen, Managing Director of EFL and a potential future resident representing a mini-jury of around 10 potential future residents from the future living community on the site.



Anni Sinnemäki



Joakim Breitenstein



Joost Nieuwenhuijzen

*"The competition was an embodiment of how we can leverage continental scale positive impact and reach our inevitable sustainability requirements through pan-European collaboration. Mixing sustainability assessment methods from different parts of Europe in a real-life project evaluation helped us understand what sustainability criteria could and should be implemented on an EU level, and also which criteria could and should be left for local implementation"* Joakim Breitenstein, member of the jury

### 2.4 THE AWARDS CEREMONY

The virtual Awards Ceremony took place on 4th November 2021. The event was moderated by Joakim Breitenstein, Co-founder of Village Co-Living and member of the jury. After some opening words by project partners including Village Co-Living, the City of Helsinki and EFL, students and attendees had the opportunity to listen to two interesting presentations by expert speakers. Firstly, Matti Kuittinen, Senior Specialist at the Finnish Ministry of Environment and Professor of resource-efficient construction at Aalto University, gave a presentation on resource-efficient construction and sustainability in the built environment. Highlighting the climate impact of the construction sector, especially linked to the extraction of raw materials, he came to several conclusions that he went on the share with participants. Among the points he raised were the fact that new construction should be the last option when it comes to increasing housing supply, that investment in climate and social resilience of the built environment is more than ever necessary, and lastly, that the construction sector needs to address its impact on global biodiversity loss.

After this first presentation, Borislava Woodford, policy analyst at the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, gave a talk about the New European Bauhaus

initiative, launched in January 2021 by the European Commission. The New European Bauhaus, which seeks to combine beauty, social inclusion, and sustainability in the built environment, is a collaborative initiative relying on input from 307 partners across Europe. Through the presentation, attendees had the chance to learn more about the different steps in the development of the European Bauhaus initiative and how they can contribute to the project in the future.

Introduction presentations were followed by a panel discussion around the following question: "Do we need a Pan-European standard for assessing the sustainability of new build developments/masterplans?". The discussion was moderated by Joakim Breitenstein. Matti Kuittinen and Borislava Woodford were two of the panelists, and they were joined by Kaisa-Reeta Koskinen, Head of the Climate Change Unit at the City of Helsinki, and Wolfgang Amman, Director of the Institute for Real Estate, Construction and Housing in Vienna, Austria. One of the goals of the panel discussion was to determine whether having a standardized European sustainability evaluation system, based on the same set of criteria, was achievable and relevant. Panelists also dived deeper into the advantages and disadvantages, opportunities and limitations posed by the Vienna and the Helsinki models of evaluation. After the panel discussion, it was time for jury members to announce the winners and give out the prizes. The honorable mention prize was introduced by Sissu Charrad, jury representative for the resident community. Then, the third prize winners were announced by Otto Höller, representing LiM. The second prize award was handed out by Joost Nieuwenhuijzen, Managing Director of EFL. Finally, the first prize winners received their award and were congratulated for their work by Riikka Karjalainen, judge representative for the city of Helsinki.



### 3. AWARDS AND PRIZES: THE WINNING ENTRIES

**In total, four student teams were awarded. The first prize winning team earned a €4000 prize; the second prize winning team earned a prize of €2000; and the third prize team a prize of €500. The jury also awarded one team with an honorable mention” resident community’s favorite”, for a prize of €500.**

#### 3.1 THE FIRST PRIZE WINNING ENTRY

The first prize for the Design Competition was awarded to Sara Annala and Ossi Hautakoski for their project “Tulvatuvat”. The students successfully put together a proposal that enhances community living and provides high architectural and life quality for residents, while paying great attention to the environmental risks affecting the site selected for the Competition. This entry took up the challenge of creating a design that will last long into the future. Indeed, the building is made up of transportable modules, so that if the site would become inhabitable due to rising sea-levels, the dwellings could be displaced to a new location. Furthermore, the project does not exclusively seek to adapt to climate change, as it also includes many initiatives for climate change mitigation, clean energy and natural resources management.

