Senior living together - make it happen!

Stockholm, Sweden

Kerstin Kärnekull

The ground floor of Fritsholmsgatan includes a large exercise area (1), a common kitchen (2), dining room (3), dining room, with library, internet PC

Preparring dinner

Dinner in the garden

Friday dinner
Project Stage: Scaling
Website: http://www.boigemenskap.se

- Aging
- Citizen sector
- Housing
- Sustainability
**Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?**

As in many other countries, the number of elderly in Sweden is increasing sharply. In 20-30 years, around 25% of Sweden’s population will be over 65 years. Many municipalities cannot satisfy the need for housing for the elderly or the need of care. The importance of community, life-long learning and empowerment is often stressed, but seldom applied. In ten years time, the need for good housing for old people and of elderly care will have grown dramatically. Municipalities and the state will not be able to meet the needs due to economic reasons but also because there is a belief that the market will solve the problems. It will not. Seniors and old people have to be a part of the solution, not only of the problem. If they start acting and planning early on for their future in the third and fourth part of life, the overall situation could be dealt with. But action has to start now. In Sweden, more and more seniors are coming together in groups to create their own accommodation while they are still healthy and strong. They look for a new way of living where they can take responsibility for their own situation in cooperation with their neighbours, based on mutual support, self-governance and active participation. They seek a way of living where age doesn’t matter, where there is lots of inspiration and opportunities to get to know other people, learn new things and try new ideas. A few know about the very few examples of such a way of living that exists in Sweden. Many more would like to live this way if they know that it is possible. The process is unfamiliar, both for the senior groups and for property owners, developers, builders, consultants and municipalities. Tools and techniques for group-initiated projects are lacking. Knowledge about how to design common spaces is scarce. The initiators of our example, Färdknäppen, formulated two problems when they started the process: • How can middle-aged and elderly people help each other acquire more social contact, have a better quality of life and be less dependent on community service through living closer to each other in a suitable environment? • How should an apartment house be designed in order to encourage middle-aged people to leave “the empty nest” so that the large apartment again can be used by new families with children? Färdknäppen is an answer. How do we spread the idea?

**Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!**

Our initiative aims at inspiring seniors to find their own housing and living solutions with the help of: - Good examples (Färdknäppen and others) - A newly published handbook, - An association that gathers and supports the tenants-to-be in collaboration (Framtiden) - An association (BiG) with architects, journalists and researchers spreading the ideas. We believe that senior cohousing based on a clear intention to live as an active participant in a group of people who "have signed up to be neighbourly" is one of the best solutions for the third and fourth parts of life and that senior cohousing - Is an investment by older people themselves in social capital and mutual support - Is a way of compensating for the anonymity of modern neighbourhoods at a time when single households are on the increase and many older people live alone - Offers an additional option for the informal care and housing needs of people approaching old age - Offers opportunities for learning and skill-exchange as well as scope for shared activities and companionship - Keeps older people active, healthy and engaged and reduces demand for health and social care services - Offers the possibility to downsize from family-sized housing to an attractive, age-proofed environment - Offers a blend of privacy and community - Encourages people to think ahead in their approach to ageing and make positive moves to prepare for it from around the age of fifty - Depends for its success and vigour on maintaining a reasonably wide age-span. The formulations above comes from a recent English report by Maria Brenton “Senior cohousing communities - an alternative approach for the UK?” but is also a good description of our ideas. These are not unique, such ideas can also be found in Denmark, Finland, Germany, The Netherlands and USA. On a very small scale, but in all countries the interest grows. The way to implement the ideas differs from country to country. Our innovative solution - to inspire seniors and old people to be active themselves and to learn other agents how to cooperate with active groups - is different from the common way of "planning for" and "speaking of". Another distinction is that there are full scale examples to learn from and be inspired of. Every existing senior cohousing in Sweden has very active inhabitants, engaged in spreading the ideas.

**Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.**

Our practical example is the cohous Färdknäppen. An initiative group formed in 1987, discussed ideas, searched for possible projects and called on politicians and other decision makers. In 1989 – when the community owned housing company “Familjebostäder” offered to build a house – the group began an intensive dialog with architects, project supervisors and builders concerning planning, design and appliances for the future house. The house has 43 flats 1 - 3 rooms each (with kitchen) and large communal area with common kitchen, dining and living room, workshop, guest-rooms etc. The group also planned the use of the common spaces and organizing a community to make life easier and more fun when the “togetherness” of family life and working life diminishes. • We have cooking groups that prepare shared dinner on weekdays • We take care of our house and garden ourselves • We learn from one another while carrying out our daily chores • We can help each other keep our spirits up if – or when – our strength declines This has resulted in a house which corresponds to our original vision and still functions extremely well after 20 years.

