

# **AGEING ELDERS**

Finding the right home to age

## **RESEARCH PLAN**

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**elders** (bijwoord)  
el.ders | \ el·dərs \

1: op een andere plaats

**elderly** (noun)  
el.der.ly | \ el·dər·li \

1: old people considered as a group

# Abstract

## AGEING Elders- Find the right home to age

The Netherlands is experiencing a large housing shortage, only getting worse in the upcoming years. The sharp increase in households (standard households and one-person households) is one of many factors in this shortage. In addition, the improved medical care and rise in wealth causes the babyboomer generation to increase the number of households. These people are living longer and are more vital, and thus prolonging their independency. However, the planning of this “third stage of life” is mostly seen as the responsibility of the individual. Moreover, their choices are dependent on collective and/or societal arrangements, norms and circumstances. And thus, an untapped potential in this group of elderly who can mean more to society on social and spatial levels. This research hopes to find an answer to the following main question: Which design strategy can create a healthy living environment on a social and spatial level where the elderly feel included and helpful while also being able to age in

place? To answer this question, the history of the housing for elderly will be studied, the needs and wishes of these elderly will also be acquired to understand how the elderly are living and can be living. Lastly, research into high densified neighbourhoods combined with the elderly will be conducted to understand in what way it influences the mental well-being of the elderly and how it could be prevented. Multiple case studies will be conducted using SWOT analysis to understand the strength and weaknesses the projects may bring.

Keywords: Ageing in place, elderly, seniors, social cohesion, social interaction, mental well-being

# Background

## Housing shortage in the netherlands

The Netherlands is experiencing a large housing shortage that will only get worse in the near future, despite over 73,000 new-build homes being delivered in 2023 (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2024). However, very many more new-build homes need to be delivered to address this acute housing shortage. With 437,000 housing applications and 47,000 available homes, the national level of the housing shortage comes to a total of 390,000 homes in 2023 (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2023).

One of the major reasons causing the housing shortage is the sharp increase in population growth and an even greater increase in the number of households both now and in the future. An increase of 916,000 is expected through the year 2037. This increase in households is mainly due to the group of older

singles and older couples without children (Gopal et al., 2023). The increase in the number of older singles and older couples is a result of the increased improvement in medical care and rise in

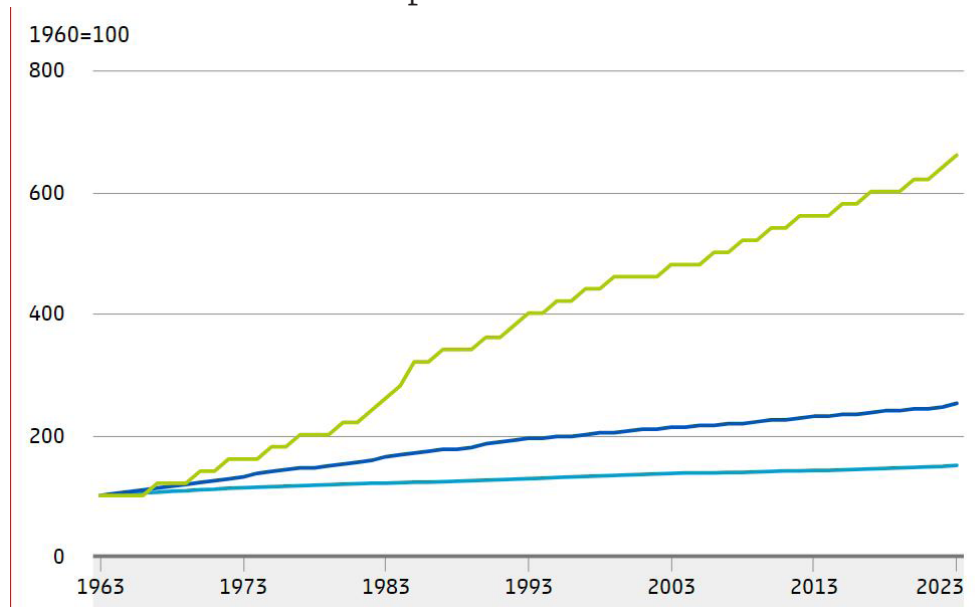


fig. 1 Growth population (purple), households (blue) and one-person households (purple) (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2023)

wealth.

