



# Rapport 2015

**Projekt 2:2015**

**Dialogue-Based Design Process of Housing for  
Senior Citizens**

**Susanne Clase**

## Dialogue-Based Design Process of Housing for Senior Citizens

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**PAPER ABSTRACT:** How can dialogues with prospective tenants as well as professional actors such as developers, district administration officers, home care, architects and builders through all stages of a planning and building process affect an actual building and the quality of the neighborhood in the end? What kind of synergy effects can dialogues give the process itself and what kind of values are created by the network between and within these groups? The ageing society is a great challenge for the European countries and Sweden is a few years ahead with our 1940's "Baby Boomers". How can we create attractive, sustainable, affordable and accessible housing for the increasing amount of elderly; housing that stimulates and encourages to keep up a social, active and independent life even at older age? Good examples of different kinds of housing for elderly is scarce. White Arkitekter has received a land allocation in a developing area in Gothenburg with the aim to carry out a full scale case study. Together with a building company we are developers for a housing block where one part will be designed for the specific needs of elderly persons with shared spaces for social activities. As a developer the architect can influence the process directly and in other ways than possible when working purely as a design consultant. The aims are high on architectural qualities, sustainability and the feel good factor for tenants and staff. Through the project a methodology for the dialogue process for housing projects is developed with the purpose to put users first and get a better understanding of future tenants' needs. The on-going project is still in an early phase. So far a feasibility study built on three workshops has been completed. To verify and evaluate the process the project is followed all the way by external researchers. The paper focuses on experiences of the project and process so far and open up for thoughts and discussions.

**KEYWORDS:** Housing for elderly, dialogue based design process, social sustainability, building economy

**AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY:** Susanne Clase is a practicing architect, educated at University of Greenwich and Chalmers University of Technology. Since 2006 she is employed by White Arkitekter. She has a broad experience but has since 2008 focused on the field of housing for elderly in which she now is an expert through successful competitions and realized projects. Susanne teaches at Chalmers University of Technology in the master course Residential Healthcare and has lectured at several conferences. She has also been involved in the research project "Future bathrooms for elderly", financed by the Swedish Government.

Lisa Wistrand is an urban planner with a Master of Science in Human Geography. She was educated at the School of Business, University of Gothenburg. With seven years' experience from the city administration Lisa's focus is on strategic and comprehensive planning. She joined White Arkitekter in 2012 where she has continued to work intensely with issues of social sustainability, social impact analysis and dialogue processes in urban development, a field where she has gained national reputation. Lisa is a skilled workshop leader and as an expert in social sustainability she both supports ongoing architectural and planning assignments and works with method development on the overall level.

## 1 Background

### 1.1 The case

This paper discusses the early outcomes of a feasibility study for dialogue-based design processes when planning and designing housing for senior citizens.

White Arkitekter has received a land allocation in a developing area in Gothenburg with the aim to carry out a

full scale case study. Together with FO Peterson, a building company we are developers for a housing block where one part will be designed for the specific needs of elderly persons with shared spaces for social activities.

In Sweden as well as many other European countries the ageing society is a big issue not least when it comes to questions about housing for elderly. In spite of a great need of different kinds of housing projects to meet the diversity of the “Baby Boomers”, there is a lack of good examples.

We have focused on user and citizen participation and empowerment in a specific context: the design and building process of housing for elderly people.

## 1.2 The architect as a developer

White Arkitekter is Scandinavia’s largest architectural practice founded in 1961 by Sidney White and owned by the employees. White has a tradition of working with a broad perspective and a strong social commitment. In the past years White has the experience of being a developer for one office building and three different kinds of housing projects with the purpose to try new solutions for important issues. As a developer the architect can directly influence the process in another way than possible when working purely as a design consultant. Our own-developed projects have all been awarded prizes in the sector.

Since 2008 White has defined housing for elderly as focus field. A small group has become specialists in theory and practice through participating in competitions and seminars, working with projects, teaching and by doing studies. This group initiated to apply for land in a new development area in Gothenburg with the aim to create attractive, sustainable, affordable and accessible housing for elderly that stimulates and encourages to keep up a social, active and independent life. To accomplish these goals we find it necessary to try new methods. By using dialogue as a tool we hope to develop the process as well as the building design.