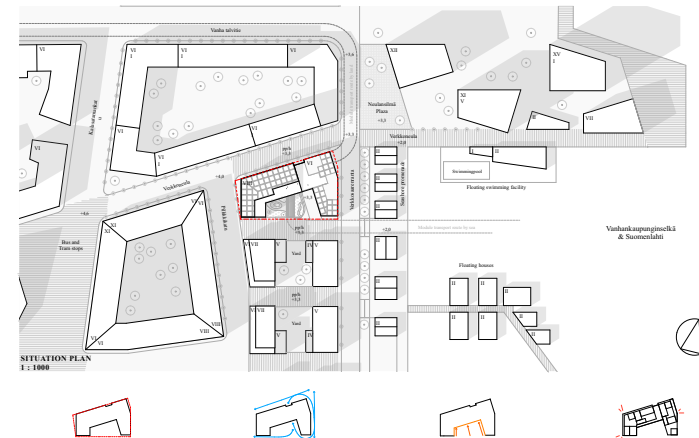
*“Considering the unpredictable progress of the past estimations, does anyone really know what the sea-level rise would be after the next three years? Or by 2025, when the building would be just finished? Do we really know when the site becomes unlivable? By 2100 or sooner? Do we know how long lifespan the building can have in this site? No, we don’t”*

Another strong aspect of this design is linked to the sense of community that is seeks to create. The creation of common spaces between every module, shared by a few apartments rather than with the whole building (“community clusters”), encourages neighbors to interact within small communities while giving residents a sense of privacy and intimacy. Some shared spaces, such as the shared cooking and dining areas, are open to all residents, and others, such as the rooftop sauna and co-working spaces, are also open to non-residents in exchange for a booking fee. This has the double effect of opening up the building to the surrounding neighborhood and city while creating a source of revenue that can be used to enhance affordability for residents. The exterior architecture is inspired from the history of the site, referencing the neighborhood’s connection to the sea and its history as a harbor.

*“The project is designed for diverse types of dwellers, varying economic situations and changing lives that benefit from a real sense of community, togetherness and belonging”.*

In short, the project took into careful consideration the environmental, social and affordability aspects of the Competition, creating a balanced proposal that seeks to extend the building’s lifespan, address climate change adaptation and mitigation, provide good quality of life and create a true co-living experience for residents.

*“A truly holistic and well researched approach including, among various other things, a smart modular construction concept and additional focus on an urgent environmental risk (flooding). The proposal stood out as the most all-considering entry with special emphasis on environmental urgency.” Joakim Breitenstein, member of the jury*







### 3.2 THE SECOND PRIZE AWARD

The second prize was awarded to Olivia Untamala and Essi Nisonen for their project “Egen”. The key word in this design is flexibility: the building includes three types of apartments whose layout can be transformed and customized according to the changing needs of residents. The architectural concept pays attention to accessibility and offers options for intergenerational living and for the adaptation of housing throughout people’s lives, for instance, to accommodate for changes in family composition. Smaller (“loft”) apartment are strategically placed next to larger ones, so that they can be connected and serve as an extension of residents’ main living space. This allows residents to adapt to the development of remote work by giving them the opportunity to turn these spaces into a home office. Flexibility is also meant to contribute to sustainability: as the students point out, one of the main reason for which buildings get demolished is because they no longer serve their original purpose.