As more of the baby boomer generation start to reach their retirement age, this trend will only intensify. (De Zaandam Jong, 2021). Not only is the baby boomer generation reaching retirement age, but life expectancy will continue to rise in the future. As a result, the population distribution table is slowly going to change from a pyramid shape to a rectangular shape (fig. 2), where the older population is becoming more prominent, see figure (Central Bureau of Statistics, s.d.-b).

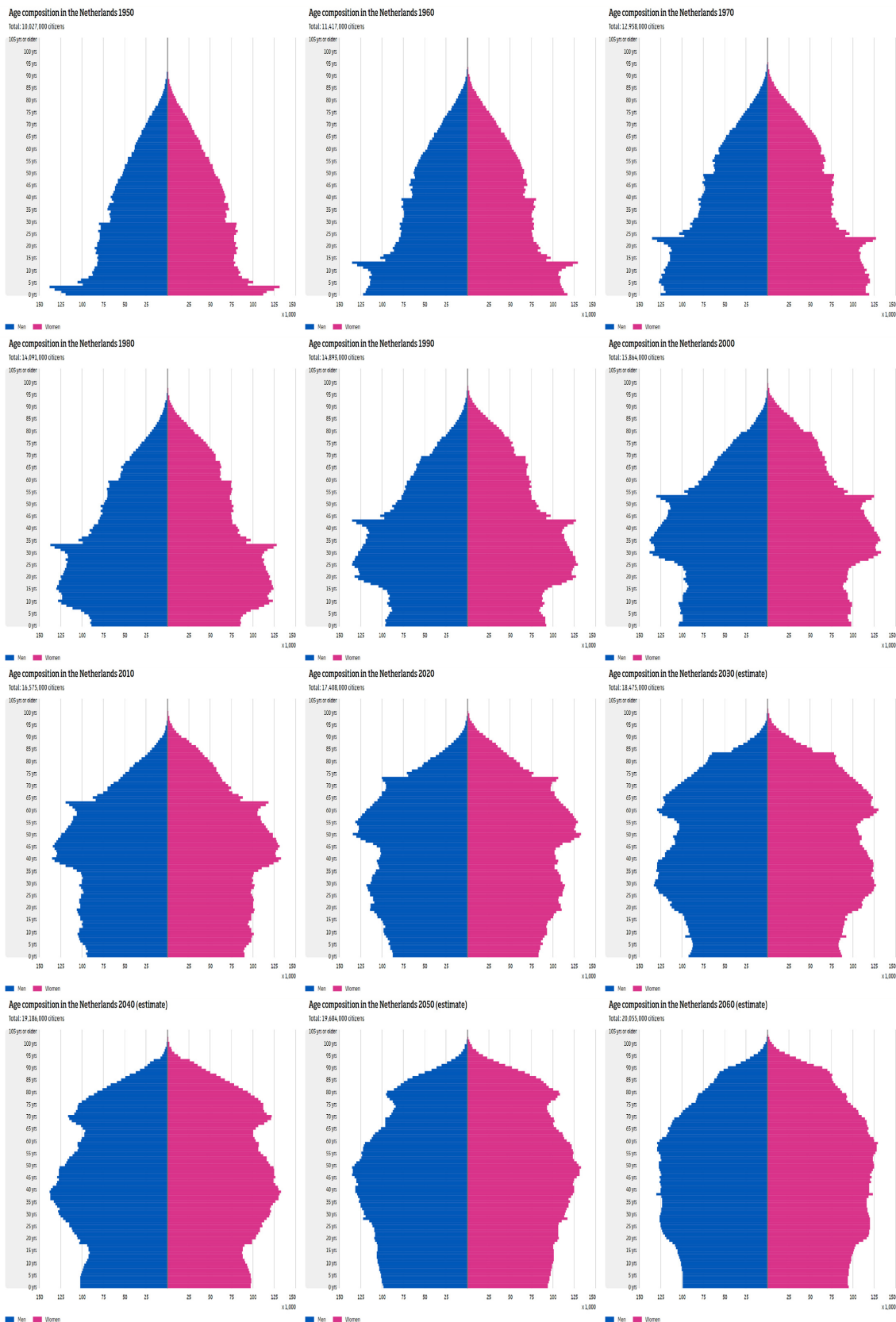


fig. 2 Population age structure 1950 - 2060 (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2023)