## 1.3 Purposes and goals

### 1.3.1 Project development

Purpose:

- To urge on and develop the new housing type *Host assisted senior housing* (Trygghetsboende) and to create an attractive and social living environment for the elderly.
- In the role as a developer get the opportunity to develop and implement initial fundamental ideas, to steer and develop project and result from the beginning to the end
- To get the opportunity to explore specific aspects of the project such as: ways of creating affordable housing, accessibility, safety and outdoor environment.

Goal:

- Using the comprehensive know-how as architects side by side with developers and other involved parts of the building process to develop a new attractive living area with a strong identity.
- Acquiring knowledge of the developer’s perspective and interests that can be valuable in future projects.

### 1.3.2 Role model project

Purpose:

- To develop a cutting edge project of *Host assisted senior housing* into a role model and a project for all involved (White Arkitekter, FO Peterson, the community and municipality) to be proud of.

Goal:

- To have developed an attractive and affordable living environment for the new generation elderly in a new development area.
- To have created a project where dialogue and participation has had an impact on the architecture.
- That the project becomes awarded and recognized international attention

## 1.3.3 Method development

Purpose:

- To develop an inclusive and transparent method and process based on broad cooperation.

Goal:

- That the developed method through the project engaging all participants leads to a better result than a traditional process.
- That the method developed for this certain project can be used in and inspire other projects.

## 1.4 Dialogue-based design

### 1.4.1 Need for dialogue

In the 1960s and '70s a lot of devotion was spent on discussing citizen involvement in the public sector and planning processes. Not the least it was so in the US, where participation is part of the nation's history and a cornerstone of democracy. During the '80s, the focus changed to economic growth, and citizens' opportunities to participate constructively in society was challenged.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, the awakening interest in democracy and participation is being increasingly recognized. Robert D. Putnam in 2001 published the book "Bowling Alone" which indicated that fewer and fewer people participate in public discourse through for example associations, name lists and direct contacts with politicians and other stakeholders with large sphere of influence.<sup>2</sup>

Dialogue with citizens or users as part of the design process is perceived by many as an important development area for urban development and architecture. A question that must be asked is what is the objective of increased participation? What do you gain by introducing systematic dialogues?<sup>3</sup> Dialogues can be performed in many different ways but require good planning and follow-up to reach good results.

In evaluations of previous citizen dialogues a reluctance from the participants often emerges. Does anyone care about what comes up or is there a hidden agenda where the dialogue is just a charade? A real dialogue requires the ability to influence.<sup>4</sup>

The specific question posed in each project must be allowed to decide what form of participation is appropriate. Already in the 1960s Sherry Arnstein developed the "Ladder of participation" to describe different levels of participation.<sup>5</sup> Prior to the decision gates and steps in the process you should consider how to enable users to be involved. The important thing is to be clear with them about what kind of involvement they can expect. The ladder gives a picture of the different levels of participation in decision-making. Arnstein's work has inspired many. The Participation Ladder visualizes that a process of dialogue can be on several levels simultaneously, and in some cases skip some steps.

### 1.4.2 In accordance to the theory of Open building

The principles of open building were first articulated by John Habraken<sup>6</sup> Our particular project aligns with Habraken in that housing must always recognize two domains of action – the action of the community and that of the individual inhabitant. When the inhabitant is excluded, the result is uniformity and rigidity. When only the individual takes action, the result may be chaos and conflict. This formulation of a necessary balance of control has implications for all parties in the housing process, including the architects.

Since the turn of the century, a number of developments in various countries indicate that open building is no

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<sup>1</sup> Day, D (1997) "Citizen Participation in the Planning Process: An Essentially Contested Concept", *Journal of Planning Literature*. Vol 11, No 3. pp 421-434

<sup>2</sup> Putnam, R (2000) *Bowling alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York

<sup>3</sup> Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting (2006), *11 tankar om medborgardialog*

<sup>4</sup> Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting (2006), *11 tankar om medborgardialog*

<sup>5</sup> Arnstein, S.R. (1969), "A Ladder of Citizen Participation", *Journal of the American Planning Association*

<sup>6</sup> Habraken, J (1961) "Supports: An Alternative to Mass Housing", published in Dutch in 1961 and in English in 1972 and 1999.

longer a speculative idea of a few pioneer practitioners and theorists. It has or is on its way to become mainstream.

