

Energy efficiency for Latvian multi-apartment dwellings

Ekodoma working with the Make Energy Change Happen Toolkit



How to increase the energy efficiency of Latvian multi-apartment buildings?



“Our project aims to improve the energy efficiency of multi-apartment buildings in the towns Cēsis and Sigulda by renovation and insulation” says Agris Kamenders, the pilot project manager at Ekodoma. Due to the low energy efficiency of the Latvian building stock, the government provides 40% co-financing for renovations that increase the efficiency of a building by at least 20%. This means that residents have to pay 60% of the renovation costs themselves. Decisions about the renovations must be supported by a 51% majority of the residents. “Our role is to inform residents about the renovations, costs and benefits.” explains Agris.

Five non-renovated buildings are participating in the project and four renovated buildings are involved to learn about and benefit from their experiences. The multi-apartment buildings are maintained by a building management company and have a ‘building elder’ who functions as a representative or spokesperson of the building.

How did the project develop?

In several meetings with residents, building manager and elder, different renovation options (e.g. partial vs. full) are discussed, including involved costs and possible consequences, such as energy savings. During these meetings, Ekodoma provides relevant information from the perspective of an energy adviser and answers questions residents may have. In each of the five non-renovated buildings the project proceeds differently due to different interests and support by residents, the building elder and the building manager.

Residents of three non-renovated buildings are interested in renovation. “One of the building elders is very active and engaged. She asked us for advice and support to apply for governmental co-financing and for gaining the necessary 51% majority among residents. In this building the preparation to apply for governmental co-financing is proceeding very fast” says Agris. Residents in the other two buildings prefer to take a bank loan themselves and invest in the renovation of the heating and hot water systems, instead of a full renovation supported by governmental co-financing.

Pictures helped the residents to imagine what the renovations would look like. But they were also emotional appeals to convince people of renovation because they showed the often poor state of the buildings. It encouraged them to vote in favour of the renovation plans.

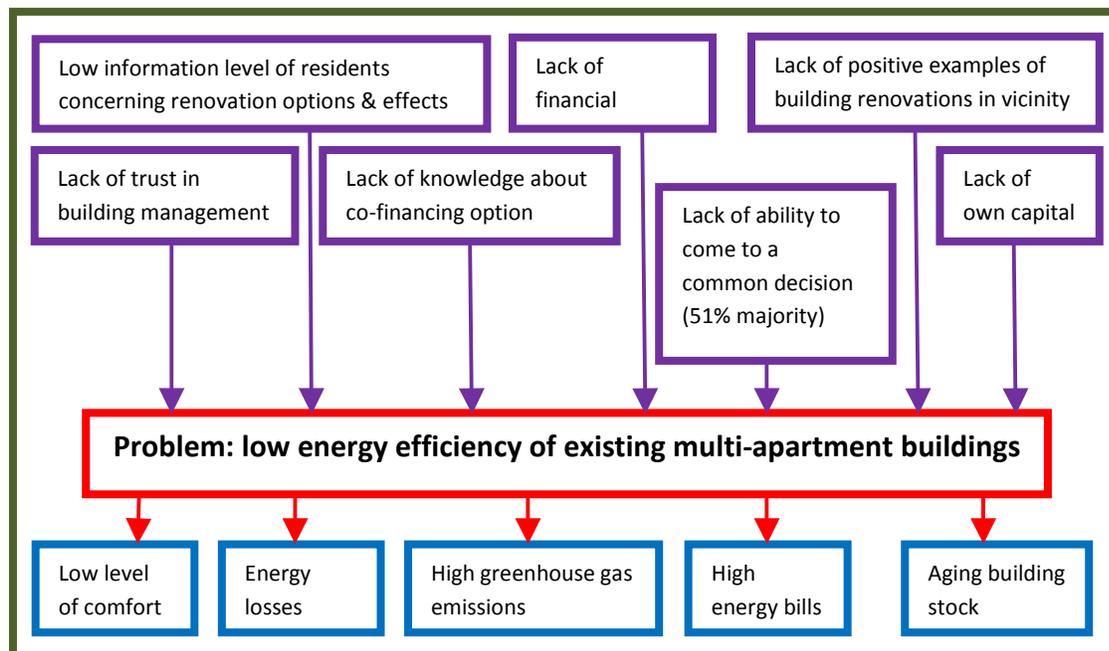
Agris Kamenders, Ekodoma

The experiences of Ekodoma with the Make Energy Change Happen Toolkit

“My colleagues at Ekodoma and I tested most of the activities of the toolkit in our building renovation project. Some of these activities were more relevant and had greater effect than others. In our case especially the problem tree helped us to better understand our problem and to improve the design of our project. But also the activities related to getting to know and engaging the target group were very helpful during the project.” states Agris. Below these three activities used by Ekodoma and their effects are further detailed.

1. Problem analysis: Problem tree

As one of the first steps in the development of the project Ekodoma analysed the problem they want to solve with their project. They did this by using a *Problem Tree* showing the causes contributing and effects resulting from the problem they target.



Agris liked the visualisation of the problem in a tree-format. “This Problem Tree made us understand the causes and effects of the problem we wanted to target better. It helped us to decide on how to do our project. It showed for example that trust between residents and the building management is crucial. Therefore we invested a lot of time in establishing a good and close contact with the building manager and the building elder, whom residents already trust, in order to make also the other residents feel that they could trust us”. Additionally, the problem tree analysis revealed all positive effects a building renovation including the implementation of energy efficiency measures would entail. In other words, co-benefits such as increased comfort and lower energy bills became apparent and central in the communication to residents.