**Sustainability**

**Marketplace: Who else is addressing the problem outlined here? How does the proposed project differ from these approaches?**

Other organizations like developers or housing companies often build senior housing after their own concept, decided in advance and with no user involvement. Shared spaces, if they exist, are small and not designed for cooperation. Many senior housing projects have inhabitants of roughly the same age, which means that they all get very old at the same time. Since the need of senior housing will grow for the foreseeable future, though many different solutions are desirable. Not everyone will be interested in senior cohousing. Senior cohousing gives unique possibilities to design and build together, to get to know each other during the planning process and to grow a social capital together. It is also a sustainable
solution in all 3 aspects: social, economical and ecological. By sharing facilities, work and ideas seniors with low incomes can live a rich life. Since an ambition in senior cohousing is to have a large age variation from the start and to maintain this variation when recruiting new inhabitants, the solution is sustainable. Sharing is a key to lesser consumption. The communal cooking saves energy and money and food tastes better when you eat together.

About You

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About You

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- Implementer(s) and cooperation partners

Name
A partnership between the associations "Living in Community", "The Future", "Cohousing NOW and the collective house Färdknäppen

Type
Informal group

Country where main implementer is located
, ST, Stockholm

How long has the main implementer been operating?
More than 5 years

Please provide a short description of the main implementer.
The partnership is active in spreading ideas of cohousing for the second half of life. "Living in community" is an association of researchers, architects and journalist engaged in ideas of new ways of living. Books written by members of the association inspired most of the cohousing projects built in Sweden from 1980 onwards. The cohoose "Färdknäppen", for the second half of life was built 1993. Many more wanted to live the same way which led to Framtiden with aim to organise interested of cohousing in the Stockholm area and see to that more cohousing projects will be built in the future.

The information you provide here will be used to fill in any parts of your profile that have been left blank, such as interests, organization information, and website. No contact information will be made public. Please uncheck here if you do not want this to happen..

- Cooperation partner

Name
The Association Living in Community (Sw: Bo i Gemenskap - BiG for short)

Type
Non-profit/NGO/citizen sector organisation

Website
www.boigemenskap.se

How does this cooperation partner support the initiative? What competencies and resources does this partner bring to the initiative?
BiG has published two books 2013, one handbook how to start a cohouse for seniors and an overview of housing for seniors and elderly in DE, DK, NL och England. The chapter on DK focusses on senior cohousing. BiG members are active visiting cohousing projects, giving lectures, writing articles.

- Cooperation partner

Name
The collective house Färdknäppen for the second part of life (Sw: Kollektivhuset Färdknäppen för andra halvan av livet)

Type
Non-profit/NGO

Website
www.fardknappen.se
How does this cooperation partner support the initiative? Which competencies and resources does this partner bring to the initiative?

Since 1993 we have learnt that our way of living is fantastic for seniors and old people and want more cohousings for seniors to be built in the future. Färdknäppen and the 53 tenants welcomes study visits from Sweden and from other countries, lectures on cohousing, how to start and how to succeed.

Cooperation partner

Name
The Future (Sw: Framtiden) - an association supporting new cohousings for seniors in the Stockholm area

Type
Non-profit/NGO

Website
www.boframtiden.se

How does this cooperation partner support the initiative? Which competencies and resources does this partner bring to the initiative?

Framtiden organises those who want to move to a cohous for seniors with Färdknäppen as a model. Framtiden tries to find interested housing companies and developers and connect them with interested seniors. Framtiden arranges study visits, study circles and acts as a process consultant.

Cooperation partner

Name
Cohousing NOW (Sw: Kollektivhus NU)

Type
Non-profit/NGO

Website
www.kollektivhus.nu

How does this cooperation partner support the initiative? Which competencies and resources does this partner bring to the initiative?

Kollektivhus NU is an association promoting collaborative housing and other alternative ways of living. The prime purpose is to inform about cohousing and to influence authorities to facilitate the creation and running of such units. It supports existing units as well as starting groups.