## 1.5 Housing for elderly

### 1.5.1 An ageing society

In Sweden as well as in many other European countries the ageing society is a big issue, not the least when it comes to housing for elderly. In spite of a great need of different kinds of housing projects to meet the diversity of the '40s' "Baby Boomers", good examples are scarce. In 2010 the Swedish Government gave commissions to SIAT<sup>7</sup> to organize several research projects, architectural competitions, field studies and conferences to investigate different issues on the theme "Live well in old age" and "Technique for elderly". The results have had impact on the debate, planning and building for the elderly.

#### 1.5.1 Ageing

*Life course perspective* of ageing is a term in social gerontology.<sup>8</sup> One way to look upon ageing is life as four ages which lasts individually for every human.<sup>9</sup> The third age is the penultimate period which for many people start with retirement. The third age enables an active lifestyle and can last for a long time for persons with good health and shorter for people with poor health. The fourth age is the last period in life which is characterized by weaker health and increasing need of care.

#### 1.5.2 Housing for elderly in Sweden

The Swedish commission for housing for elderly (Äldreboendedelegationen)<sup>10</sup> defined five different types of housing for elderly. "The Stay home Principle" (Kvarboendepincipen)<sup>11</sup> encourages housing projects that support elderly to live in an ordinary apartment even in old age. Already today, but even more in the future, private homes will become a working environment for healthcare teams. White have defined common issues that are important when designing housing for elderly.

The concept of *Host assisted senior housing* is housing for people from 70 years of age with relatively small and accessible apartments that have common spaces aimed for different kind of social activities among the tenants. Staff with daily attendance focus on activating the tenants. There are subsidies available from the state for developing this kind of housing and in Gothenburg the city offer subsidies for staff and the rent for some of the common spaces.

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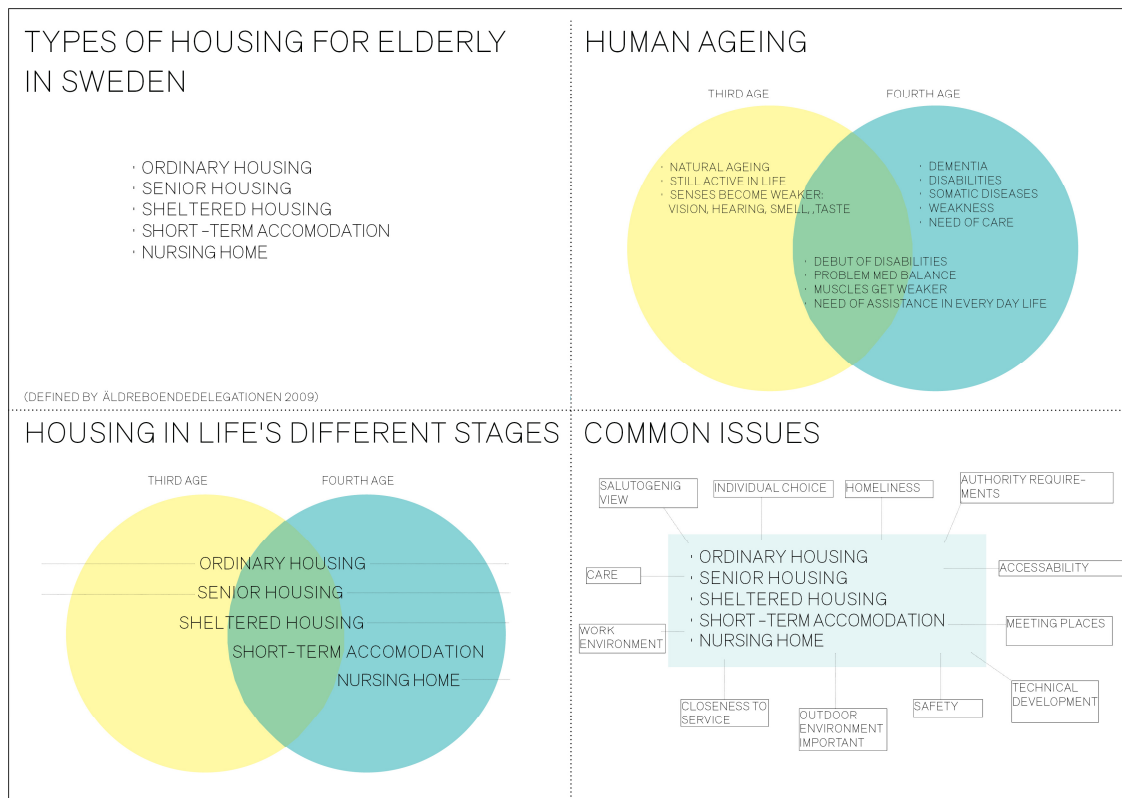
<sup>7</sup> Hjälpmedelsinstitutet (Swedish Institute of Assistive Technology)