The Problem Tree made us understand the causes and effects of the problem we wanted to target better. It helped us to decide on how to do our project.

Agris Kamenders, Ekodoma

2. Getting to know the target group

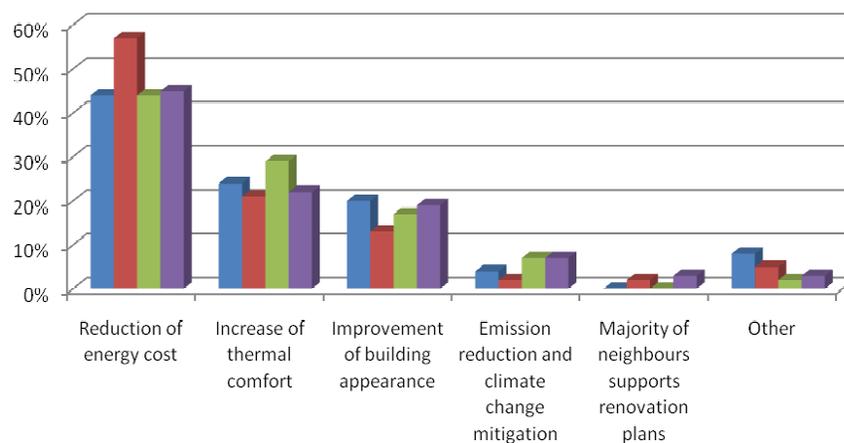
In the early stages of the project, immediately after the target group had been chosen (i.e. residents of five non-renovated buildings), Ekodoma conducted a small study on the residents of the buildings.

“To gain insights into people’s concerns and interest in building renovation and energy efficiency, we distributed a short questionnaire to the residents and held several in-depth interviews with building elders and other residents. The outcomes helped us to improve our project” says Agris. Ekodoma learned a couple of interesting things about the target group via the questionnaires and interviews which they could integrate in the project, like:

The questionnaire showed that residents were mostly motivated to invest in renovation of their building if their energy cost would go down. Knowing this, we focussed in our information for residents on the costs and revenues of renovation.

Agris Kamenders, Ekodoma

- About half the people indicate that they have knowledge about energy efficiency measures that they mostly received via mass media.
- In three of the non-renovated buildings, over 60% of the respondents indicate they would vote in favour of building renovation. In one building only a quarter of all respondents makes the same assertion. (→ The latter had recently required roof renovation)
- The majority of respondents considers building renovation as the government’s responsibility, but does not believe that governmental funding is available and does not rely on banks to finance renovation.
- In the two renovated buildings where energy efficiency measures had been implemented, people had largely been convinced by their building manager and the building elder.
- People are mostly motivated to invest in building renovation by the prospect of lower energy bills, increased comfort and a nicer appearance of their building (see graph).

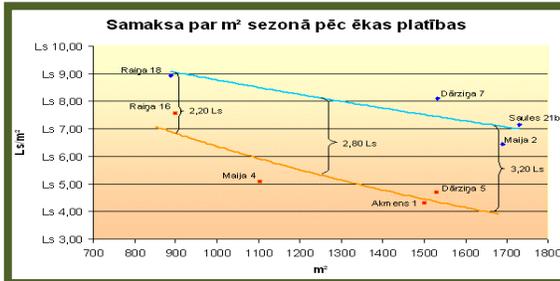


3. Engage the target group

There is no one best way to engage a target group. It depends very much on the context and focus of the project. “Our renovation project focuses on investment behaviour and aims to convince residents of multi-apartment buildings to support the renovation. We were looking for the best tools to encourage residents to take a common, approving decision” says Agris. Based on the specific context of the this project Ekodoma chose to combine the following tools to engage their target group:

Use emotional appeals

During meetings with residents many pictures are shown Agris explains. “These pictures might have shocked people by zooming in the often poor state of their building. But we also showed images of already renovated building to help residents imagine the effects of a renovation. It helps to encourage them to vote in favour of renovation plans”.



Use rational appeals

Residents and the building management company are, of course, very interested in the amount of money different renovation options cost and how much energy savings can be achieved. “Therefore we presented results of investment cost calculations and possible savings based on expertise and previous projects. These calculations answered a lot of the questions residents had about the investments they needed to make” according to Agris.

Provide transparent and understandable information

Agris also points out the relevance of information which is easy to understand by the target group. “We tried to make our information as understandable and transparent as possible by using images of the buildings the residents are living in, thermo graphic pictures of the buildings and graphs. We explained these in face-to-face meetings with residents in order to invite clarifying questions and be open to feedback and criticism.”



Build trust and confidence

Ekodoma is an energy advisor, independent from large companies and the government. “Residents trust us and we can easily operate as a facilitator of trust-building measures between the building management company and residents” according to Agris. “We further strengthened the trust between our organisation and the residents by inviting elders of already renovated buildings, to discuss problems and benefits related to renovation during

informational meetings with residents of non-renovated buildings. Hearing the experience of an outsider who had no personal interest in this project increased the enthusiasm of the residents for renovation”.



Provide support and services

Ekodoma offers support and other services according to the needs of the residents. “We support the residents of each building interested in renovation differently because the process of deciding on a specific renovation and financing plan is different in every case and often depends on the opinion and engagement of the building manager and elder.” Agris gives an example: “In one building we helped organising meetings with residents in which they were informed about the renovation. We noticed that not many residents came to a meeting we held in an external meeting room. We decided to try another strategy and organised a meeting the same way and in the same location they usually have residents’ gatherings if there is something to decide: in the staircases of the building! Residents thus only had to walk out of their door to join us. It was an unusual experience for us but a lot more people joined our meeting!”

