

The Commons

Collective living environments for
socially active ageing

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Designing for Health & Care Graduation Studio
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Abstract

This research explores how architecture can contribute to enabling older adults to remain socially active within their neighbourhood. The main research question is: 'How can the architectural design of the built environment support older adults in remaining socially active within their neighbourhood?' The aim is to develop a housing design proposal for Houtwijk, The Hague, that supports social interaction, reciprocity and participation among inhabitants, with a specific focus on older adults.

The research combines a literature review with a workshop and interviews with inhabitants in Houtwijk, to gain insight into their everyday experiences, needs and preferences regarding social interaction and living environments.

The findings show that social networks are essential for older adults to remain socially active, and are strengthened by both spontaneous

encounters and organised activities. Walkable neighbourhoods, accessible facilities and shared spaces contribute to daily interaction, while transitional zones between public and private space and flexible, age-friendly housing support both social contact and ageing in place.

These findings led to the development of a housing design proposal organised around a reinterpreted common: a shared, collectively governed space that fosters reciprocity, visibility and continuous social interaction. The proposal introduces mixed-age housing around this common to strengthen social relations and embed collective responsibility into everyday life.

Overall, the research demonstrates that architectural design can support socially active ageing by integrating social interaction, collective use of space and adaptability across both housing and neighbourhood scales.

01

Introduction

Problem statement

Houtwijk is a neighbourhood in the Loosduinen district of The Hague. It is characterised by single-family homes arranged around courtyards and green spaces. With a population of 12,740, Houtwijk is one of the largest neighbourhoods in Loosduinen. Figure 1 shows the population distribution in three different areas. Compared to The Hague and South Holland, Houtwijk has a relatively high proportion of older people. Almost a quarter of the population is aged 65 or over, while the proportion of young adults is low (AlleCijfers.nl, 2025). This demographic profile indicates that the ageing population is likely to increase further in the coming years.

Research shows that many inhabitants in Houtwijk do not simply move to a more accessible or smaller home when their circumstances change as they get older. Attachment to their own home and familiarity with the neighbourhood play an important role in this complex matter (Graduation Studio Designing for Health and Care, 2025, pp. 294-300). Consequently, housing availability for newcomers is limited, residential mobility within the neighbourhood is minimal, and the population is ageing. This reflects the broader trend of population ageing in the Netherlands (Van Nimwegen & Van Praag, 2012). It highlights a mismatch between the housing environment and the needs of a changing demographic.

Despite the ageing population, HWW Zorg, a nursing home in Houtwijk, is being demolished. This decision is part of a broader national trend of closing many traditional nursing and care homes, as the focus has shifted towards home care. Older adults are encouraged, and often prefer, to live at home for as long as possible (ANBO-PCOB & Abbi Insights, 2025).

At the same time, local data show that 53.2% of inhabitants aged 18 and over experience loneliness, and 36.5% report health limitations (Buurtatlas, 2024). These concerning trends, alongside the reduction in care facilities due to the shift towards home care, show some contradictions. This highlights a gap between the ambition of ageing in place and the increasing vulnerability associated with loneliness and health

limitations.

Considering the social cohesion figures of Loosduinen, the high level of loneliness in Houtwijk is not unexpected. Inhabitants rate the district's overall social cohesion at just 5.8 (Leefbaarheid en Veiligheid, 2023).

While many inhabitants report positive relations with neighbours on their own street, the neighbourhood as a whole is characterised by a patchwork of different communities, some of which are defined by prejudice (Designing for Health and Care Graduation Studio, 2025, pp. 294-300). Consequently, the neighbourhood's overall level of social cohesion remains limited.

This limited social cohesion is particularly problematic given Houtwijk's ageing population. Older adults are more likely to depend on informal social networks in their immediate living environment, so a lack of cohesion at neighbourhood level can increase the risk of social isolation and loneliness.

The contribution of the built environment to social cohesion is being considered, with various housing concepts being explored in the Netherlands. The potential of shared housing for older people has been investigated. However, these concepts do not always meet the needs of the entire older population. Furthermore, as these housing concepts are designed exclusively for older people, the inhabitants are likely to become dependent on care services at the same time, meaning they are less able to support each other. Additionally, some people may feel that these living concepts offer insufficient privacy due to the high level of social control. Some concepts also tend to be inward-looking and exclusive, such as courtyard housing surrounding a communal garden, making them less accessible. This can result in poor connections with the neighbourhood (ZorgSaamWonen et al., 2022).

There are also a few residential groups and care homes in Houtwijk, where the same challenges arise. These are specifically targeted at certain groups and therefore do not always meet the housing needs of Houtwijk's inhabitants. Most

of them focus on older adults and only offer social housing (Centraal Wonen Houtwijk, n.d.).

Houtwijk is a representative example of the broader social developments in the Netherlands (Van Dam et al., 2012). Due to the ageing population, a crucial question is how to ensure that older people do not become excluded or isolated, but remain active in the community. Research shows that this has positive health effects (Huygen & De Meere, 2008).

This research aims to explore how architectural design can encourage the greater involvement of older people, support ageing in place, and increase cohesion between inhabitants. Ultimately, this will improve the health and liveability of the entire neighbourhood. The insights gained from this research can also serve as an example for other residential areas in the Netherlands facing similar social developments.

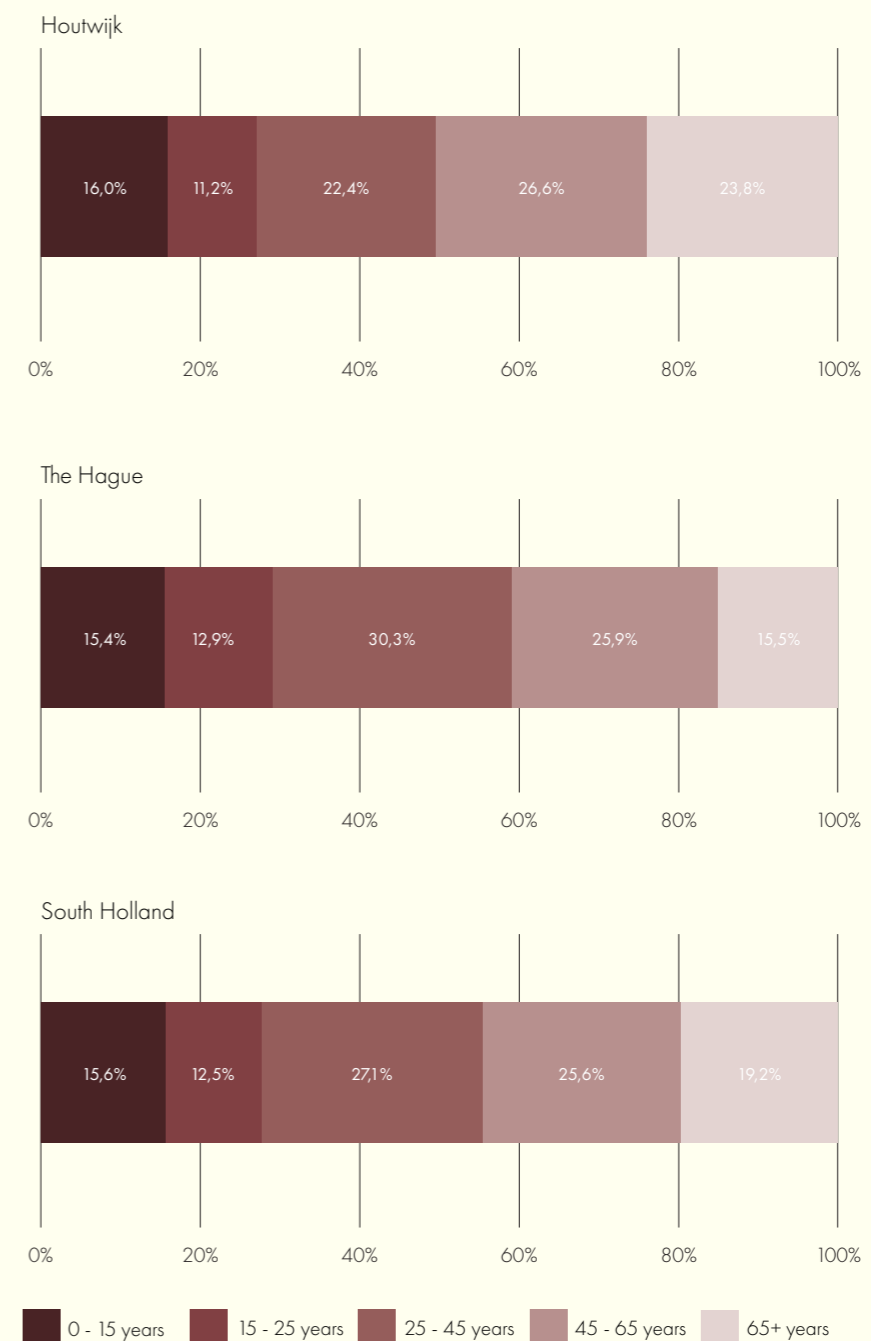


Figure 1: Population of Houtwijk by age group (AlleCijfers.nl, 2025)

Research questions

This research will answer the following question: 'How can the architectural design of the built environment support older adults in remaining socially active within their neighbourhood?'

The answer to the main research question will be obtained by answering three subquestions. These are as follows:

1. 'Which social activities are important for older adults to remain socially active?'
2. 'Which architectural design elements in the immediate residential environment encourage social interaction?'
3. 'Which architectural design elements within the dwelling support older adults in ageing in place?'

In this research, the term *built environment* refers to residential areas, including houses and its immediate surroundings.

The term *older adults* is used to describe individuals aged 65 years and over. This age criteria is commonly applied in ageing-related research.

Socially active refers to the ability of older adults to engage in meaningful social interactions within their neighbourhood. This includes both planned and spontaneous encounters.

Ageing in place means that older adults keep living in their own homes and communities as they age and require more care.

Scope

This research focuses on Houtwijk, a neighbourhood in The Hague, and examines older adults aged 65 years and over. The study addresses the architectural design of the built environment, including homes and their immediate surroundings. The focus is on improving the health of Houtwijk's inhabitants by supporting ageing in place and social activity. The research will be conducted within the timeframe of the graduation project.

02

Approach

Methods

In order to answer the main research question, ‘How can the architectural design of the built environment support older adults in remaining socially active within their neighbourhood?’, a combination of literature reviews, workshops and interviews will be conducted.

This research is based on the intersection between ‘designing for older adults’ and ‘designing for social encounters’, as combining these approaches is essential in supporting older adults to remain socially active. Therefore, the literature on age-friendly cities from the World Health Organization (2007) and on designing for social encounters from Platform 31 (Mantingh & Duivenvoorden, 2021) will form the basis for the framework of this research.

A local workshop was organised to gain a better understanding of the specific wishes and needs of the inhabitants of Houtwijk. The workshop focused on four key themes: facilities, housing typologies, feeling at home and the perfect home. Sixteen participants shared their preferences and ideas.

In addition, interviews were conducted to gain further insight into the wider target group and the design of care homes in general. Visits were made to a community centre and a residential care facility. Conversations were held with visitors and staff during these visits.

To answer the first subquestion, ‘which social activities are important for older adults to remain

socially active?’, the conversations that took place during the workshop on the topic of ‘facilities’ will be used. Another question asked here was what inhabitants like to do in their spare time to stay active. In addition, a literature review will be conducted. This review will focus on the types of social interaction and specific activities that contribute to older adults’ social activity. In particular, the study by Chang, Wray, and Lin (2014) will be used as a key source.