<sup>8</sup> Dannefer, D & Settersten, R.A. (2011) "The study of life-course: implications for social gerontology" The Sage handbook of social gerontology, London: Sage Publications pp 3-19

<sup>9</sup> Phillips, J & Ajrouch, K & Hillcoat-Nallétamby, S, Key (2010) "Concepts in Social Gerontology" London:Sage

<sup>10</sup> The Swedish Government commissioned a delegation to deal with questions about the ageing society and elderly people (2004-2008).

<sup>11</sup> The principle that the most desirable case (for the individual as well as the state) is that elderly as long as possible can live independently in an ordinary apartment.



**Fig. 1.** Illustrations, ageing, types of housing and common issues for housing for elderly. Source: White Arkitekter

## 2 Dialogue based design for senior citizens at Rambergsstaden

### 2.1 Rambergsstaden

Sweden is being urbanized in an extensive way, and as the second largest city Gothenburg is growing fast. Rambergsstaden is a new development area in the district of Lundby north of the city center. The inhabitants in the neighborhood are low to middle income with mainly small rental apartments and some single family homes. The average age of the inhabitants is high. The area has many qualities as good accessibility to public transportation (10 minutes to the city center), a sports center with swimming bath, a football stadium, a healthcare center and stores for everyday needs nearby. There are good connections to green areas as parks and allotments. Some of the challenges are to deal with the busy street which is a barrier and to integrate the new development with the existing context. We consider that the preconditions are very good for developing housing for elderly people in this area.



Fig. 2. Map of the area, the city of Gothenburg

## 2.2 The process of the project

Together with two other developers White Arkitekter and the building company FO Peterson have had an active role in the progress of the local plan and the quality program for the development area in collaboration with the City Planning Authority. The area will contain approximately 600 apartments, a day care center and premises for shops. In January 2014 the plan acquired legal force.

During the spring of 2015 agreements and letters of intent between the developers are carried through. Pricing and division of land is agreed upon between the developers. Conceptual design of the different projects can then be commenced.