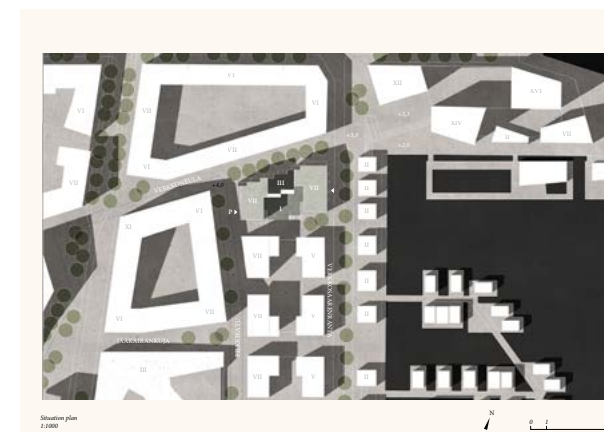
Therefore, adopting a neutral design and building possibilities for transformation into the design can significantly increase the life-span of a building.

*“We consider the purposes of spaces to be constantly evolving, so instead of determining apartments with labels we create flexibility through spacious, multifunctional rooms and countless possibilities to vary their size and connections”*

The co-living aspect of the design translates into the creation of different levels of community: neighborhood, housing community and personal community. Cultural appropriateness is carefully considered to propose a community concept that creates opportunities for encounters but doesn’t force interactions between neighbors. The goal is mostly reinforcing and nurturing existing relationships (residents’ “personal community”) rather than creating new ones, with semi-private facilities

such as saunas to be used among friends and family. Yet, there are also possibilities to foster new connections between neighbors, thanks to the verandas, the deck garden and the shared spaces located on the second floor of the building. Common spaces are purposely located in visible areas of the building as a way to encourage residents to use them for daily activities.

*“We think that co-living is at its best when it is optional, especially in a Finnish cultural context. That’s why all the apartments will have host the “basic functions” of everyday life. The aspects of co-living elevate the everyday life, but don’t make people dependent of them”*