For the second subquestion, ‘which architectural design elements in the immediate residential environment encourage social interaction?’, a literature review will also be used. The main reference will be the research conducted by Platform 31 (Mantingh & Duivenvoorden, 2021). In addition, the results on the workshop on facilities and housing typologies will be utilised. Participants were asked which facilities they feel are lacking in the neighbourhood and which type of housing they prefer.

The third subquestion, ‘which architectural design elements within the dwelling support older adults in ageing in place?’, will also use a combination of the workshop findings and a literature review. Design principles will be formulated based on the research of Platform 31 (Mantingh & Duivenvoorden, 2021). These principles will then be complemented by the interviews with Houtwijk inhabitants and the visit to the residential care facility.

Theoretical framework

This chapter explores two complementary approaches. The first is a framework developed by the World Health Organization. This framework focuses on how cities can promote active ageing. The second is a scale-based approach from Platform 31 which highlights how spatial design can facilitate social encounters in and around dwellings. Combining these approaches creates a framework in which architecture contributes to older adults remaining socially active in their neighbourhoods.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed a framework for active ageing. The aim is to support people in living healthy, active and safe lives for as long as possible.

Figure 2 shows the eight topics that determine the age-friendliness of a city, as described in the framework (World Health Organization, 2007). Each topic is divided into several subtopics, which can be measured using the indicators described in a checklist. Although this framework is intended for cities, some topics are also relevant on a smaller scale.

The topic of *outdoor spaces and buildings* focuses on how public spaces can be designed to be safe, accessible, comfortable and attractive for

older people.

The *transportation* topic describes the importance of accessible, reliable and affordable transport options to enable older people to remain mobile and participate in social life.

The *housing* topic demonstrates the need for housing that enables older people to continue living independently for as long as possible.

The topic of *social participation* describes opportunities for older people to engage in social, cultural and recreational activities.

The topic of *respect and social inclusion* explores how cities can promote positive attitudes towards older people and encourage a sense of belonging.

The *civic participation and employment* topic discusses how older people can continue to contribute to society.

The *communication and information* topic focuses on how information can best be shared in the most understandable and accessible way.

The last topic, *Community support and health services*, looks at different forms of support from the community and healthcare services.

This research focuses on architecture at the scale of housing and its surroundings. Therefore, the topics of *outdoor spaces and buildings* and

housing are relevant to include in the framework of this research, as they are directly related to architectural design. However, the topics of *social participation, respect and social inclusion* and *community support and health services* are also interesting, because architecture plays an important role in facilitating social encounters, inclusion and support in everyday life.

Platform 31 has developed a catalogue that examines what interventions can be made to encourage social encounters at different scale levels, specifically everyday, spontaneous encounters. The aim is to promote social networks, connectedness and self-reliance.

Figure 3 illustrates the five scale levels described in this catalogue (Mantingh & Duivenvoorden, 2021). For each scale, relevant topics that encourage encounters are mentioned.

The *neighbourhood* scale focuses on the wider urban context in which daily life takes place.

The scale of *the route from street to home* refers to the everyday path that inhabitants take from the public street to their front door.

The *housing block* scale focuses on the residential building as a social environment.

The *threshold zone* describes the spatial

transition between private and public space.

The scale of *the dwelling* refers to the individual home and its relationship with the street.

To better match the scale of this research, *the neighbourhood* scale is replaced by *immediate residential surroundings*. This concerns the immediate public outdoor space around dwellings.

Based on these two approaches, the Age-Friendly Interactive Environments Framework is developed. The framework is structured around five scale levels, represented by the innermost circle, which form the foundation. For each scale level, the framework outlines the key objectives to be achieved. Building on these objectives, specific design elements have been translated into measurable indicators, represented in the outermost circle. These indicators are derived from the literature-based approaches and therefore provide a theoretical basis against which the design can be assessed and optimised. Figure 4 shows the design elements that must be integrated into the design, the 'must-haves'. Figure 5 highlights the design elements that are desirable, the 'nice-to-haves'. Figure 6 summarises all the design principles against which the design can be assessed.

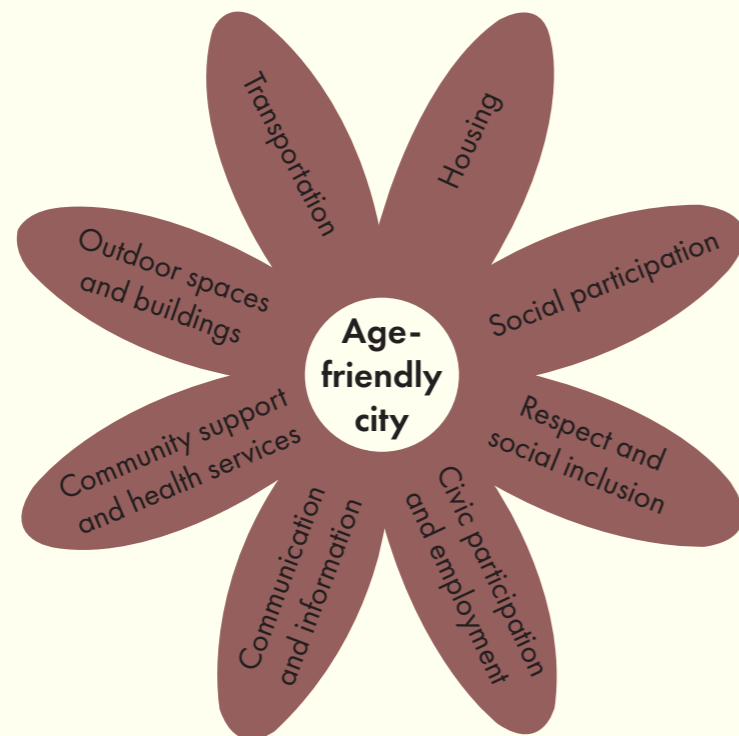


Figure 2: Framework Age-friendly city (World Health Organization, 2007)



Figure 3: Five spatial scales for designing social encounters (Mantingh & Duivenvoorden, 2021)

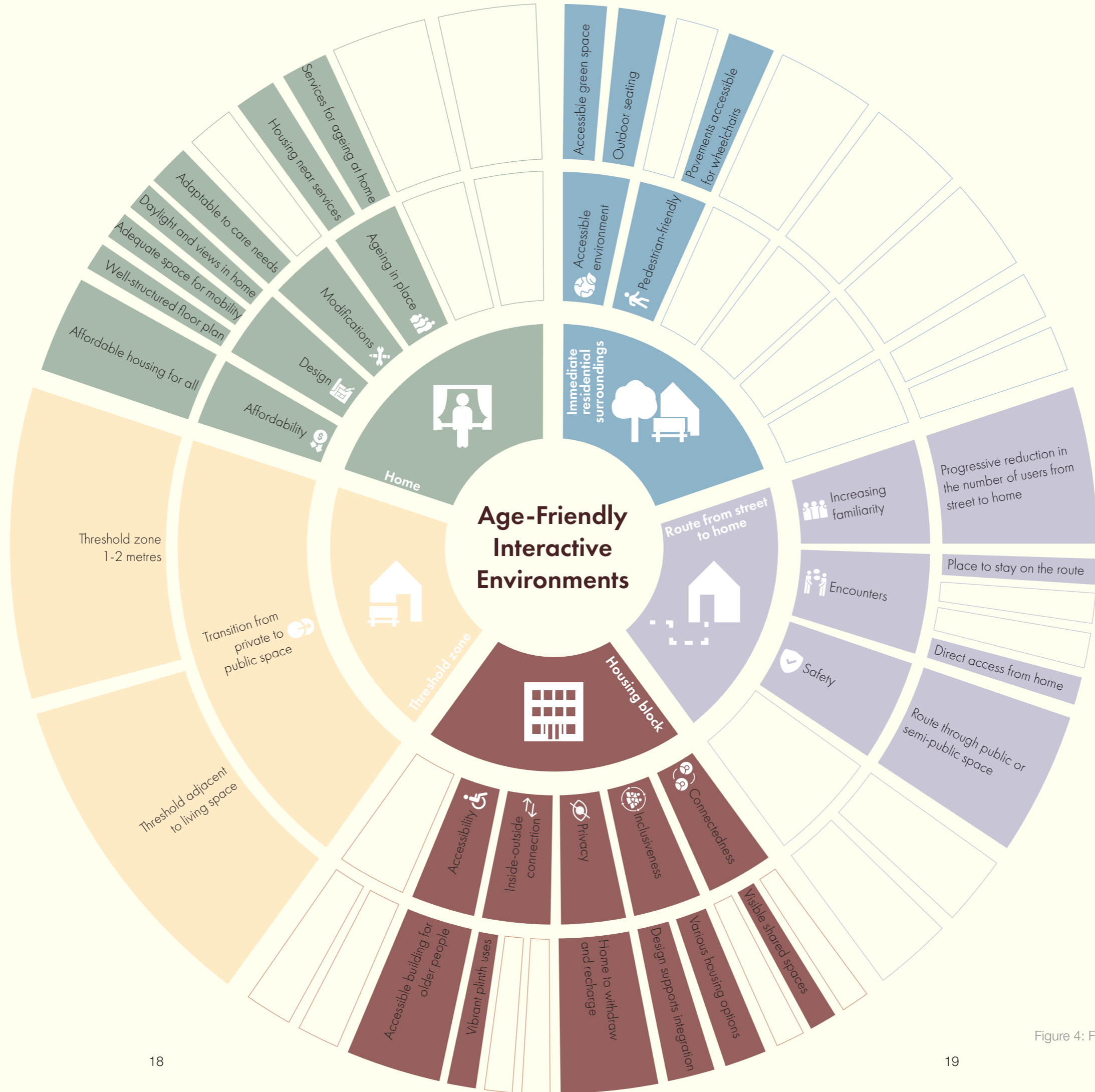


Figure 4: Framework 'must-haves' (own figure)

