

Scenario 1 (2025-2035), Helga

In 2025 Helga is 62 years old. She lives in a single-family home in Gemen. Together with her husband Werner and her three children, she had moved into the home 30 years ago. Helga worked in a part-time position that she carried out next to caring for the children. A few years after moving in, they added a winter garden and converted the top floor under the roof to offer their growing children bigger rooms. When their children moved out, Werner repurposed one of the children’s rooms into a home office. The other rooms became guest rooms.

In 2025 their daughter moves back into the neighborhood with her boyfriend and toddler. They have founded a cooperative with three befriended families and want to move into three houses together. As Helga’s daughter is a nurse, she is especially motivated to rethink the way that elderly-, childcare and the household chores involved are organized in single-family homes. While some aspects of the project resonate with Helga and Werner, they find certain plans of the co-op rather extreme such as sharing a living room and kitchen.

In 2028, Werner dies of a heart attack. Part of the grief and demands that Helga deals with is being left alone in her home, which is too big for her. Although Helga is unwilling to change her living situation at first, after some time and many discussions with her daughter, she realizes that she will not be able to finance the upkeep of the home as is. Helga does not want to leave her home, so they decide to modify it. As she does not have the economic means to pay for the renovation herself, her daughter suggests to her to join the cooperative to profit from the pooling of financial resources, skills and general support.

The plans for the renovation are drawn up, with Helga’s daughter urging her to already incorporate changes that will accommodate her aging body. In line with the densification goals of the co-op, an apartment for four to five people will be integrated into the upper two floors. Helga will only use the ground floor. During the necessary energetic renovation, the bricks of the façade are reused after the new wood fiber insulation is mounted. The small bathroom is remodeled, becoming barrier-free and a furniture is built that allocates space of the living room to a bedroom. Should Helga need a nursing bed in future, the furniture can be removed to make space for her caring needs.

To make sure that Helga, who is very sociable, can maintain her social relations even at a higher age, her daughter suggests creating a small square with seating towards the street to allow her mother to meet with friends and to connect and talk to those who pass by. For easy accessibility, a ramp and railing which lead to the place are built. A bench is placed on the new stone square which reaches into the sidewalk to promote visibility. It is modified, mounted higher and equipped with a footrest, to facilitate sitting down and standing up. For the color of the coated metal railing, she chooses her favorite color blue. Helga is relieved that these elements are introduced before she is dependent on them as she can enjoy their design without it reminding her of her lack of mobility.

After Helga’s grandson befriends the children of her upstairs and next-door neighbors, they decide to dismantle the fences that separate the two gardens to give the children more space to play. Helga appreciates receiving help from her neighbors with work in the garden that Werner used to take care of.