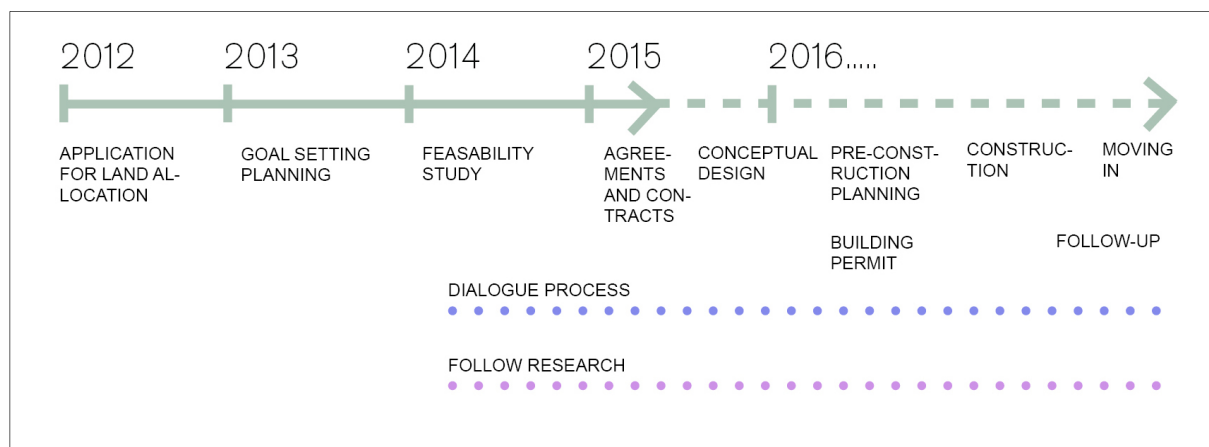
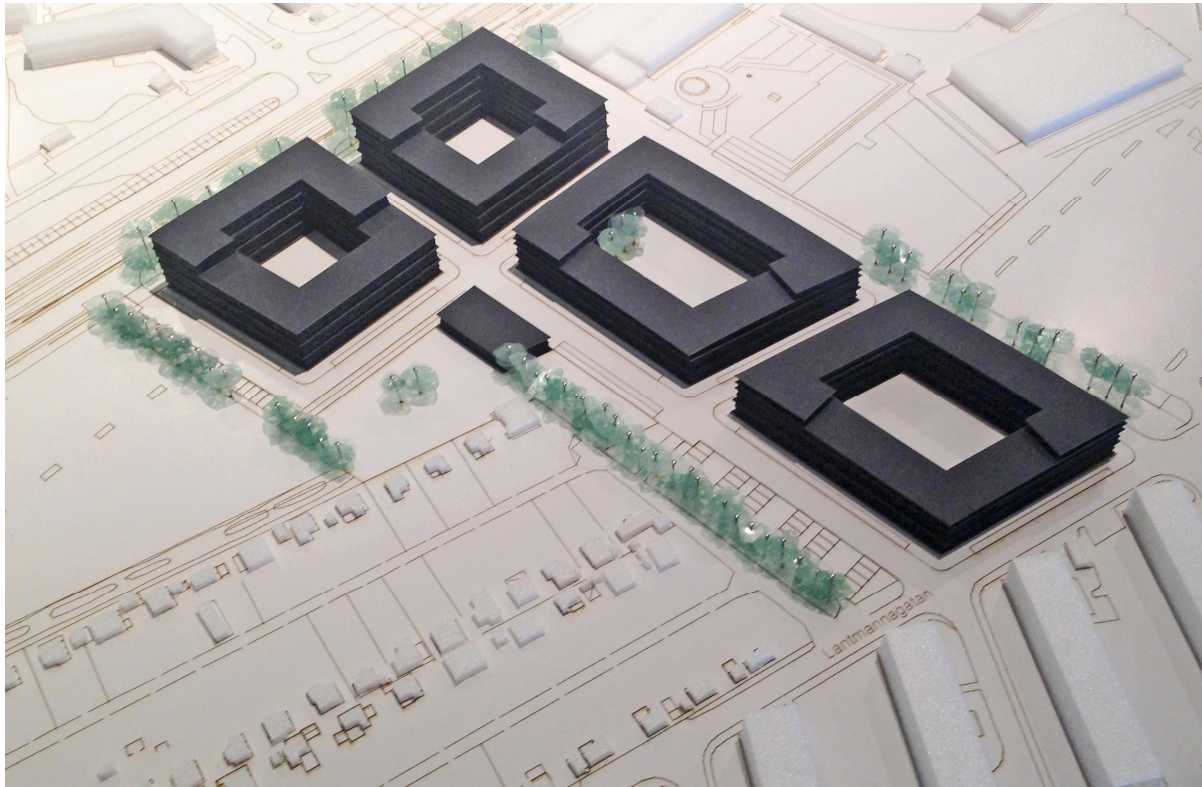


Fig. 3. A schematic project plan (White)



**Fig. 4.** A model of the development area (White)

## 2.3 The feasibility Study

### 2.3.1 Dialogue

The aim of promoting dialogue as part of the process is to obtain knowledge and create commitment from future residents and stakeholders in different project phases. It is important for us to meet the actors in different stages to increase awareness of their needs and relevant circumstances.

The dialog provides the ability to capture unique knowledge of the place, on the needs and desires of the target groups and to jointly identify opportunities for collaboration at various levels. Parallel is also a dialogue and collaboration internally within the architect company White, which involves many of the company's various skills, to raise the project's development.

We look at dialogue as a tool to create projects that are well rooted on site and among those who live and work there. The method allows us to meet potential tenants and even neighbors who get a chance to participate and influence the environment they live and work in. Our ambition is that the dialogue will lead to a better designed product with a high livability. This first phase, the feasibility study, aims to develop and test a working model in the project development of an accommodation with a focus on community and with the users – both private tenants and professionals – at the center of the design process.

### 2.3.2 Method

We have used Arnstein's Ladder of participation as a basis for designing a customized model for participation in housing processes in Sweden. The Ladder is used in order to analyze the extent of dialogue we need to implement and how big our ambitions for participation are. This has helped us to determine our target groups and dialogue methods for the process.

Through dialogue we:

- invite people affected by the project or individuals or groups that could represent these people, to

participate in the project from start to finish.

- increase the specific knowledge about the location and its prospects by getting all concerned participants' perspective
- learn and increase our knowledge about people's different life situations and needs
- work for a collaboration between stakeholders that can lead to significant synergies and greater mutual understanding.