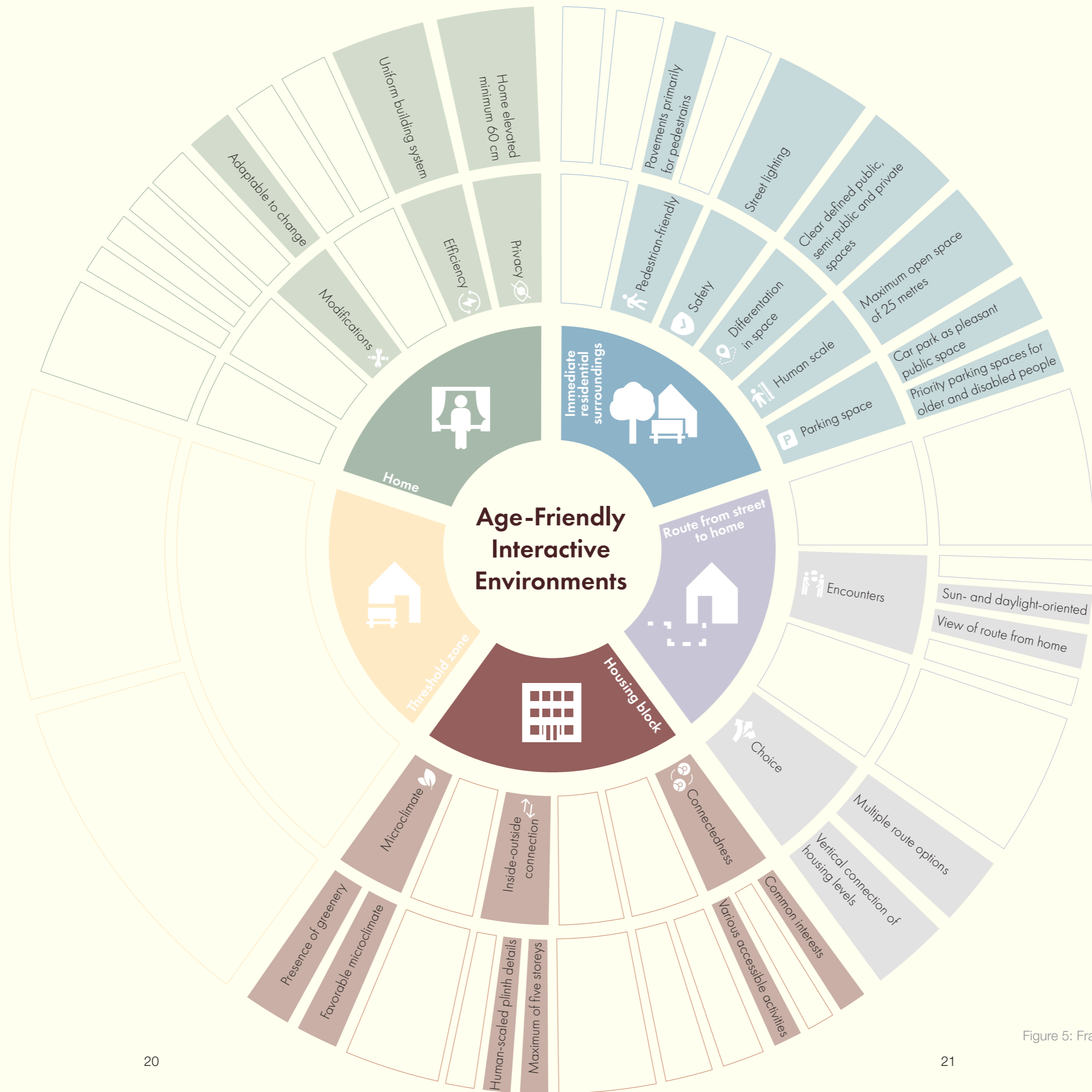


Figure 5: Framework 'nice to haves' (own figure)

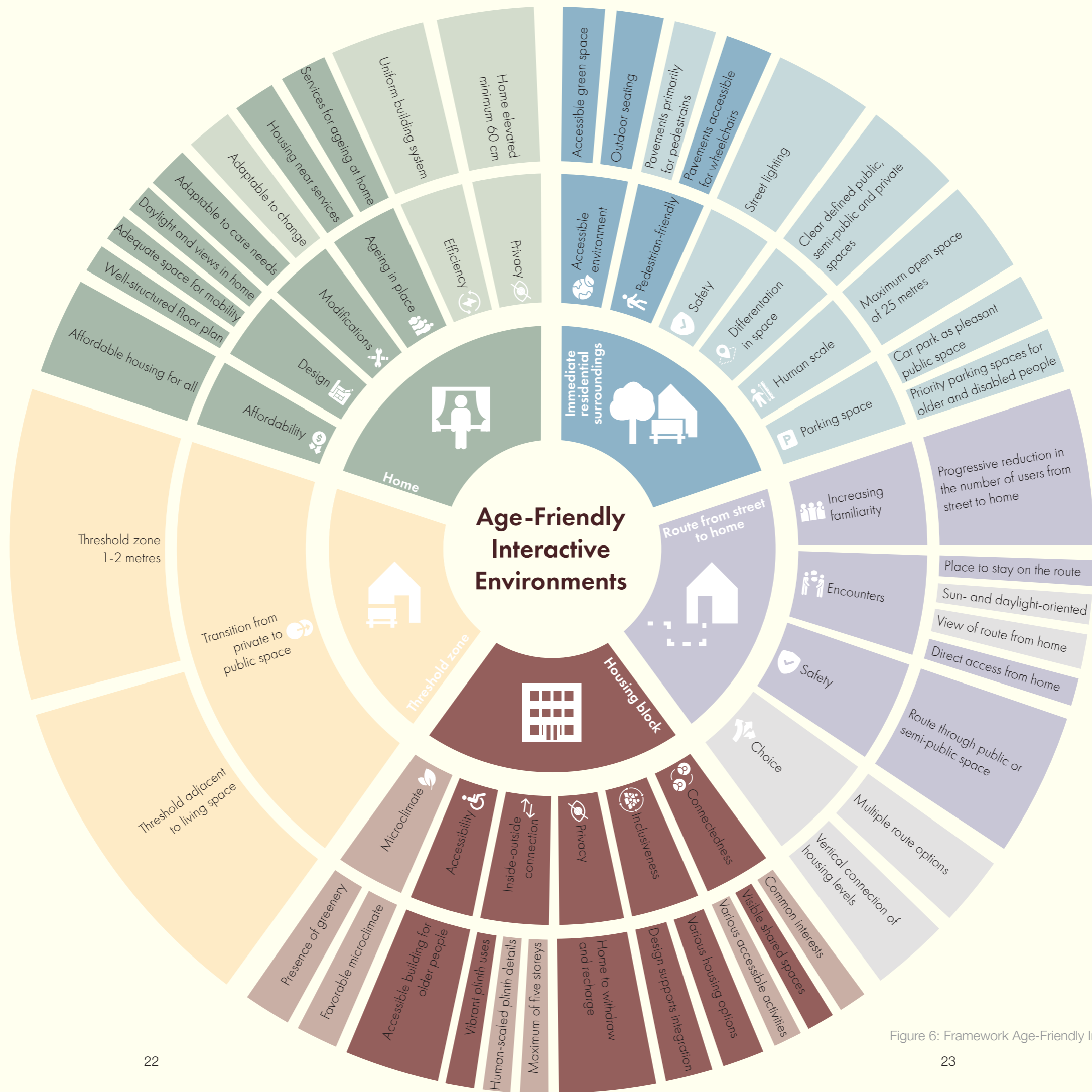


Figure 6: Framework Age-Friendly Interactive Environments (own figure)

03

Results

Social activities for older adults

To understand how the built environment can support older adults in remaining socially active, it is first necessary to identify the types of social activity that are important to them. This section therefore addresses the following question: 'Which social activities are important for older adults to remain socially active?'

Research shows that social interaction is essential for maintaining social activity (Franke et al., 2013). Having a strong social network, consisting of both strong ties (family and close friends) and weak ties (such as neighbours), plays a key role (Figure 7). These weak ties appear to be particularly important in supporting self-reliance, as neighbours often provide practical and informal support in daily life (Mantingh & Duivenvoorden, 2021). This can also be observed in Houtwijk,

where many older adults have turned their former professions into hobbies and use these skills to help others in the neighbourhood. Additionally, Houtwijk's inhabitants enjoy going outdoors for a walk or bike ride, which gives them the opportunity to meet neighbours spontaneously, according to participants during the workshop. These spontaneous encounters play an important role in strengthening social networks, particularly weak ties (Mantingh & Duivenvoorden, 2021).

In addition to spontaneous contact, planned activities are also important for older adults. According to Chang, Wray and Lin (2014), activities that combine social interaction with physical or mental engagement have the most positive impact on health and well-being. In Houtwijk, community initiatives such as group

sports and creative activities provide opportunities for neighbours to meet and connect, these are highly valued in the neighbourhood, as mentioned during the workshop. Participants also appreciate the interaction between different age groups during these activities, as it promotes mutual understanding and exchange (source: workshop).

Over time, these interactions contribute to the development of strong social networks. Such networks lower the threshold for asking for help, increase feelings of contribution and reduce loneliness (Rijksoverheid, n.d.). Once people have established these connections, they often prefer to remain in their familiar environment (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2023). At the same time, the Dutch government encourages people to live independently at

home for as long as possible. Therefore, mixed neighbourhoods with different age groups are promoted, as inhabitants can support and complement one another through reciprocity (Rijksoverheid, n.d.)

In conclusion, social networks are essential for older adults to remain socially active. Good relationships between neighbours are especially important in this regard. Both spontaneous encounters and organised activities contribute to building and maintaining these networks as they foster social connections, reciprocity and a sense of belonging.

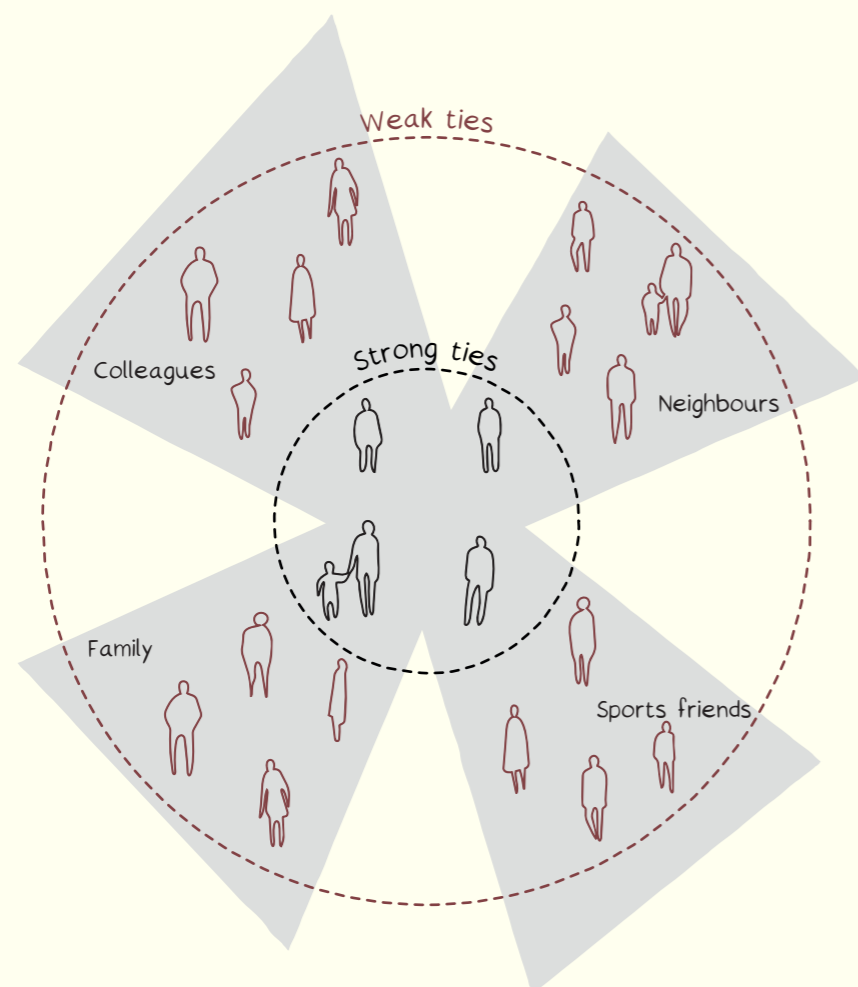


Figure 7: Social network consists of weak and strong ties (Mantingh & Duivenvoorden, 2021)

Design for social interaction

The design of the neighbourhood strongly influences opportunities for spontaneous encounters, which are essential for strengthening social networks. This section answers the following subquestion: 'Which architectural design elements in the immediate residential environment encourage social interaction?'