Problem and solution

Which of these fields of Active and Healthy Ageing are addressed by your initiative?

Personalized health management, Independent living solutions, Social inclusion (intergenerational practice, work and volunteering), Age friendly buildings, environments, and communities.

If none of the above, answer here:
Please describe if and how your stakeholders (cooperation partners, funders, users, etc.) have been participating in defining the problem and developing the solution.

BiG formulated the ideas for a cohousings with private flats, common spaces and collaboration instead of service. The model is tested in more than 40 projects built since 1980. Almost all initiatives have been taken by local groups, often in collaboration with a housing company or a cooperative organisation.

Members of BiG has since visited every existing cohous and learnt from their experiences (published in the research report "15 kollektivhus/15 collective houses"). The cohous "Färdknäppen" is based on this model, but adapted to the needs of seniors and old people by the initiative group and continuously developed by all tenants living at Färdknäppen.

The association Framtiden was initiated by Färdknäppen to forward more senior cohousings in the Stockholm region. Up till today, two senior cohousings have been built in cooperation between Framtiden and the municipal housing company AB Familjebostäder and a third, multigenerational, is on its way.

Kollektivhus NU is the national umbrella org spreading ideas of cohousing.

The idea of collaborative housing is based on cooperation, sharing of spaces and equipment and joint decision-making and user participation is a cornerstone.

Has your solution been tested in trials, experimentations, or pilot projects? If yes, please describe the process and outcome.

The idea of senior cohousings has resulted in 11 projects all over Sweden; Stockholm, Falun, Norrtälje, Göteborg, Mölndal, Lund och Malmö. Local groups have taken initiatives to build a new senior cohous or adapt an existing building. The outcome in all projects have been successful.

It took six years from the first initiative group started to the finalization of Färdknäppen when people moved in. This process has given knowledge on how to speed up the process for later groups, used in the writing of the handbook. The time factor is important, especially for seniors.

A recent study in Denmark of senior cohousings, "Det store eksperiment. Hverdagsliv i seniorbofælleskaberne/The big experiment. Every day life in senior cohousing" shows the same. The researcher Max Pedersen has made interviews, study visits and questionnaires and he describes senior cohousing as a great sucess for the tenants. He also says that the implementation of the ideas in municipalities and housing companies is problematic due to lack of understanding, not seeing the gain for society and unwillingness to enter into new fields.
One could say cohousing is difficult to establish but worth the effort!

How long has your solution been in operation?

for more than 5 years

Please select the relationship between your solution and related solutions currently established in our society. Is your solution...

independent (your solution is approaching a problem that has not been approached before)

What barriers might hinder the success of your initiative? How do you plan to overcome them?

The first barrier is lack of knowledge, among seniors but also in the housing and care sector as well as in the finance sector. Our handbook and all information work the network engages in is a way to spread knowledge widely.

The handbook can be used by groups who want to create senior cohousing, and by the housing sector, municipalities and consultants. It provides knowledge and inspiration regarding design and implementation. It gives suggestions for group project time-plans, including key milestones, risks and opportunities. Emphasis is on social content and the shared spaces. Fourteen existing senior housing communities are also described from different aspects.

The handbook helps starting groups to work collaboratively to create their living, based on their own needs, wishes and dreams. A range of new options and models will thus be able to develop.

The second barrier is high construction costs and high rents, making it difficult for most pensioners to move to newly built flats. This is a political problem and must be solved through political decisions. But the more initiative groups are forming, the more the pressure will grow for political solutions.

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Organization and funding

Regularly paid employees

0

Volunteers

100

Trainees

0

External advisers and experts

Others (please specify)

What are the specific professional backgrounds and competencies your team brings to the initiative?

Our deep knowledge of senior cohousing as activists, residents, architects, journalists, researchers.

Our wide network of contacts with initiative groups, municipalities, government authorities, architects, planners, housing companies etc.

Our belief that a good living in old age can only be created by ourselves.

Please describe your management or coordination structure in the initiative.

We are an informal group of four organisations, working independently but also together. All are engaged in spreading the idea of senior cohousing and giving support with knowledge and information.

BioG has formulated the ideas and written the handbook. One member of BioG, Kerstin Kärnekull, lives in Färdknäppen. Another member, Ingela Blomberg, is chair of Framtiden.