We divided the dialogue process in three phases where we worked to find actors and groups which are essential for the project, who have experience of these housing types, knowledge as an elderly citizen or actors who have a key role in the processes. We defined three groups:

1. Local residential citizens in the target group and the researchers who do the on-going evaluation.
2. Neighborhood and related experts, such as occupational therapists, home care services, senior organizations, the municipal Authority of Real Estate and the researchers who do the on-going evaluation.
3. Multidisciplinary teams at White, building company FO Peterson and the researchers who do the on-going evaluation.

The three phases were designed as workshops, especially programmed for the specific target group that would participate in each workshop. In the feasibility study the focus was on defining issues which can serve as a basis for the program in the next stage. The focus of workshops one and two was to learn about site conditions and needs, wishes and visions of target tenants of this specific housing type. For the third workshop we defined focus areas for how the project can proceed, which challenges that must be encountered, and ideas for future solutions.



**Fig. 4 Workshop with prospective tenants (photo: Emma Persson, White)**

### **2.2.3 Result**

We have gained a lot of knowledge during these dialogues. Knowledge of site-specific issues of Lundby and Ramberget, and knowledge of how it is to be elderly in Gothenburg, how it is to be alert and how it is to be affected by disability and illness. We also collected the knowledge of how it is to work with the elderly, what is important when a senior's home becomes a place of work, and what factors of housing design that facilitates rehabilitation. Some points that we brought with us in the continuing design process are:

- Low rental levels are important for the elderly in this area
- There is a strong network for the elderly in the area

- There is a willingness to participate and contribute
- There is a great curiosity from residents in the community
- Co-operation at various levels is important for the success of the process
- There is development potential in many adjacent neighborhoods

Among workshop participants we have met a lot of enthusiasm and desire to participate and contribute. This indicates a need for *Host assisted senior housing* in Lundby.

In the best of worlds *Host assisted senior housing* in Lundby is:

- Functional and affordable
- A hub in the new residential area
- Intergenerational – open for children and the elderly
- Located nearby a public transport hub

### 2.2.4 Follow Research

To verify and evaluate the process, the project is followed all the way by two researchers: Inga Malmkvist, associate Professor at Chalmers University of Technology, the department of Architecture and Lisbeth Lindahl, research leader, welfare department at GR, FoU i Väst<sup>12</sup> through funds from CMB<sup>13</sup>. Follow research means research that follows the ongoing processes of the project instead of as in traditional evaluation of the final result<sup>14</sup>. The follow researchers evaluates whether the project develops according to the goals set, giving feedback to the project team. The following methods will be used:

- Observations of the activities of the project
- Interviews with the project team
- Interviews with focus groups of representatives of seniors
- Consultation with a reference group
- Literature studies
- Feed back

The expected results will eventually be documented in a handbook.

## 3 Coming process

We have high ambitions for this dialogue and the design process. So far the focus has been on creating a good knowledge platform for important milestones in the project's initial stages. In a continuing process, we want to deepen the dialogue to be more consultative and co-creational where we together with prospective or potential tenants creates an adequate layout and design.

We hope that with this participatory design process we create added value and will inspire future stakeholders to an extensive participation process and co-creation even in operation and management stages of the properties and housing in a future.

We also believe that evaluation research can give us valuable input in our on-going process, as well important feedback afterwards. Since it is uncommon for architects to engage in this way we trust it will contribute to

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<sup>12</sup> The Göteborg Region Association of Local Authorities (GR) is a co-operative organisation uniting thirteen municipalities in western Sweden. FoU i Väst is the research department at GR.

<sup>13</sup> CMB is Sweden's premiere forum for management issues related to the built environment. CMB was established in 1998 as a long-term partnership between Chalmers University of Technology and Sweden's built environment sector.

<sup>14</sup> Brulin, G & Jansson, S (2009) "En ny programperiod, en ny utvärderingsansats!" I Svensson, L., Brulin, G., Jansson, S., Sjöberg, K (red). Lärande utvärdering genom följeforskning, Kap. 2. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

useful knowledge within our profession.

When the residents have moved in we hope to get the opportunity to follow up the project intentions and results with a new round of dialogues. We will ask questions as “What did we managed to implement, what questions permeated the design, what was lost through the process? Is the accommodation is appreciated? What works for the residents and what does not?” In this way we can learn from our experiences and include this in new projects and processes forward for the whole sector.