The residential environment can be understood through different spatial scales, ranging from the public neighbourhood to the private home. At each of these scales, the environment can be designed in ways that stimulate encounters between inhabitants. Together, these transitions from public to private create opportunities for both spontaneous and planned interaction.

At the neighbourhood scale, walkable environments and accessible public spaces are essential. Attractive and safe public spaces encourage older adults to spend time outdoors and increase the likelihood of informal encounters (Mantingh & Duivenvoorden, 2021). These spaces become more socially active when they include facilities that attract people throughout the day. The presence of these facilities encourages inhabitants to leave their homes and meet others in the neighbourhood. For older adults, accessibility is important in this regard. Essential facilities, such as healthcare, a supermarket and public transport, should ideally be located within 400 metres, the so-called

'rollator distance', according to Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties (2023). However, accessibility also depends on the quality of the route and the availability of resting places, meaning that distances of 500 to 600 metres may still be acceptable. In addition to these essential facilities, Houtwijk's inhabitants also expressed a need for informal meeting places, such as cafés and restaurants, where people from the entire neighbourhood can meet. Other facilities desired by inhabitants are listed in Appendix A (Workshop Houtwijk - Facilities).

A safe route from these facilities to the dwellings is crucial, because multiple attractive walking routes with good visibility and rest places can motivate older adults to move through the neighbourhood more frequently. It's pleasant when the number of people on the route keeps getting smaller, fostering a sense of community with your immediate neighbours.

Many inhabitants of Houtwijk express a preference for living in a private dwelling that is part of a shared residential block organised around a collective courtyard, where different age groups are mixed (see Appendix B: Workshop Houtwijk - Housing typologies). Living in such a housing block offers several advantages, as people can continue living independently while still being part of a close community. The collective and semi-private

spaces within the block stimulate interaction between inhabitants on a smaller scale. Research shows that these types of environments can reduce loneliness, support physical activity and strengthen mutual support between neighbours (Bani & Spijkman, 2026).

Inhabitants of Houtwijk particularly value shared spaces where activities can take place together, such as a communal kitchen for shared meals or spaces for cultural events, which are currently lacking in the neighbourhood. According to Khatibi (2022), such collective facilities not only strengthen social connections, but can also reduce conflicts between neighbours. The design of these shared spaces strongly influences their use and the level of social interaction they generate. Collective spaces should therefore be located in visible and accessible areas, offer flexibility in use and provide inhabitants with a sense of ownership and involvement.

These ideas relate to the concept of the commons, in which shared spaces are collectively used, managed and shaped by inhabitants. Such collective responsibility can strengthen both social ties and community engagement. Historically, this concept can be linked to the agricultural commons, where land was collectively managed by local communities for shared use and production rather than being centrally organised by

the market. Today, the concept of the commons can be increasingly relevant as a model for more sustainable and socially connected ways of living (Bollier, 2014).

The transition between collective spaces and private homes also plays an important role in encouraging interaction. Transitional zones, such as front gardens, porches or shared entrances, create opportunities for casual encounters with neighbours while still maintaining privacy. Because people can choose whether to engage or withdraw, these spaces support both social contact and a sense of comfort and ownership, especially as they allow people to personalise this space (Mantingh & Duivenvoorden, 2021).

Within the home itself, the internal layout can further support interaction. Functions such as kitchens and living rooms are preferably positioned along these threshold zones, as this increases visual contact and liveliness near shared spaces (Mantingh & Duivenvoorden, 2021).

Overall, the design of routes and transitions through different spatial scales can significantly stimulate social interaction. Thoughtful design at each level of the built environment increases the likelihood of spontaneous encounters and contributes to stronger social networks.

Housing design for ageing in place

A strong social network is crucial for older adults to remain socially active. Therefore, it is important that people can continue to live in their familiar environment as they age, relying increasingly on this social network. To achieve this, homes should also be designed to facilitate ageing in place. This section therefore addresses the following subquestion: ‘Which architectural design elements within the dwelling support older adults in ageing in place?’.

Inhabitants of Houtwijk have identified several important requirements for dwellings they would like to age, including private outdoor space, step-free access and sufficient storage space (see Appendix C: Ageing at home). Additionally, age-friendly dwellings should be flexible and adaptable, with an extra room for different uses and enough space for easy movement. They should also have good access to daylight and views for well-being (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2023).

Beyond these general requirements, additional considerations are necessary for older adults with dementia, as also highlighted during the interview at a residential care facility (Appendix D: Interview at residential care home). To support them in remaining at home for longer, the design

of the dwelling should help maintain a natural day-night rhythm. This can be achieved through large windows that allow sufficient daylight, while incorporating a higher sill level to reduce disorientation. Furthermore, placing the kitchen next to the dining area can strengthen sensory cues and support orientation in daily activities. A recognisable entrance is also important, as it helps inhabitants to easily identify their own home (Woonzorg Nederland et al., 2024).

Beyond the individual dwelling, clustered housing can further support ageing in place by facilitating social interaction and informal support among neighbours. Living in close proximity to others and having access to shared spaces can strengthen both independence and overall well-being (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2023).

In conclusion, the design of a dwelling is an important factor in supporting ageing in place. A flexible and adaptable dwelling with sufficient space for comfortable movement and daily activities helps older adults to maintain independence for longer. When designing for an ageing population, specific attention should be given to dementia-friendly features that support orientation and help maintain a stable day–night rhythm.

Design guidelines for social interaction

Based on the subquestions, design guidelines are defined to support the design decisions. The subquestion on architectural design elements that encourage social interaction identifies guidelines across five scales, shown in Figure 8.



Figure 8: Design guidelines for social interaction (own figure)

Design guidelines for ageing in place

Design guidelines for ageing in place can be derived from the subquestion on architectural design elements that support ageing in place within the dwelling (Figure 9).



Age-friendly home



Figure 9: Design guidelines for ageing in place (own figure)

Programmatic guidelines

The research also defines programmatic design guidelines. Activities that encourage social interaction between different age groups and require physical or mental engagement are most beneficial for health. Examples are shown in Figure 10.

In addition, the research identifies key functions that could be integrated into the design to support older adults in remaining socially active (Figure 11). The full list of results, including frequency of mention and intended social connections, is provided in Appendix A (Workshop results: facilities)

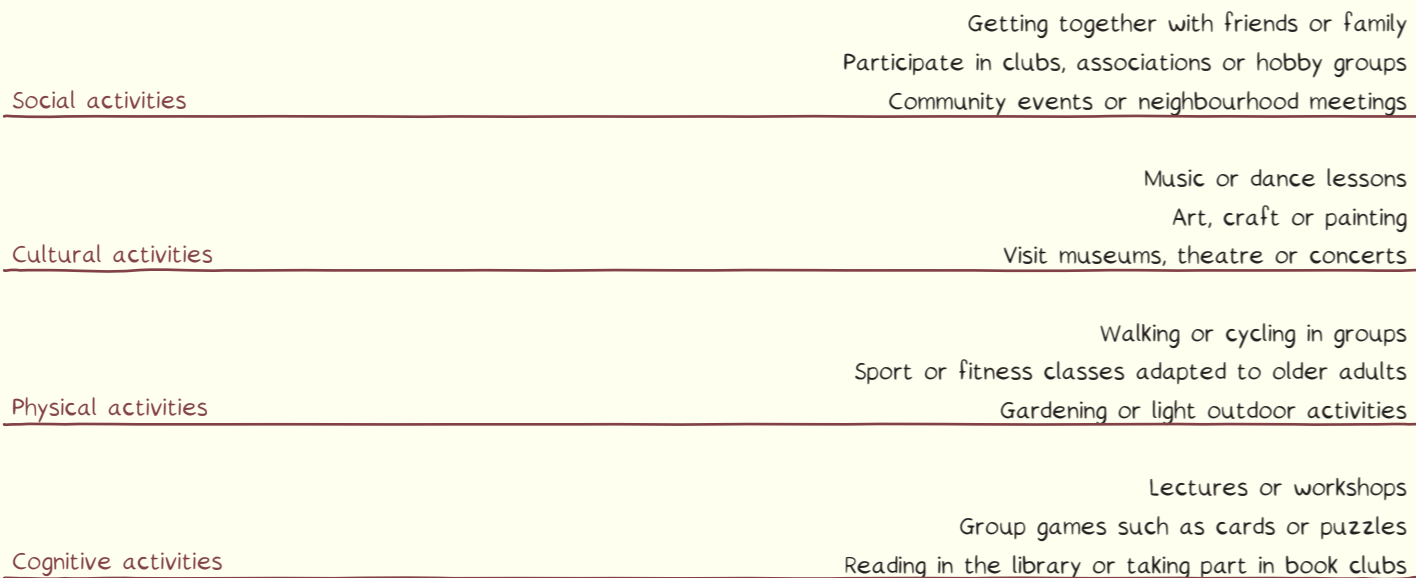


Figure 10: Activities for social interaction (own figure)



Figure 11: Preferred programmatic functions for older adults (own figure)

Conceptual idea

The following design decisions are based on the previous research and the defined design guidelines (Figure 8, 9, 10 & 11).

As social networks play a significant role in the social lives of older adults, this project uses the concept of the commons to create shared spaces that inhabitants can collectively control and use. Within this community-oriented living environment, people can continue living in their familiar surroundings as they age. A mix of age groups is integrated so inhabitants can support and strengthen one another. Figure 12 illustrates this conceptual idea.

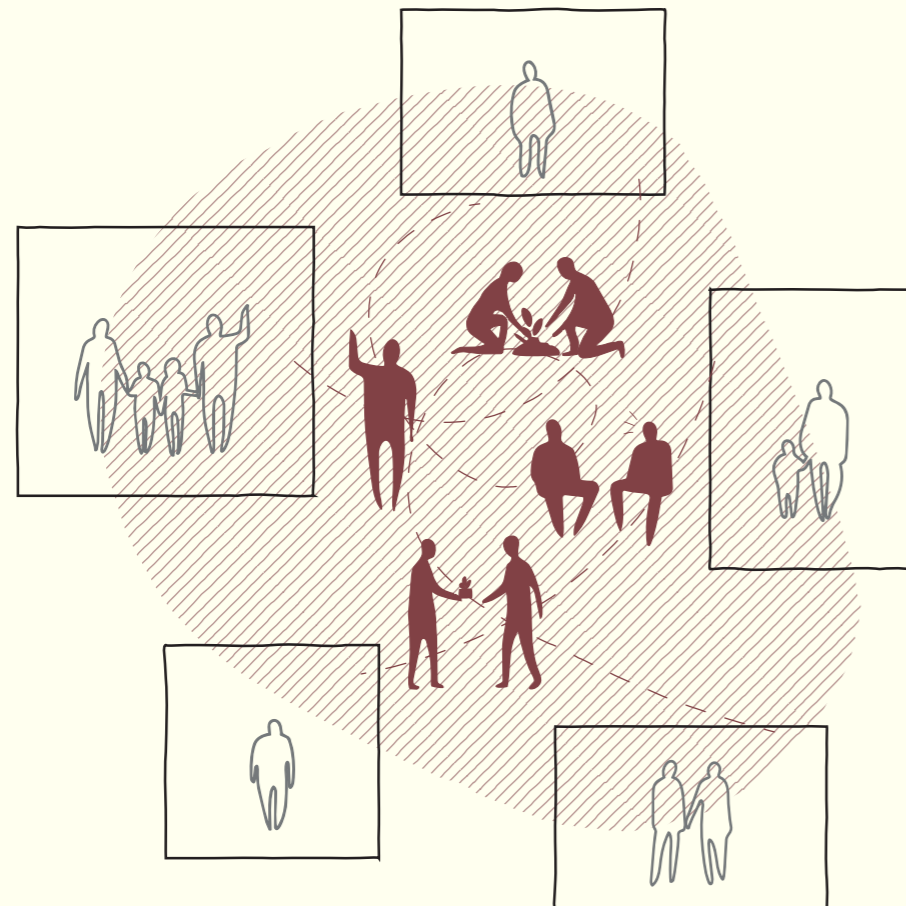


Figure 12: Conceptual idea of design project (own figure)

Site selection

When selecting the project location, the aim was to choose a site where inhabitants could form a community while maintaining connections with the surrounding neighbourhood. For this reason, a location along the green cycling route, that runs through the entire neighbourhood, was chosen (Figure 13). This route is widely used by inhabitants and connects the centre of Houtwijk with nearby parks and the surrounding area.