# General problem statement

## Seniors stuck in place vs ageing in place

There have been many changes in the history of elderly housing in the Netherlands. These elderly people could no longer work and their social position was therefore equal to that of a poor or sick person. This made them dependent on either their children, the church's diaconate or charity from the rich (fig. 3). By 1597, this was under such pressure that the government had to intervene. Later, in the 20th century, the "elderly" were rediscovered as a separate group. These received benefits under the General Old Age Security Act (AOW) in 1957 (Gulmans, 2014).

This also brought a new housing typology to society: housing for the elderly. And at a rapid pace, elderly homes, rest homes, service flats, and nursing homes were sprung up. The popularity of these "retirement homes" resulted in very long queues of up to 10 years (Jonkhoff, 2010). On top of this, the quality of elderly care was often



fig. 3 Maria van Pallaes distributing food during the yearly give away (painted by Hendrick Bloemaert in 1657)

below par due to the commercialization of these elderly homes (Mens & Wagenaar, 2009).

In 1975, the government came up with an overall vision of elderly policy. The message was that the elderly needed to live independently at home for as long as possible, as the number of elderly people and the costs incurred by the government for their care kept rising. In 2015, the Social Support Act (WMO) was introduced as well as the reform of the Long-Term Care Act (WLZ). Instead, the government encouraged informal care from family or your surroundings, with the aim that the elderly only go to a care home when there is really no other way (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2023).

Consequently, this separation of living and care has also put pressure on the housing market. A shortage of senior housing, government incentives to live at home for as long as possible and the changing ideal of being in a place you know until your last years actually reinforce that problem. Research by CBS (2020) found that more than two-thirds of 65- to 75-year-olds live in owner-occupied homes. These houses are often the size that first-time buyers or families need to be able to move on. This flow should also take place in the group of senior citizens, but because current new construction does not match the needs of the elderly well, they cannot move on.

A large group of seniors would like to move to a life-proof home, but do not do so due to lack of suitable and affordable housing (Van Staaij et al., 2021). As a result, you get homes that are either adapted to the

resident's needs or that homes are in fact too big for what they need and thus large parts of the house are not used. On top of this, single elderly people who are already unable to care for themselves and are no longer physically active have a much smaller network and often feel lonelier (Jonkers, 2016; Kaljouw, 2014). It is therefore imperative to design alternative housing.

# Specific problem statement

## maximizing unused potential

More and more older people who are in their “third phase of life” (the phase after retirement) are getting older and staying vital and healthy for longer (Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu, 2020). As a result, we have a good number of years left after retirement that we can fill as we wish. There is now more space and time to contribute to society in new ways.

Many older people contribute to society. For example, 25 per cent of the over-65s do volunteer work in care and support or by babysitting their grandchildren, relieving their children at rush hour. Despite the differences in how these older people spend their new leisure time, there are also common values they do share. The need to be self-reliant for as long as possible, feeling connected to other people and having a sense of belonging (De Raad voor Volksgezondheid en Samenleving, 2020).

Currently, the planning of the third stage of life is seen as an individual matter. While being able to design the third stage of life for oneself is important, the availability and accessibility of these choices is a communal responsibility. Indeed, their choices are highly dependent on collective and/or societal arrangements, norms and circumstances (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Consequently, there is a large untapped potential among this group of older people in their third stage of life, which is only growing, who can mean more to society not only at the social level, but also at the spatial level. In a way, the way urban development is filled determines the height of the role these elderly people can play.