View from Verkkoneula





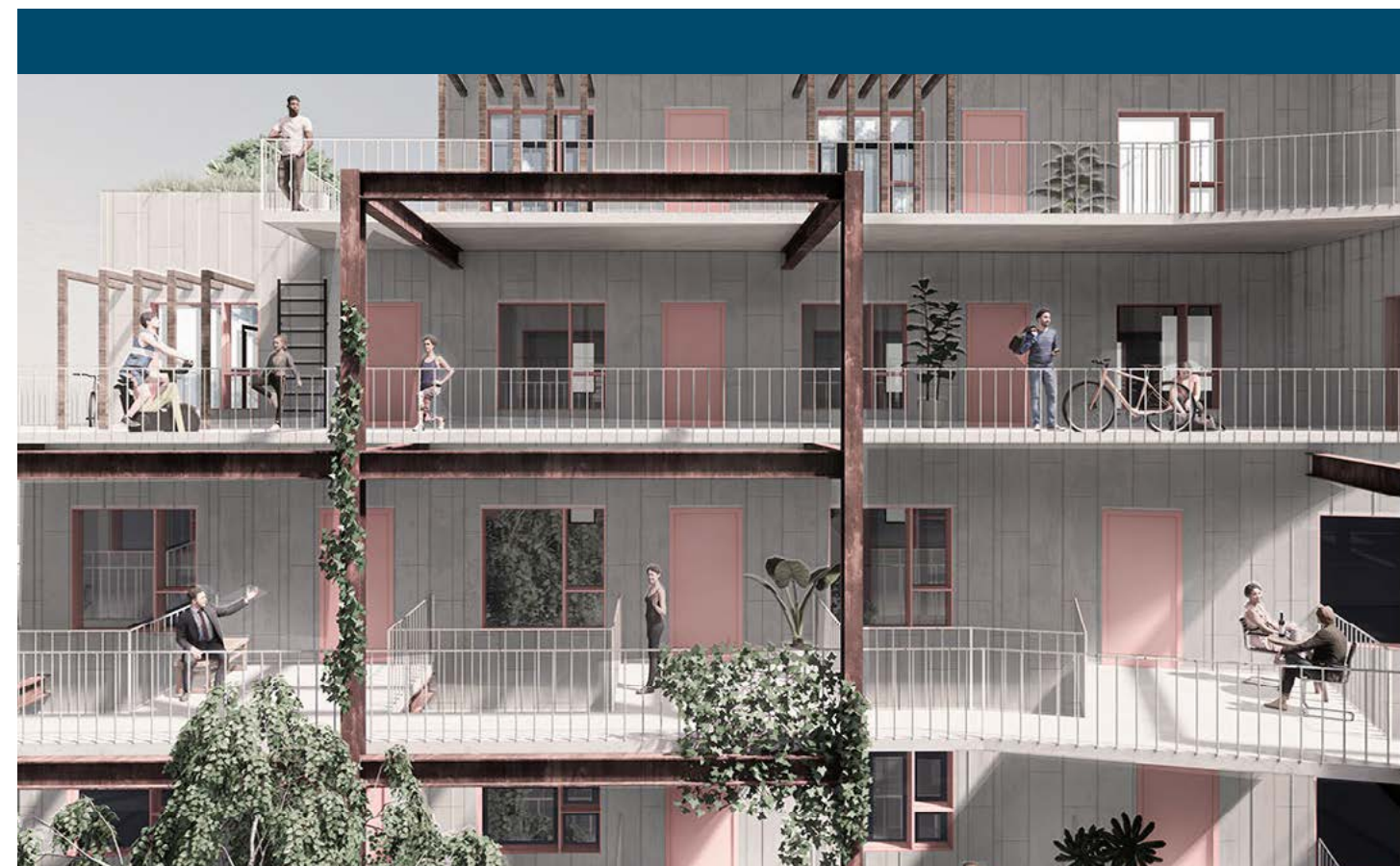
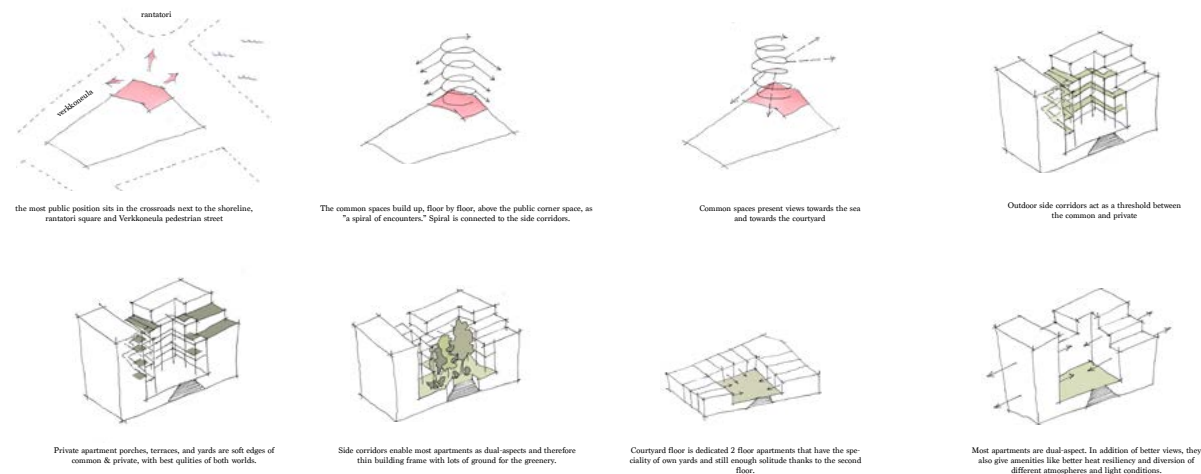


### 3.3 THE THIRD PRIZE AWARD

The third prize was awarded to Joonas Lukka and Ville Pääkkönen for their project "Tihtaali".

For this project, the students' biggest source of inspiration was the history of Kalasatama district itself. The heritage of the former industrial harbor, with a tradition of manual labor, is visible in the building's architecture and community concept. "Roughness" is one of the guiding principles of the design and it is embraced through the use of recycled and

reused materials. This not only contributes to ecological sustainability, considering that the production of construction materials is responsible for a significant part of global CO2 emissions, but it also pays tribute to the district's "DIY-spirit". What's more, residents are encouraged to continue honoring this tradition thanks to a DIY-garden and workshops located in the central courtyard and where residents can work on their own projects. In addition, the building is constructed in such a way that if it were to be disassembled, the materials could easily be extracted and reused.