The site, which is currently occupied by the HWW care facility, will become available in the future as

the building is planned to be demolished due to changing regulations. It is located between the centre of Houtwijk and the Haga Hospital, with 't Kleine Hout and the Florence Nightingalepark nearby, providing direct access to green spaces and recreational areas.

However, the site lies at the intersection of two main roads. While this improves accessibility, particularly as there is a bus stop nearby, it may also lead to noise and safety challenges, which are carefully considered in the design.

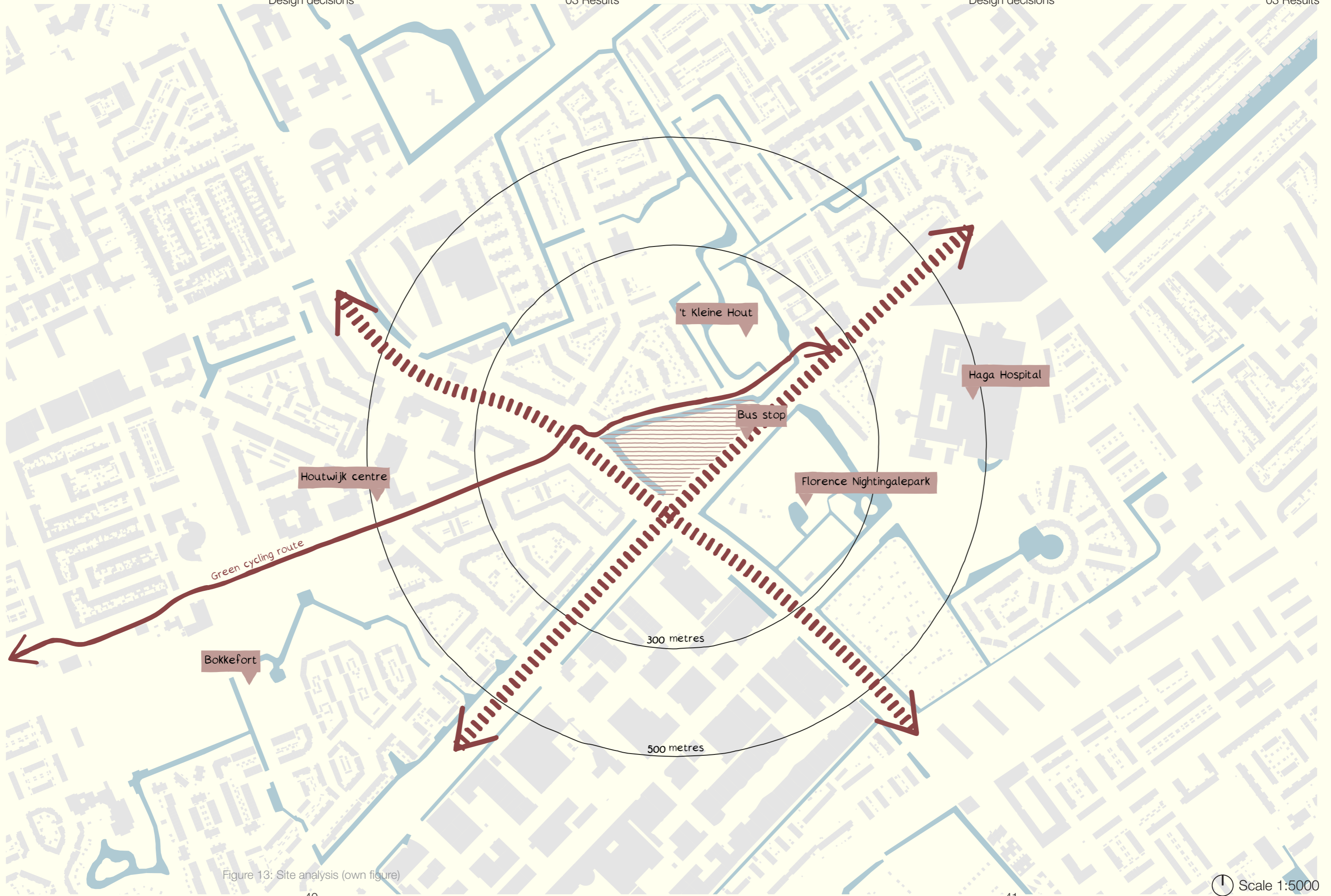


Figure 13: Site analysis (own figure)

Mass evolution

Figure 14 shows the mass evolution, where parts are carved out of a volume. Since the green cycling route is not very accessible for older adults and to strengthen the relationship with the environment, a parallel pedestrian route has been introduced.

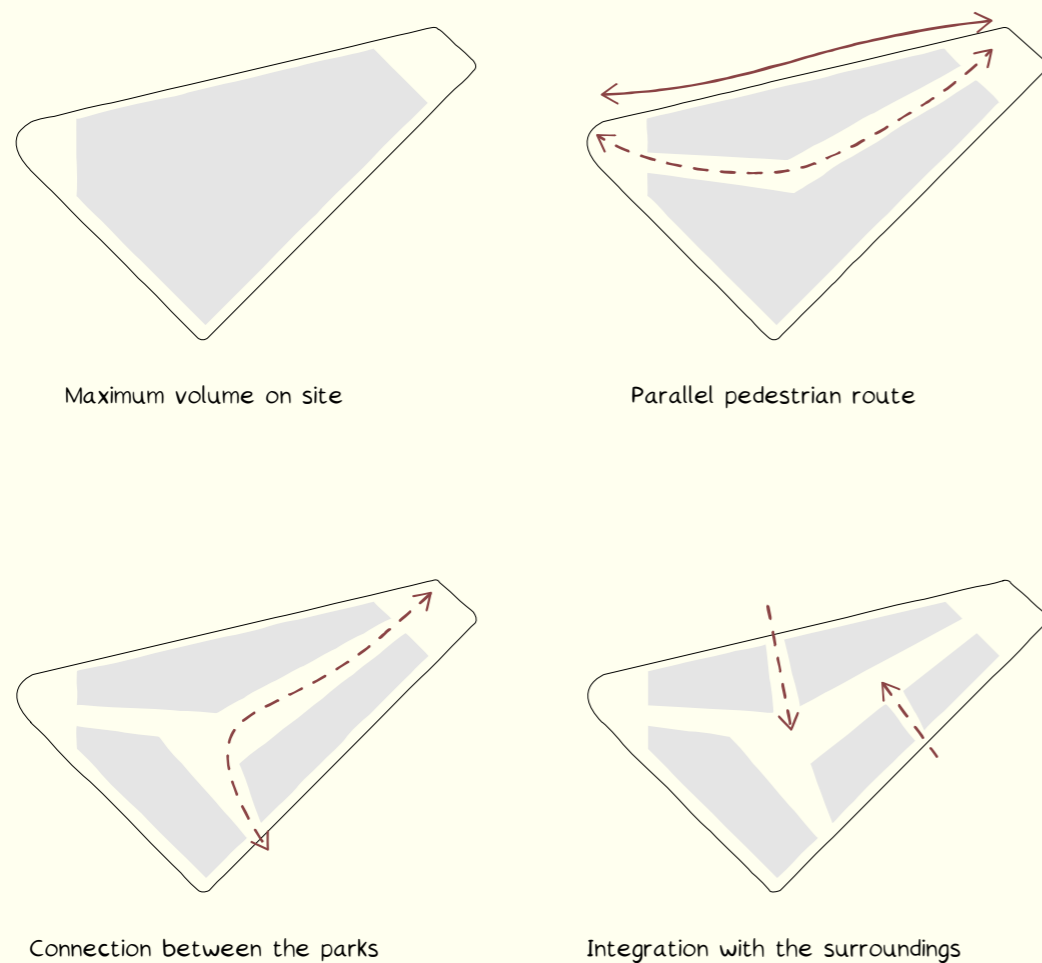


Figure 14: Mass evolution (own figure)

Public space

The space between the volumes functions as a public outdoor area and a connector between the parks, the green inner street. Along both sides of this green connection, paths are positioned: the main route, this is the parallel route alongside the green cycling axis, and secondary paths linking to the surrounding neighbourhood and parks. These paths are connected via the greenery, creating opportunities for people to meet and relax.

At the centre of the green inner street is a square, which also serves as a public gathering space. To enhance the area's vibrancy, all main entrances are oriented towards the green inner street. The conceptual design of the green inner street is shown in Figure 15.

