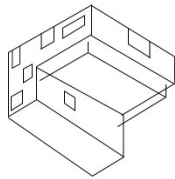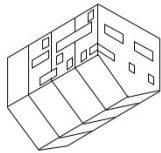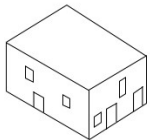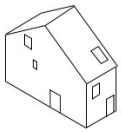# Exploring
Intergenerational Community Mode
to improve social inclusion and affordability

Research Plan
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Introduction

Judging from the age composition of Delfland, the elderly population will increase in the future. Apart from this, the number of people living alone also grows significantly in the Netherlands. As of 2023, the number of one-person households has reached 3.27 million, and the rate exceeds 39.5% among all private households (Statistics Netherlands, 2023). Those who live alone in the Netherlands mainly consist of three groups of people: one is young adults who are usually in their 20s to 30s and just completed their education or starting their careers; middle-aged and older adults who live alone due to divorce, widowhood, or remaining unmarried; and the other is senior citizens who are widowed or considered as empty nesters.

Living alone physically means fewer cohabitation opportunities or close contact and more apparent boundaries between people. Some studies have shown a potential link between living alone and low positive mental health. For instance, living alone for a long time may cause mental health problems (Tamminen et al., 2019). This problem is more prominent among the old people. Due to the lack of intergenerational support and social roles with a sense of participation, their family atmosphere is more deserted than those accompanied by children, lacking vitality and a sense of belonging, thus causing symptoms such as depression and loneliness. At the same time, they are more cautious and insecure because they are afraid of being hurt (Zhang, 2019). In this case, even if they do not live alone physically but with their partners, it is still considered "living alone" in intergenerational contact.

Intergenerational contact has been shown to alleviate the social isolation and loneliness that comes from living alone (Arquitt, 1978). The old can also use their knowledge and experience to help young people and gain a sense of accomplishment when they come into contact with people of different ages. At the same time, some elderly people who no longer work but still want to participate in social activities can gain recognition by participating in community or public affairs management, which can also reduce community costs.

In addition to the problem of residential segregation caused by living alone, housing types in our site fall into homogenisation. Given that traditional farming remains the primary industry in my site in the future, the existing conventional housing types should be maintained. They should be partially continued to accommodate the need for low-density housing around the farm. However, in order to avoid people with different incomes and ages living together with their "similar" people, developing inclusiveness, accommodating more groups and establishing a new sustainable operating model, some other kinds of housing, such as collective communities, are needed to change the current situation. Based on the findings above, building communities that encourage intergenerational contact has the potential to improve affordability and social inclusion by integrating residents of different ages in this area.

Building a community that promotes intergenerational contact is a very complex issue. Usually, the operation of a community after its establishment relies more on spontaneous connections between residents. A simple collective building allowing different groups to live in is not an ideal community for intergenerational contact since studies show that even in full-age communities, intergenerational communication is often limited, with peers preferring to form friendships with people of a similar age (Sherman, 1975). Moreover, older

respondents pointed out that the younger generation prefers to socialise with peers rather than participate in activities with older people, whether older relatives or older neighbours outside the family (Lau, 2023). So, more detailed design elements should be considered from an architect's point of view. We can think about public spaces and how they (space) encourage people of different age groups to meet. Additionally, the design could also focus on diverse building types, which are able to enrich the community dynamic. Flexible housing structures with the potential to change may increase affordability by reducing construction and maintenance costs. Therefore, I propose the following main research question:

>*What can architects do for communities to foster intergenerational living?*

Followed by some subleading questions:

>*How can building typology in our site contribute to the morphology diversity?*
>*How can public space in collective building be designed to promote intergenerational communication?*
>*How can housing modes (units) be prepared to be age-friendly and increase the interaction possibility?*

Theoretical framework

- *Full-age community*

Age-based residential segregation is often described as a "natural" consequence of ageing (Vanderbeck, 2007). As the population ages and the trend of living alone increases, the residential isolation of older and younger generations increases. Some scholars believe that residential age segregation is conducive to providing effective services in a targeted manner, such as some well-equipped retirement communities, which can improve older people's physical health and well-being (Golant, 1985; Lloyd, 2014). Nevertheless, at the same time, the separation of age groups has caused psychological problems such as depression and loneliness because they are separated from other age groups. Moreover, many elderly people are dissatisfied with this (Wang, 2011; Liu et al., 2016; Addae-Dapaah, 2008). Apart from that, providing communities for specific ages also reverses the trend of age segregation, giving rise to anxiety about intergenerational relationships and fear of other generations (Zhang, 2020). These findings represent another way to think about residential age segregation: it blocks essential opportunities for individuals to meet, interact, and move beyond "us versus them" distinctions (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005).