*"Our conceptual inspiration derives from the tradition of manual labor, the harsh setting of renowned Aki Kaurismäki movies and notable examples of the local community's creativity and soul, such as SuviLahti DIY-skatepark, and Sompasauna, an open-for-all public sauna upheld by the community"*

The design also reflects a thoughtful community concept in which human encounters are balanced against residents' need for solitude. This is achieved through a "spiral of encounters" which includes spaces with different levels of communality, starting with an open-for-all public space on the ground floor and becoming more and more private as residents make their way to the upper floors. These common spaces are located on a corner of the building,

facing the street and providing residents with a sea-view. In addition, apartment porches, terraces and yard provide an in-between space between public and private. By carefully balancing common and private areas, the students elevate the importance of alone time to the same level as that of community-building, giving residents the option of when and how they chose to engage with their neighbors.

*"As architects we cannot force communal living, but only endeavor and suggest opportunities and physical frames for such to take place. In today's hectic and hyperconnected society we also wanted to highlight the necessity of solitude, the basic need of positive kind of alone-time, which bears an important role towards our well-being"*





### 3.4 HONORABLE MENTION “RESIDENT COMMUNITY’S FAVORITE”

In addition to the first, second and third prizes, the jury also delivered an honorable mention “resident community’s favorite” to reward the most-voted design among resident community representatives. This award went to Sini Antila and Sara Voutilainen for their project “Puuluoto” (“Wood islet”).

This design is characterized by high adaptability, as it is composed of five different modules that can be combined in different ways to adapt to residents’ needs. Non-bearing partition walls can be easily demolished to connect different modules to each other. In that way, housing units can be customized to fit every living situation, including remote working, living alone, living with roommates, house-sharing with older parents and many other possibilities. Besides, the building is partly dismantlable in case the plot would become inhabitable, which is crucial considering the building’s sea-side location. The project also offers a wide variety of communal spaces and some convenient services to facilitate residents’ everyday lives, including refrigerated boxes for grocery delivery and an extra room which can be booked for visitors.

*“We can’t predict the future but with flexible housing units, that provide different types of efficiency and can be transported elsewhere if necessary, we can make sure our building is not disposable”*

The building’s architecture creates a warm and welcoming environment for residents: the two main construction materials, brick and wood, have been selected to symbolize natural elements and to blend into the surrounding environment. They also contribute to the building’s sustainability, as bricks are recycled and the design doesn’t rely on more carbon-intensive materials such as concrete or steel. But the project also considers and integrates other aspects of sustainability: urban agriculture, clean energy and water-saving technologies are an integral part of the design. Residents have the possibility to grow their own fruits and vegetables on the rooftop gardens, while roof solar panels provide the building with electricity. Rainwater is collected and grey water is recycled and used for irrigation.

*“Our key goal was to include sustainable design factors in every step of the way and emphasize both sociality and biodiversity in our project”*