Design guidelines applied:

- Walkable pathways and accessible green spaces
- Place to stay on the route

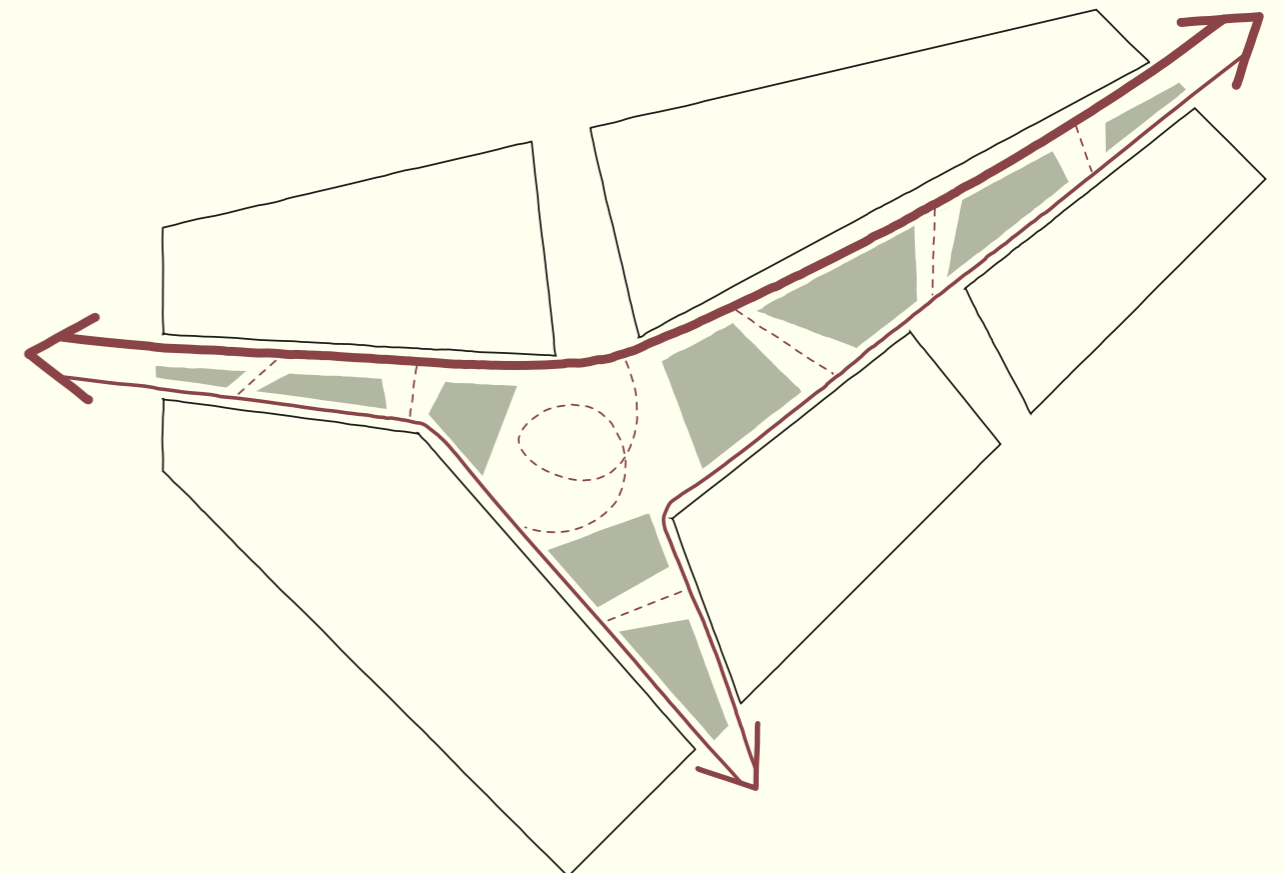


Figure 15: Conceptual design green inner street (own figure)

Programme

The plinths of these building volumes surrounding the green inner street accommodate public and collective functions, in accordance with the programmatic guidelines. The public functions are primarily located around the square, while more active functions are positioned near the entrance area, and quieter functions are situated towards the park edge (Figure 16). Residential units are situated above the plinth. By placing public and shared functions on the ground floor, inhabitants

are encouraged to come down to the green inner street, creating opportunities to meet and interact with others from the neighbourhood.

Design guidelines applied:

- Clear defined public, semi-public and private spaces
- Informal meeting places
- Vibrant plinth uses

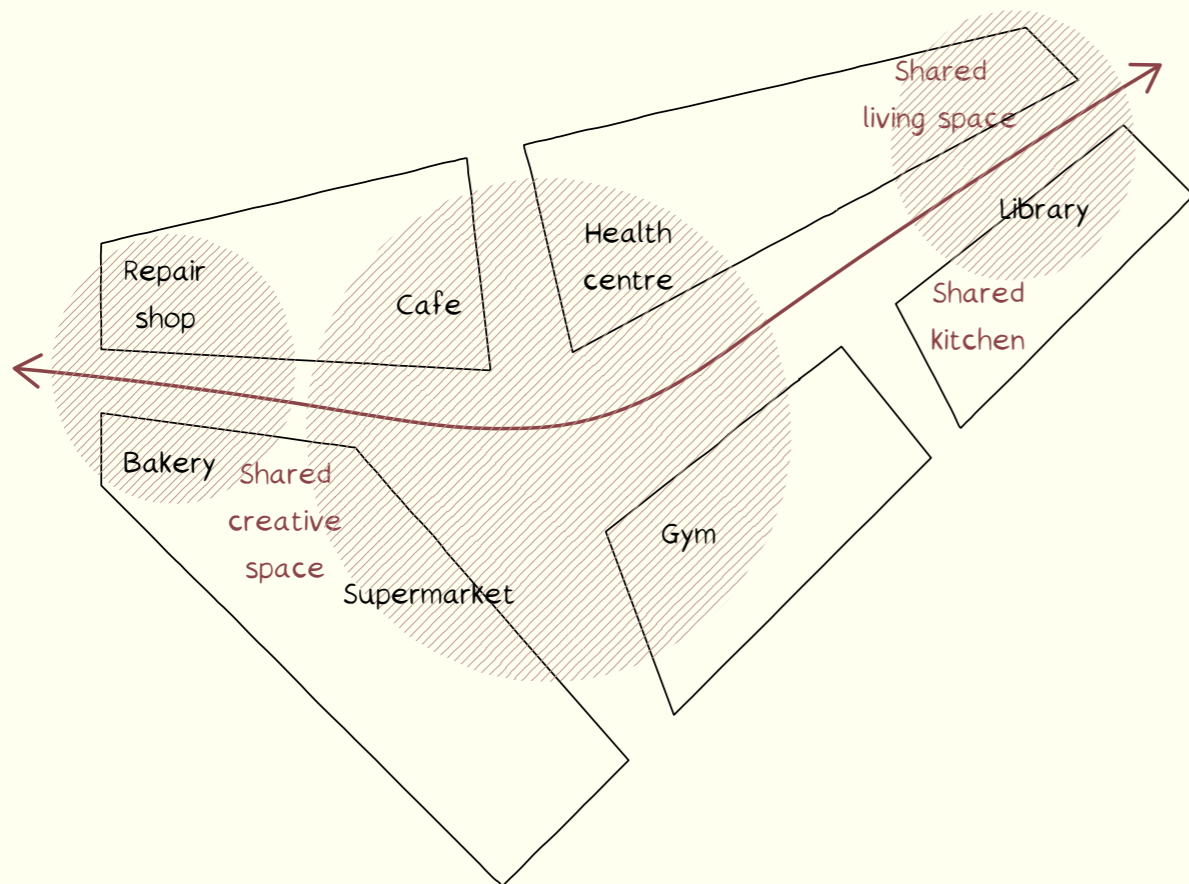


Figure 16: Schematic overview ground-floor programme (own figure)

Carving the common

By carving out the volumes above the plinth, two building parts are created that embrace a shared deck. The dwellings are oriented around this collective space, the common, which acts as a transition between public and private spaces, connects all entrances and functions as the social heart of the cluster. Illustrated in Figure 17.

further supporting collective use and interaction (Figure 18).

Design guidelines applied:

- Sun- and daylight oriented route to home
- Direct view and access to the route to home
- Route to home through (semi-)public space
- Visible shared spaces
- Flexible and adaptable spaces
- Ownership of spaces
- Decreasing users from street to home
- Multiple route options and vertical connections
- Various housing options

The common encourages a strong sense of ownership, as the adaptable space allows inhabitants to shape its use and design together. An additional shared indoor space along the main circulation route can also be used by inhabitants as they wish, for example as a communal kitchen,

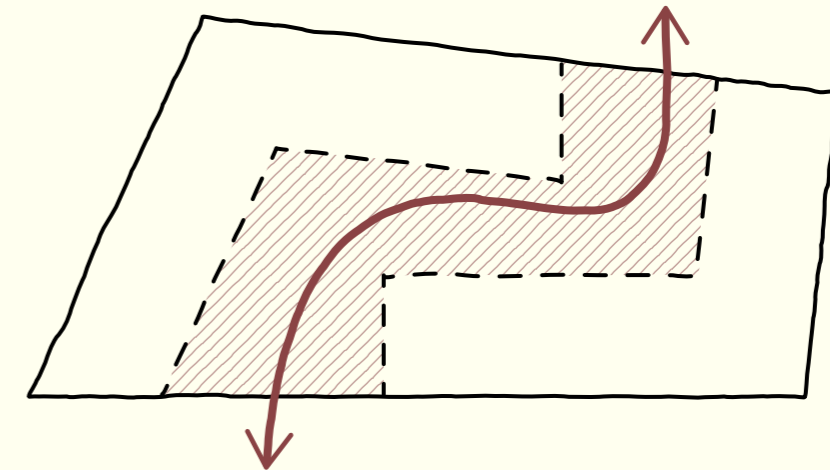


Figure 17: The common (own figure)

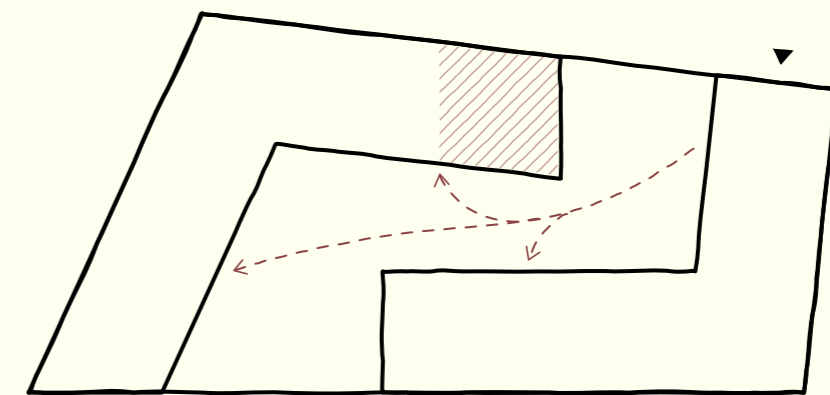


Figure 18: Shared space along circulation route (own figure)

Creating views

To ensure that each dwelling has a view of greenery, openings have been created in the building volumes, restoring sightlines towards the green inner street (Figure 19).

Design guidelines applied:

- *Maximum of five storeys for street-level connection*
- *View and daylight*

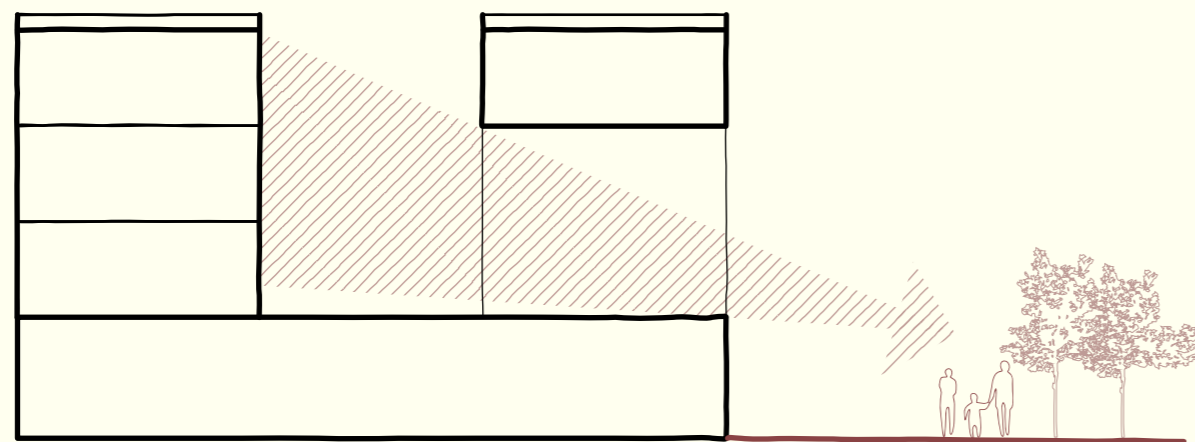


Figure 19: Views from each home onto the green inner street (own figure)

Conceptual floor plan

The project includes different housing types; however, the focus here is on single-storey apartments designed for older adults. Both gallery-access and porch-access typologies follow a similar spatial concept, as shown in Figures 20 and 21.