To encourage different age groups to communicate more and have more chances to help each other, thus mitigating the adverse effects of residential age segregation. In 1999, UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan proposed the concept of a "Society for All Ages" (Anan, 1999). On this basis, The Communities for All Ages, a national model, was developed by The Intergenerational Center at Temple University in 2002 (Brown & Henkin, 2014) to counter the harmful effects of residential age segregation. Myers (2015) argues that we need a new generational compact which recognises that the younger generation is the future workforce and residence base of our communities, and this should create positive synergies with older adults. A 2008 APA national survey of planners shows that 90 per cent of planners believe that communities

populated with people of every age bracket are more vibrant (Israel & Warner, 2008).

- *Intergenerational contact*

In the context of ageing becoming a global issue, many studies on age discrimination have been conducted in different regions. Research shows that the experience of ageism for older adults is widespread and highly prevalent in Western and Eastern countries (Yaghoobzadeh et al., 2020). Individuals of different ages have negative attitudes towards older people and the ageing process (Meshel & MCGlynn, 2004). Especially during the pandemic, intergenerational threats and related stereotypes appear to be reinforced due to reduced exposure opportunities and the portrayal of older adults as a homogeneous, vulnerable group by the media (Drury et al., 2022).

Positive intergenerational contact has been shown to have a rich potential to improve older adults' physical and mental well-being. Intergenerational cohabitation may protect against increases in depressive symptoms in later life, and face-to-face contact with younger adults may promote feelings of meaningfulness, belonging, and social integration, which are positively associated with older adults' mental health (Tosi & Grundy, 2019). Relying on Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory, intergroup contact has been highlighted as one of the most promising methods for reducing adverse categorisation reactions and improving intergroup relations. Cross-age communication constructed from the principles of the contact hypothesis helps promote more positive attitudes among adolescents and older adults (Meshel & MCGlynn, 2004), helps improve the quality of life for all involved, and promotes a sense of purpose and achievement among all generations. Therefore, constructing a collective living model that promotes intergenerational exchanges plays an essential role in mitigating the negative impacts of ageing within our sites.

- *Housing for the old*

As the elderly age, their willingness and ability to move decrease significantly. The preference for renting or living in a tenant cooperative compared with owning a home increases with age. Regarding housing type, older people are more likely to be willing to live in an apartment compared to a single-family home (Abramsson & Andersson, 2016). Collective senior living communities may become a model to promote healthy living for older people, in which infrastructure and corresponding medical services are critical. Many older adults have negative attitudes about their ability to cope with environmental stress so an age-friendly living environment will play an important role. The natural and built environment plays a decisive role in older people's perception of age-friendliness. Among them, greenery, adequate and suitable public open spaces, walkable community environments and high-quality sidewalks are all building elements that older people regard as having a positive effect. Precisely, "nature," green environments and amenities have ecological, aesthetic, and emotional functions for people's active and healthy behaviours. In addition, space and subjective experience are essential ways to perceive the beauty of life. Meaningful spatial experiences include walking, informal chatting, exercise, activities, and travel (Sun et al., 2018). In terms of housing scale, downsizing may be more suitable for older people because the quality of housing is more likely to affect the living experience of older people than the size. There are different strategies for residences of different heights to make them age-friendly. For example, in mid- and low-height houses, floor

plan design is crucial. In high-rise residences, the co-living model between neighbours is more critical (Adam et al., 2016).

Methodology

- *Literature Review*

The research will extensively collect literature with different focuses to help sort out the construction process of a mixed-age community that promotes intergenerational communication. Throughout the design process, there are two main audience groups: the elderly group, primarily local residents, and the other is young new starters who live alone, mainly working nearby. Part of the literature survey will first focus on the living needs and preference types of these two groups, including their unique psychological needs under the "living alone" trend. Another part of the literature will focus on the theory-building part. The ultimate goal of building an all-age community that encourages intergenerational exchange is to promote social inclusion and enhance affordability. Therefore, I will also read literature about the community operating mechanism for social inclusion, social rules and cooperation methods.

- *Case study*

Many countries with a relatively high ageing population have completed many age-friendly designs, and practical experience can be learned from their successful cases. The case study also includes two parts. The first part is about housing and community types targeting the different needs of the elderly and young people, including sharing units, typologies, and collective modes. The analysis would be concentrated on how they are different from ordinary residential units and what are the effective ways of shaping public spaces. The other part includes the structural construction of the different houses. To increase affordability and consider the sustainability of the community, for example, where some residents may expand (or downsize) their homes in the future, some flexible structures should be considered. In addition, there are many local materials available on our site. How to use them rationally in house construction is also worth looking for relevant cases for reference.