## 4. OTHER ENTRIES

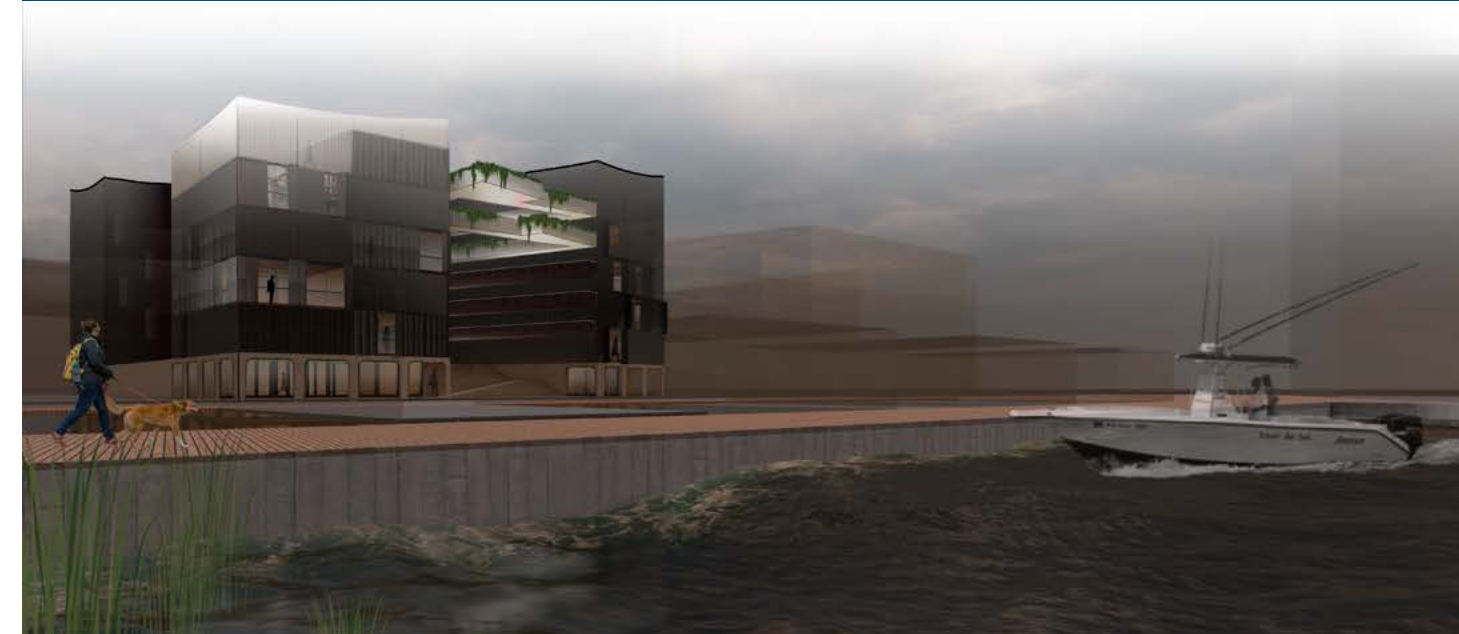


## 4. OTHER ENTRIES



### 4.1 JYRKI PALDAN

Another interesting proposal revolving around communal gardening to create positive interactions between neighbors and a sense of community. Allotment gardens are at the heart of the co-living experience the project seeks to create due to their many social, health and environmental benefits. It also seeks to encourage biodiversity in a central area of the city, while addressing the issue of affordability by suggesting that some of the gardens could be rented out to cover some of the residents' housing costs.



### 4.2 MUSTAFA SERCAN BULUT

This entry includes a good number of shared facilities and commercial space. It uses modular, prefabricated housing as a way to lower construction costs and make housing more affordable. It includes some provisions for sustainable construction and design: use of wood as a building material, solar panels, rainwater collection and urban gardening. A project which good potential which could have been more fully developed.



### 4.3 SEGUYA ANNAN MATOVU

This project has some interesting proposals from a sustainability perspective. The reduction of energy consumption and the improvement of thermal comfort by finding alternatives to air conditioning are relevant issues to cover in a context of global warming. The use of recycled materials, clean energy and rainwater collection are also addressed. The project, however, doesn't pay similar attention to the social, economic and architectural aspects of the Competition.





#### 4.4 SIYU LIANG & XUANFAN CHEN & XIN HU

This project relies on self-construction to deliver affordable homes, through an “unfinished shell” methodology. The design uses a modular approach to allow residents to build homes adapted to their needs. Similarly, residents are encouraged to participate in the design of common areas, which come in the form of empty spaces between apartments. Yet, the project requires that residents have at least some basic construction skills: without technical expertise, there is a risk that the resulting housing units could be of poor quality. Likewise, a lack of community engagement could result in common spaces simply not being used by the residents.