Each apartment is organised around a central core containing the wet functions and an open kitchen, creating a flexible living space that extends from front to back. This layout enables continuous circulation throughout the dwelling, improving accessibility and ease of movement. All spaces are fully wheelchair accessible, ensuring sufficient circulation space. The relatively small

private outdoor areas encourage the use of shared outdoor spaces.

Design guidelines applied:

- *Treshold zone of 1-2 metres*
- *Living spaces along treshold zone*
- *Step-free access*
- *Sufficient circulation space*
- *Recognisable entrance*
- *Large windows with parapets*
- *Clear spatial layout*
- *Smell cues (through open kitchen)*
- *Flexible and adaptable floor plan*

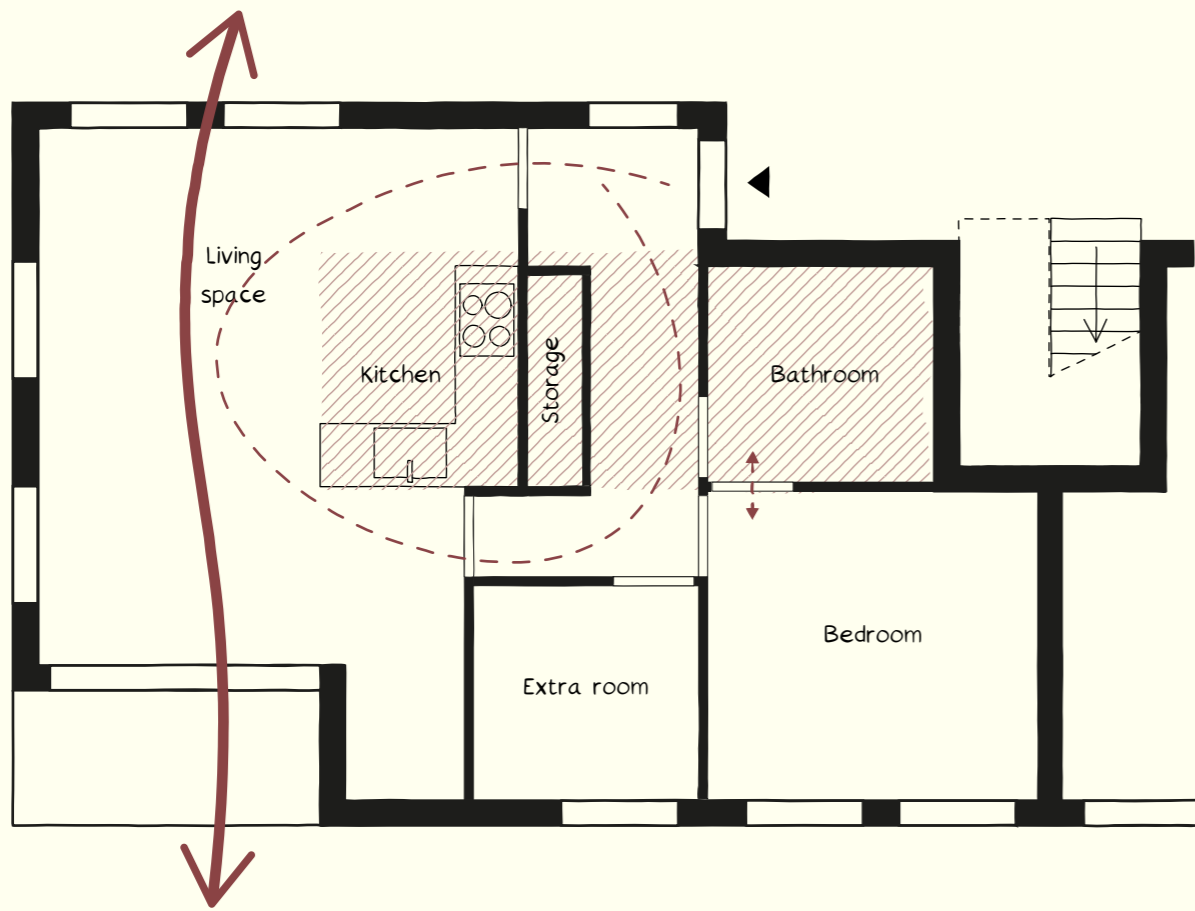


Figure 20: Conceptual floor plan of a gallery-access apartment (own figure)

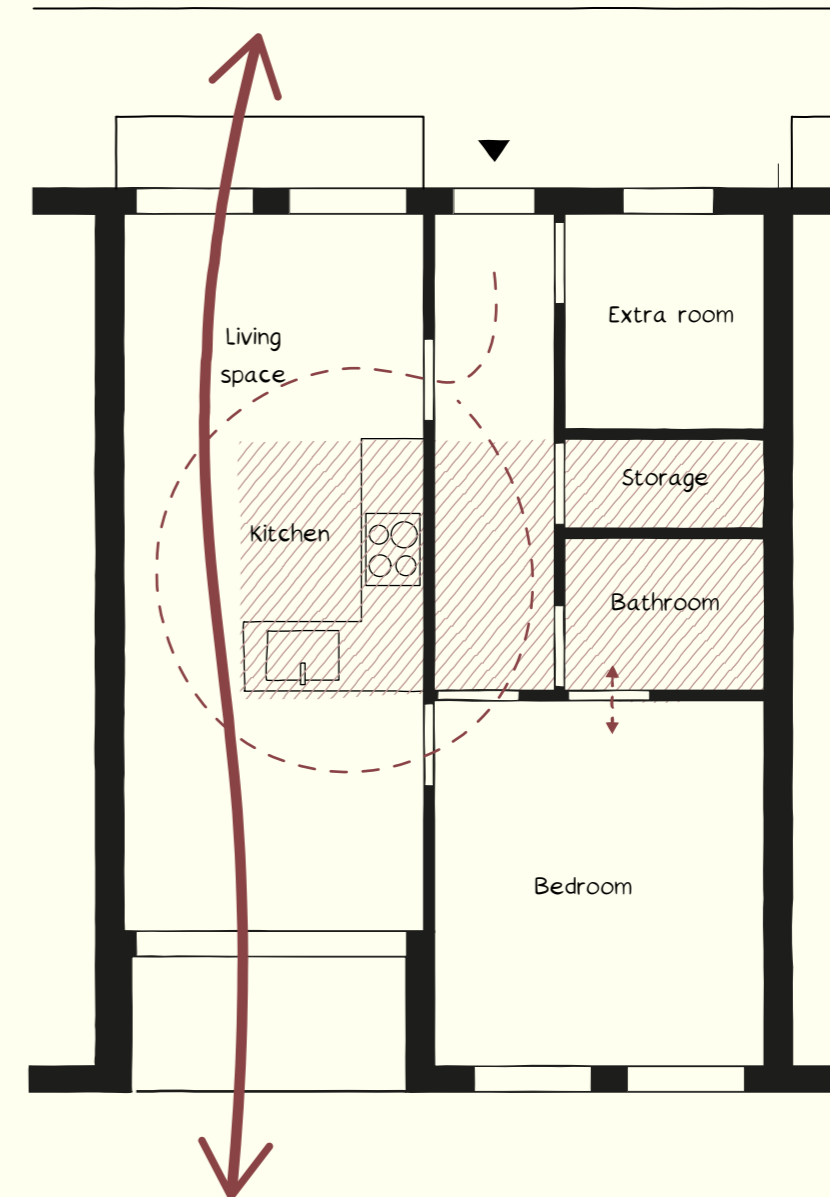


Figure 21: Conceptual floor plan of a porch-access apartment (own figure)

04

Conclusion

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that the architectural design of the built environment can support older adults in remaining socially active by creating environments that encourage social interaction, strengthen social networks and enable ageing in place. Social activity among older adults depends not only on the availability of social opportunities, but also on the spatial design that facilitate both spontaneous and organised encounters within the neighbourhood.

The research shows that strong social networks, consisting of both strong and weak ties, are essential for older adults to remain socially active. In particular, informal relationships with neighbours contribute to self-reliance, a sense of belonging and reduced loneliness. Both spontaneous encounters and organised activities within the neighbourhood play an important role in maintaining and strengthening these networks.

Architectural design can actively support these encounters by shaping the relationship between public, collective and private space. Walkable neighbourhoods, accessible public spaces and nearby facilities encourage older adults to spend time outdoors and meet others. Shared spaces within residential environments, as well as transitional zones such as porches, entrances and front gardens, create important opportunities for informal contact while maintaining a balance between privacy and interaction. At the dwelling scale, flexible and accessible homes further support independent living and ageing in place, ensuring that older adults can remain within their

familiar social environment for longer.

These insights inform the design approach of this project, which reintroduces the concept of the common. Historically, the common refers to shared spaces that are collectively governed and shaped by their users, rather than being externally defined. By bringing this concept back into contemporary housing, inhabitants are given shared responsibility and decision-making power over a space they use in their everyday life. This collective governance itself becomes socially valuable, as the process of negotiating, deciding and shaping the space strengthens social ties and fosters a sense of ownership.

In the proposed design, mixed-age housing is organised around such a common. It is designed to be a shared space that all inhabitants pass through every day, ensuring visibility and encouraging continuous informal interaction. Because the space is actively used and shaped by the community itself, it becomes a meaningful expression of collective identity and reciprocity. At the same time, the common is elevated, making clear that it is a distinct shared domain belonging to the surrounding inhabitants.

By combining mixed-age living, collective governance and spatial visibility, the design creates a living environment in which social interaction is not incidental but embedded in everyday life. This makes the common a key instrument for supporting older adults in remaining socially active within their neighbourhood.

Recommendations

This research shows that the final design has broader relevance for the architectural profession. The design demonstrates that social interaction, reciprocity and informal support can be actively created through spatial design, instead of leaving this to chance. By using mixed-age housing and organising it around a shared common, the design shows how collective spaces can play a central role in everyday social life.

What is especially valuable in this approach is the idea of shared decision-making and collective ownership over space. This form of joint responsibility strengthens social ties, creates a sense of belonging, and makes people more involved in their living environment. This is not a new idea, but something that can be found in earlier ways of living, where shared spaces and collective management were more common. Revisiting these principles can therefore offer valuable strategies for addressing today's societal

challenges.

For the architectural profession, this indicates that housing design could play a more significant role in supporting social connections. Especially in a time where the pressure on healthcare is increasing and people are more dependent on each other again, it becomes important to design environments that support mutual care and reciprocity.

Therefore, architects should not only focus on individual dwellings, but also on how people live together and support each other in daily life. This requires a stronger focus on the user perspective and on how spaces are actually experienced and used over time. By learning from older spatial principles, such as shared commons and collective responsibility, architecture can contribute to more socially connected and supportive neighbourhoods.

Reflection

Reflecting on the research process, it was valuable to approach the location with an open perspective. As the neighbourhood was unfamiliar, there were hardly any prejudices or assumptions about it, enabling the research and design process to evolve more organically from the area's own qualities and needs.

The combination of a literature review, interviews and a workshop proved especially valuable. The literature provided a broader theoretical understanding of socially active ageing, while the interviews and workshop offered insight into the specific wishes and experiences of the inhabitants of Houtwijk. This highlights the importance of directly involving specific user groups in the design process rather than relying only on general theories or guidelines.