Lotta Bystedt and Anita Persson from Färdknäppen are on the board of Kollektivhus NU. Dick Urban Vestbro, chair of Kollektivhus Nu is engaged with Ingela and Kerstin in a Grundtvig project, "Co-Elderly". Informal network!

Please provide the total yearly budget in Euro that your initiative spends on implementing the solution.

We have no budget since we all work as volunteers.

National public funding

% The handbook has been founded to 50% by Hjälpmedelsinstitutet

European Union public funding

% Some of us have been active in Experimentcity and the publication of CoHousing Cultures with EU funding.

Economic return from own products/services

% 0

Foundations and philanthropy capital

% 0

Single donations from private individuals

% 0

Donations from private companies

% 0
Crowdfunding platforms
% 0
Participation fees%
Other (please specify)% Each initiative group forms an association and decides on membership fees, building costs, rents etc.

Target group, scale and impact

Which target group(s) do you want to reach with your solution?
The main target group are seniors and old people interested in forming their future way of living (45 years old or more). In senior cohousing, a mixture of ages is desired as well as both those still working and those retired. The main criteria is the willingness to cooperate, share and take a common responsibility.

Municipalities (both politicians and civil servants), housing companies, developers, architects and media must also be reached. To work with initiative groups requires different skills and methods compared to the conventional planning, construction and management models.

Please estimate the number of persons within your target group (users, clients, etc.) that you currently reach directly with your solution.
1200 (users/tenants, housing companies, architects, municipalities etc). The number will grow when the handbook gets attention.

In which local/regional/national area(s) is the solution currently implemented?
In Stockholm, Norrtälje, Falun, Göteborg, Mölndal, Lund and Malmö. Starting groups exists in at least 15 Swedish municipalities.

What is the impact on your target group (users, clients) you want to generate?
We want seniors to take own initiatives and see possibilities in alternative housing solutions.
We want housing companies, municipalities and professionals take an interest in senior cohousing and learn more how to support starting groups.
We want to see more senior cohousing all over Sweden. In the Stockholm region we hope for one new senior cohousing unit every year.
Senior cohousing also demonstrates all the possibilities of having shared spaces and doing things together. It is a laboratory continuously developing the concept of how to hold autonomy in old age through mutual support.

What is the wider impact on society you want to generate?
Senior cohousing is an example of how seniors take the responsibility for their future in own hands. It shows also that all other actors have to find new ways in order to support and facilitate the senior's initiatives.
Senior cohousing can act as an inspiring example for many seniors. It is not a solution that suits all, but it can act as starting point and make other seniors reflect upon their future and how to prepare for a good life in old age.
Another impact is the lessening of grownup children's responsibility and worries for their parents instead of increasing their burden.

What are the impacts on your target group you already achieved?
Today eleven senior cohousing projects are built and more are at the planning stage. At least 15 starting groups exists all over Sweden.
We hope that the handbook, just published, will arise even more interest. It will be presented at conferences, arranged by leading organisations in the building and planning sector in 2013-14.
SABO (the National Association for Municipal Housing Companies) is presenting cohousing projects at their conferences and also arranges study visits to Färdknäppen.
Several radio programs have presented Färdnäppen and senior cohousing during the last year.

How has the impact of your initiative been assessed?
Experience-based self-assessment (you assessed the impacts based on your experiences with the target group), Feedback-based self-assessment (you assessed the impacts based on feedback from the target group without using specific methods), Self-evaluation (you used qualitative and/or quantitative methods to assess impacts).

Public information and strategy

What information on your initiative is publicly available?
Mission and strategy, Organisational structure, Information on team members, Working method and 'theory of change'.

Please indicate webpage or contact for obtaining the respective information.

What are your milestones for further developing, implementing, and establishing your initiative in the next three years? Please describe 1-3 milestones.
Milestone nr 1: The handbook “Senior housing together/Bygga seniorboende tillsammans” is supplemented by a study circle tutorial.
Milestone nr 2: The number of starting groups has grown from 15 to 50. Five existing initiative groups have turned into “real projects” and are in the design or construction stage.
Milestone nr 3: 10 - 15 municipalities has decided to support and encourage initiative groups, help them to find plots and incorporated the ideas in their housing and elderly policies.