# Research questions

Because of the previously stated problem statement, this research will focus on the potential role of the elderly in the highly densified built environment, specifically in Amsterdam. The following research question shall therefore be addressed in this research.

Which design strategy can create a healthy living environment on a social and spatial level where the elderly feel included and helpful while also being able to age in place?

Answering this questions requires historical knowledge about the roles of church and government changed throughout the years, as well as the different housing typologies that came with it. Thus the following subquestion will be asked:

“When and how did we design housing for seniors and has the

design  
changed nowadays and in what way?”

Furthermore, it is imperative to understand the importance of different needs and wishes of the elderly and acquiring knowledge to the different housing types (e.g. co-housing, CPO's) and how it relates to their needs and wishes. The following question shall therefore be asked:

“What does a group of seniors need in order to stimulate a sustainable community and subsequently what can this community offer to its surroundings?”

Lastly, due to housing and space shortage it will be important to understand to which extent high densified residential blocks could help relieving stress on the housing market and providing new homes for the elderly. This will be answered through the following question:  
“How can design stimulate social cohesion in a high density area?”



# Theoretical framework

For the historical aspect of this research, the 2009 publication of Mens & Wagenaar investigated how senior housing changed in the Netherlands. They emphasised the importance of historical changes in the social status of the elderly, which is a crucial component of our research. Through examining the dynamics of interactions between the aged and society and pinpointing areas in need of development, the objective is to incorporate these insights into creative solutions that are specifically designed to meet the requirements of the ageing population.

In the body of current literature, the study of older people's wants and needs has been thoroughly examined. The urgent physical and spatial needs of the elderly are outlined in a study written by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (2022). Furthermore, Van Hees (2018) promotes the idea of "lifecycle-robust"

neighbourhoods and its abilities to stimulate outgoing behaviour within the elderly group, suggesting that simple changes to housing configurations are insufficient to encourage older adults to be more active and socially engaged.

Barros et al. (2019) pose questions on the possible impact of planning, urban design, and architectural features on the psychological and social welfare of the general public. According to their research, social and mental well-being are correlated with the type of home, floor level, and spaces found in high-rise buildings. Ji et al. (2023) have demonstrated the important influence that easily accessible green spaces have on the psychological well-being and social behaviours of senior citizens, highlighting the critical function that these surroundings play in boosting general well-being.

# Methods of research

The first sub-question explores the role of the elderly in society by researching historical events. This investigation attempts to examine case studies applying a SWOT analysis through a review of Mens & Wagenaar's book (2009) and a comparison analysis. This method provides insights into the historical background of senior housing by concentrating on the advantages and disadvantages of architectural projects, especially as they relate to society and spatial dynamics.

Examining multiple aspects and perspectives is necessary to answer the second sub-question. Comparing the demands and preferences to the size of individual homes as well as the larger neighbourhood setting is part of this. The study will investigate factors related to physical, social, and spatial problems and conduct interviews with seniors residing in varying living conditions. Through the integration of these insights with literature evaluations, a thorough understanding of cur-

rent concerns will assist in the development of design concepts that promote the well-being of the aged.

The last sub-question focuses on social cohesion and multigenerational interacting through case studies conducted in highly populated neighbourhoods. The goal of these studies is to identify different types of living arrangements. Afterwards, using a SWOT analysis breaks down each project's strengths.

Through the integration of historical research, comparative analysis, and empirical investigations, this study aims to provide nuanced insights into the challenges of providing accommodations for the elderly in urban settings. It seeks to provide insight into inclusive, sustainable design techniques that are adapted to the requirements of ageing populations through a multifaceted lens that takes societal, physical, and architectural factors into account.