- *Interview*

The emergence of The Communities for All Ages (CFAA) is a measure based on the needs of ageing and a solution from the old's perspective. Meanwhile, many studies have shown that the increase in the well-being of the elderly and the improvement in living standards are more prominent than that of the young (Petersen, 2023). Young people also need to be more considered as part of the main body. So, there is an urgent need to know how the young generation views this kind of community and what measures could be taken to improve their willingness to participate in community life and activate the public space in the collective buildings.

In this study, the audience of the young group I designed is new starters, primarily in the stage of just graduating from school. The detailed semi-structured interviews will be carried out

among people in the 20-30 age group. Specific questions include but are not limited to: Do they want to live alone (and why)? Are they aware that living alone reduces opportunities for contact with others, especially between generations, and what do they think about this reduction in contact? To what extent do they realise that intergenerational interaction benefits the old's mental health and themselves? What are their attitudes towards intergenerational communities (living with old people)? Are they willing to live with old neighbours, and why? What makes a continuously energetic community? The questions were exploratory, and respondents were encouraged to come up with more questions and comments about intergenerational contact, as seen from a young person's perspective.

- *Field investigation*

Field investigation is an accumulation of experience. On-site visits to some nursing centers and collective communities can help to gain a deeper understanding of the daily activities and needs of older people and the lifestyle of young people. This sometimes differs from observations in the literature and can be regarded as a supplement outside the text. In addition, field research can test the actual use of space. Sometimes, the space created from the designer's perspective is not used as expected after the construction. The user completes the accurate verification of the quality of the space. So, observing how these spaces are used can help provide a complete understanding of spatial development possibilities. This includes many details, such as facade materials, staircase width, lobby height, interior color, etc.
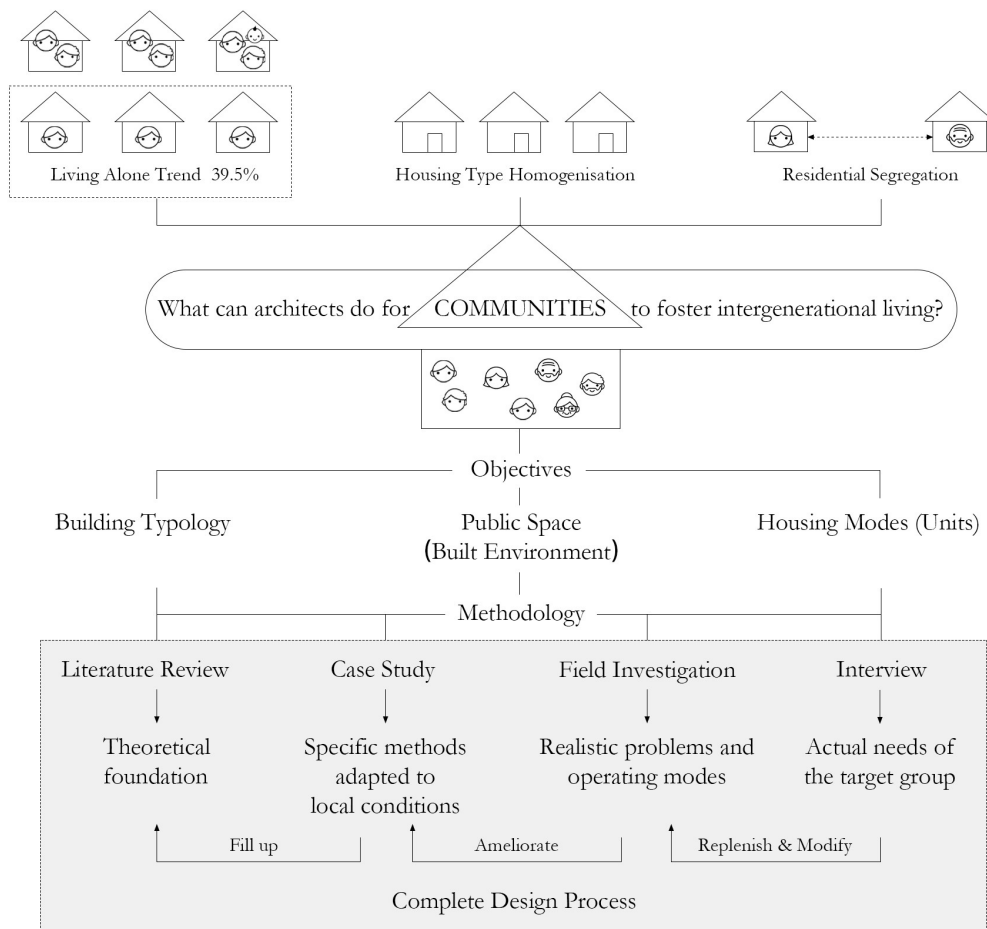
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