At the same time, the methods used also had limitations. The interviews and workshop mainly involved people who were already active in the neighbourhood or willing to participate, meaning

that the results remain somewhat selective. Perspectives of less socially active or less visible groups may therefore be underrepresented in the research.

In addition, the research mainly focused on the perspective of older adults. Since the project proposes mixed-age living environments, it would also be valuable to involve other age groups more actively in future research and design processes. Their needs, experiences and expectations could further contribute to creating a living environment that works for different generations.

Finally, the project showed the importance of leaving space for inhabitants to shape and appropriate their environment themselves. Rather than fully determining how collective spaces should be used, the design mainly provides the spatial framework within which inhabitants can collectively decide how these spaces evolve over time according to their own wishes and needs.

Appendices

Appendix A

Workshop results - Facilities

<i>Facility</i>	<i>Number of mentions</i>	<i>Shared with</i>
Cultural activities	8	All ages / 16+ / 20+
(Dining) café	6	All ages
Restaurant	5	All ages
Meeting place	5	All ages / 16+ / 65+
Shops	5	All ages
Park / green space	4	All ages
Place for sharing knowledge	3	16+
Community centre	2	All ages / 65+
Public square with seating	2	All ages
Children's play area	2	All ages
Gym	2	All ages / 16+ / 20+
Workplace / repair centre	2	All ages / 20+
Alotment garden	1	All ages
Exercise area	1	16+ / 20+
Creative workplace	1	All ages
Bookclub	1	All ages / 65+
Meeting place for older people	1	65+
Pub	1	All ages

Figure A1: Workshop results - desired facilities to add to Houtwijk (own figure)

Appendix B

Workshop results - Housing typologies

<i>Housing typology</i>	<i>Number of preferences</i>
Housing courtyard for all ages (type 3)	7
Housing courtyard for older adults (type 2)	4
Apartment complex for older adults (type 1)	4
Shared home with family or friends (type 5)	1
Shared home with people of all ages (type 4)	0

Figure B1: Workshop results - preferred housing typologies according to Houtwijk's inhabitants (own figure)

Appendix C

Workshop results - Ageing at home

<i>At home in your home</i>		<i>Number of mentions</i>	
Garden	15	No nuisance from neighbours	2
Step-free	6	Stuff	2
Temperature	6	Comfort	2
Storage space	6	Family	1
Safety	5	Plants	1
Sustainability	5	Facilities	1
Layout	4	Balcony	1
Pet	4	Peace	1
Adequate spaces	4	Bedroom	1
View	4	Kitchen	1
Daylight	3	Large bathroom	1
Memories	2	Living room	1

Figure C1: Workshop results - contributing factors to feeling at home in one's own home (own figure)

<i>At home in your neighbourhood</i>		<i>Number of mentions</i>	
Public transport	13	Restaurant	2
Lovely neighbours	10	Many children in the neighbourhood	2
Shops	10	Church	1
Parking space	9	No nuisance of youth	1
Safety	8	Peace	1
Nature / park	7	Café	1
Supermarket	5	Gym	1
Cycling	3	Car	1
Community centre	2	Creative places	1
Well maintenance	2	Family	1
Care for each other	2	Friends	1
Social cohesion	2		

Figure C2: Workshop results - contributing factors to feeling at home in one's own neighbourhood (own figure)

Appendix D

Interview at residential care home

Transcript of the interview at a residential care home.

Bewoners

1. Voor welke doelgroep is dit project bestemd? Voor oudere mensen met een zorgvraag: dementie (psychisch) of somatiek (lichamelijk). Zij kunnen hier tot het einde van hun leven blijven wonen, tenzij iemand agressief wordt en dus een gevaar voor zichzelf of de omgeving vormt, bij dementie kan dit bijvoorbeeld gebeuren. Of indien er toch hele intensieve zorg niet geleverd kan worden. Hier is namelijk 24/7 zorg aanwezig, maar mensen krijgen niet 24/7 zorg.

2. Wonen hier enkel alleenstaanden of ook koppels? Ook koppels, zij hoeven niet extra te betalen als ze met z'n tweeën in een appartement wonen.

3. Hoe bepalen jullie wie hier mag wonen? Mensen melden zich aan, waarna er wordt gekeken of de zorgvraag past bij deze locatie. Als er tijdelijk geen plek is, zijn er eventueel ook andere locaties, anders is er een wachtlijst. Als er last minute nog plek is, mogen mensen die een tijdelijk verblijf nodig hebben hier wonen, bijvoorbeeld mensen herstellende van een operatie.

Sociaal

4. Hoeveel woningen bevinden zich hier? En waarom? Er zijn 35 woningen in totaal, ongeveer 12 per vleugel. Dit heeft vooral financiële redenen, hiervoor zijn namelijk minimaal 30 woningen nodig. Voor dementiewoningen krijgt de organisatie bijvoorbeeld meer geld van de overheid dan voor woningen voor mensen met somatiek.

5. Kennen alle bewoners elkaar? De meeste mensen zullen elkaar wel kennen, maar tot een bepaalde mate.

6. Worden er gezamenlijke activiteiten georganiseerd? Zo ja, welke? Ja, er worden ongeveer acht activiteiten per week georganiseerd. Vaak zijn het externen die dit hosten. Per maand is er een activiteitenagenda.

In februari worden bijvoorbeeld massages, bloemschikactiviteiten en danslessen georganiseerd.

Het is wel verschillend voor mensen met dementie of somatiek. Bingo is bijvoorbeeld leuk voor dementerenden, maar mensen met somatiek willen hier niks van weten en spelen liever andere spellen.

De woning

7. Welke ruimtes bevinden zich in de woningen? Bewoners hebben een woonkamer met een klein keukentje, maar kunnen hier niet zelf koken. Er bevindt zich hier een wastafel, koelkastje, koffiezetapparaat en een waterkoker.

Daarnaast zijn er één of twee slaapkamers. Soms hebben mensen toch wel voor langere tijd voortdurend zorg nodig, waardoor in deze extra slaapkamer een familielid of iemand van thuiszorg kan slapen.

Verder bevindt zich in de woning een badkamer met opklapbare meubels en een open douche om zorg mogelijk te maken.

8. Zijn de woningen helemaal privé en afgesloten of is er zicht naar binnen vanaf de gang?

De woningen zijn volledig privé, vanaf de gang kan er niet bij de woningen naar binnen gekeken worden.

9. Heeft elke woning een eigen buitenruimte? Nee, er zijn ongeveer 5 woningen met balkons. Een aantal hiervan is enkel bereikbaar met een klein trappetje dus die is in principe onbruikbaar. Daarbij worden de balkons nauwelijks gebruikt, bewoners gaan namelijk liever in de gemeenschappelijke tuin zitten. De woningen op de begane grond hebben allemaal wel een eigen terrasje, grenzend aan de gemeenschappelijke tuin.

Gemeenschappelijke ruimtes

10. Welke gemeenschappelijke ruimtes bevinden zich hier?

Er is een woonkamer, maar deze is redelijk afgesloten. Hier worden wel activiteiten georganiseerd, maar bewoners gaan er niet zomaar zelf zitten.

Daarnaast is er een restaurant waar mensen

zelfstandig kunnen eten of in een begeleidingsgroep. Hiervoor is een aparte ruimte waar mensen geholpen worden met eten. Sommige bewoners kiezen ervoor om hun maaltijd in hun eigen appartement op te eten.

De keuken is afgezonderd van het restaurant en de begeleidingsgroep. Dit is eigenlijk niet ideaal, aangezien het proces van eten bereiden erg belangrijk is om bewust van te zijn, voornamelijk voor mensen met dementie. Het ruiken en zien van koken helpt bij de bewustwording dat het bijna etenstijd is. Daarnaast kunnen de bewoners hierdoor niet zo makkelijk helpen met koken. Tot slot faciliteert de locatie ruimtes voor alle benodigde zorg van buitenaf, zoals een kapper, fysio, huisarts, pedicure of diëtiste.

11. Welke functies zou deze locatie nog kunnen gebruiken?

Er mist niet echt een ruimte, maar meer verbinding tussen de keuken en het restaurant zou prettig zijn voor de bewoners, zodat zij eventueel kunnen helpen koken. Ook is de woonkamer nu te afgezonderd, deze zou meer zichtbaar mogen zijn.

12. Waar in het gebouw bevinden de gezamenlijke ruimtes zich?

De meeste functies zitten op de begane grond. Maar ruimtes voor bijvoorbeeld de fysio zitten wel op de eerste verdieping, wat in de praktijk onhandig blijkt. Het kost bewoners vaak teveel moeite om naar boven te gaan, waardoor fysio oefeningen dus vaak beneden in de hal of bij de gemeenschappelijke woonkamer gedaan worden.

13. Dragen bewoners bij aan de gezamenlijke ruimtes en activiteiten?

Nee, eigenlijk niet. Veel kunnen dat ook niet en vinden het ook wel lekker dat er bijvoorbeeld voor hun gekookt wordt.

Extra functies

14. Welke ruimtes zijn er in het gebouw aanwezig naast de woningen en gemeenschappelijke ruimtes?

Bij de entree bevindt zich een balie. Daarnaast zijn er kantoortjes voor de medewerkers. De medewerkers lunchen bijvoorbeeld in de

gemeenschappelijke woonkamer. Verder is er een parkeergarage onder de gemeenschappelijke tuin. Dit is vooral voor de medewerkers en bezoekers.

Overig

De gehele locatie is afgesloten met een hek, de deuren zijn te openen met knoppen. Mensen met dementie snappen dit niet, waardoor zij niet zomaar buiten het terrein kunnen komen.

Het is belangrijk voor de bewoners om een normale dag na te bootsen voor een zo goed mogelijk dag- en nachtritme. Met dementie worden bijvoorbeeld dag en nacht omgedraaid en is er geen hongergevoel. Hierbij is het ook belangrijk om mensen bezig te houden, al is het bijvoorbeeld de tafel te laten dekken.

Voor sommige mensen zou het beter zijn om mensen met dezelfde zorgvraag bij elkaar te huisvesten. Zo voelen mensen met bijvoorbeeld dementie zich niet onbegrepen en kunnen de mensen met enkel somatische klachten zich niet aan hun 'ergeren'. Maar sommige dementerende mensen zijn juist wel weer voorstander van het mengen van zorgbehoeften, dus dit blijkt erg verschillend per persoon.

Appendix E

Key conclusions from visit to community centre

Conclusions from the visit to a community centre for older adults.

General conclusions:

- People have been living in their homes for decades.
- They have built up good relationships with their neighbours over the years and look out for one another.
- One person has moved to a 55+ flat (step-free), because they could no longer manage the stairs. Apart from that, no one plans to move.
- It is striking that people particularly value the neighbourhood. They all live in the city centre, where everything is close by, like the supermarket, general practitioner and public transport.
- They have no clear preference about which age groups they would like to live with. However, many did find this community centre pleasant as it is quiet and exclusively for older people.
- They enjoy hearing children in the neighbourhood and having students living nearby.
- They enjoy socialising, but do not necessarily need to do this in or around their home.

Activities in the community centre:

- Having lunch together
- Playing games
- Crocheting / knitting
- Chat table where they talk about their week
- Dance lessons

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