# Research diagram

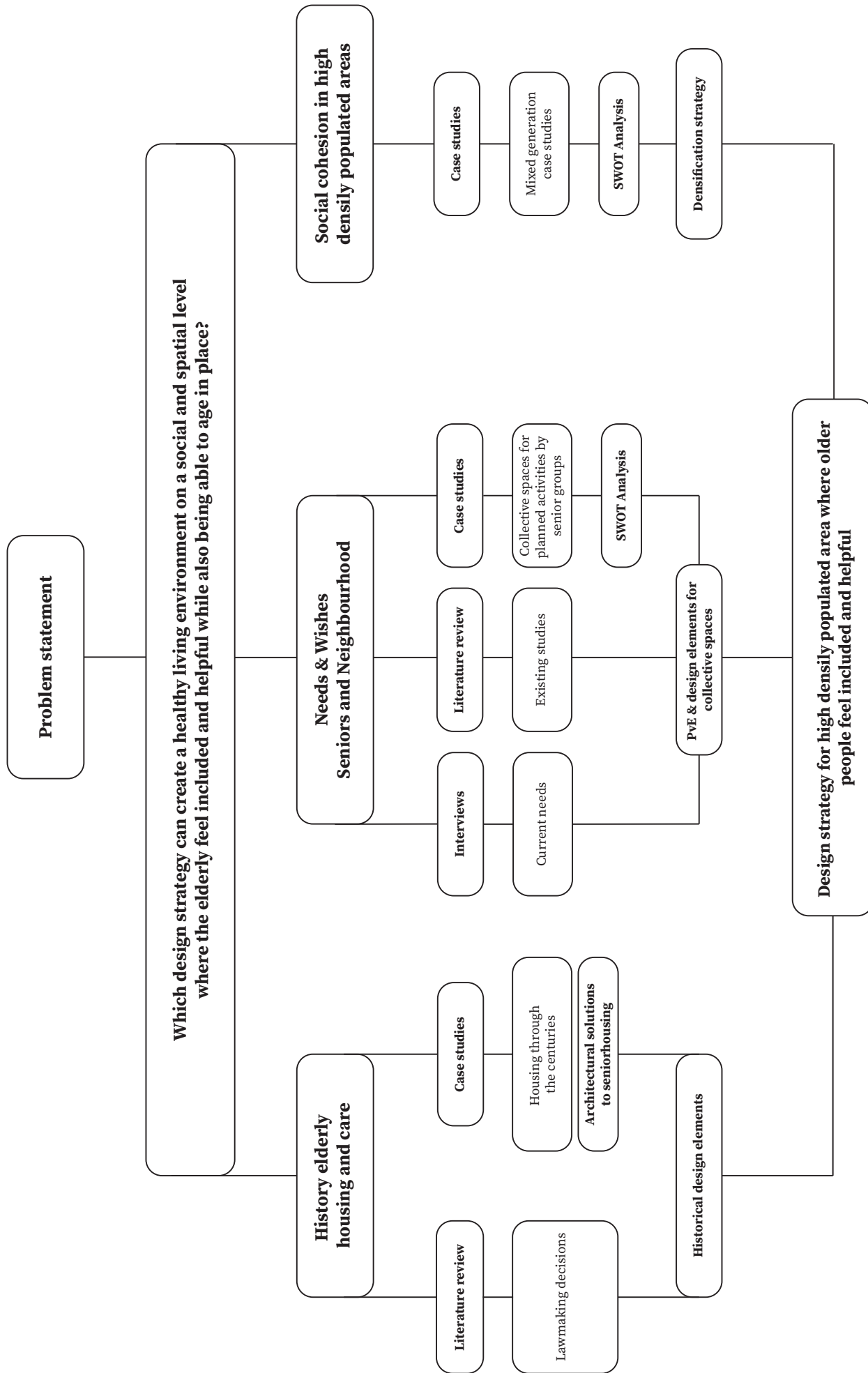


fig. 4 Research diagram (own figure)

# Relevance

This research is trying to create a design strategy in which the design strategy isn't focused on creating perfect housing for the elderly, as noted during the preliminary research. Rather the opposite, the design strategy is focussing on how to create an safe and healthy environment in which the elderly feel included and part of the community. An environment stimulating not only social interaction, but also the need for being able to contribute back to so society. And when the time comes, and they are in need of light informal care, that society gives back on an architectural, urban and societal level.

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