## CONCLUSION

**This edition of the EFL Design Challenges once again illustrated the inventiveness and resourcefulness of the next generation of architects to transform buildings and living spaces to answer some of today and tomorrow’s most pressing challenges.**

Students formulated a lot of interesting proposals for climate change mitigation which included clean energy, the use of recycled and bio-based materials, the integration of biodiversity and urban farming, and the sustainable management of water resources. The site chosen for the Competition presented unique challenges when it comes to climate change adaptation, as it is located on a sea-side

location which puts it at risk of flooding in a close or distant future. While this risk was not sufficiently considered in some of the proposals, some student teams, particularly the winning entry and the honorable mention award, took the issue very seriously. They adopted a circular economy approach and designed a building which could be disassembled, and its materials recycled in case the area

would become inhabitable. This capacity to consider the entire life cycle of the building is essential to move towards a carbon-neutral city, an idea which was once again emphasized during the Awards Ceremony.

Flexibility to adapt to different uses and changing life circumstances was a key concern for many of the students, which reflects a mindset shift, partly influenced by the pandemic, in the role that housing plays in our lives. An apartment or a building should not just be a place for residents to rest and sleep, but also to work, to socialize and to take part in leisure activities. It should also allow for different living arrangements beyond the nuclear family, such as intergenerational living. Many of the projects, including the first, second and “community’s favorite” award, relied on a modular design to offer customizable housing units that can be easily adapted and transformed over time by adding or removing partition walls or by connecting a few basic modules in different ways. This is also linked to sustainability: as Olivia Untamala and Essi Nisonen rightly pointed out in their work, an adaptable building has a lower risk of being demolished when it no longer serves its purpose.

*“Students were very aware of the climatic developments and in particular they have paid attention to climate resilience and the prevention of greenhouse gas emissions in their designs. The new trend in promoting social cohesion is also expressed in the entries. I would also like to mention the high architectural quality that the students have shown. That promises something for the future!” Joost Nieuwenhuijzen, jury member and Managing Director of EFL*

Most entries included shared areas in the building for residents to come together and engage in social activities; however, the best designs went beyond the simple act of creating collective spaces and carefully thought about the articulation of public and private, creating a balanced community concept. In particular, several entries highlighted the importance of privacy and alone time alongside sociality and community living, especially in a Finnish cultural concept. In Essi Nisonen and Olivia Untamala’s work,

the possibility to nurture of close relationships appears as a central motivation to integrate spaces for different levels of community, with a focus on residents’ “personal community” made up of family and friends. Similarly, Joonas Lukka and Ville Pääkkönen include “human encounters” and “solitude” as two equally important concepts in their design. Something that was shared by several of the most compelling entries is that they create opportunities to forge new connections, but do not seek to force interactions between neighbors.

*“Tackling climate crisis works well with co-living - both were taken into account. Light, air, spaces facing outwards; being in contact with the surrounding city and its inhabitants. Co-living in a building, but also in an entire neighbourhood: teams provided everything we need in a post-covid world.” Anni Sinnemäki, Chair of the jury and Deputy Mayor for Urban Environment, City of Helsinki*

Affordability was maybe the aspect of the competition that was most overlooked, though some entries include interesting ideas. Sara Annala and Ossi Hautakoski’s work suggests using revenues from services and facilities located in the building and which, by opening them to non-residents, could make it possible to lower housing costs for the co-living community. The use of prefabricated housing was also mentioned by some students as a way to lower construction costs. Overall, the difficulties students faced in proposing innovative solutions to make their design affordable highlights the ongoing challenge of combining climate goals, architectural quality and social inclusion.





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**CONTACT INFO**

European Federation for Living

Official Postal address / P.O. Box 67065 / NL-1060 JB Amsterdam

E: [info@ef-l.eu](mailto:info@ef-l.eu) / W: [www.ef-l.eu](http://www.ef-l.eu)

