

# SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY WITH YOUNG & ELDERLY

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*Just a picture from the internet, to give an impression*

## Vision – growing old with friends in an inspiring, natural environment.

There is a sustainable, relatively independent community in Mrdenovići where young and old live together, take care of the earth, each other and the future.

*You drive through a beautiful forest in a hilly landscape. As soon as the forest opens up, you know you are in the right place.*

*You turn off your car engine and hear Nature's silence. You see colourful insects and butterflies around the flower garden next to the car park. You pick some flowers for the person you're visiting and you wander off in the park-like gardens. A colourful mix of vegetables, herbs and (edible) flowers that strengthens your love for Mother Nature.*

*You see some children picking small yellow tomatoes and there is an old man in a wheelchair weeding the raised vegetable beds. He throws the weeds in the chicken garden where the chickens are happily scratching in the compost.*

*You hear a young child laughing while she picks beans with her mother, grandmother and great grandmother. 4 Generations chatting and exchanging.*

*A group of young, international volunteers is collecting herbs in the herb garden. These herbs will be used in the kitchen, to mix teas, to make medicinal syrups and tinctures and herbal oils.*

*Some men are playing cards in the orchard. Some others come back from a walk in the forest, with a basket full of mushrooms.*

*There is an old lady spinning wool, next to the stables where you see sheep, goats and a local variety of mini cows. Behind the lady, under the roof of the stable, you can see a glass display cabinet with the products she made. Sweaters, scarves and beautiful woollen socks, dyed with local flowers and plants.*

*You make a mental note to buy some socks and herbal teas when you leave, to sponsor this small community where young and old live together in a natural setting, help each other and learn from each other.*

It is our plan to build a stronger, sustainable, more self sufficient community, where people can live a happy life in harmony with nature. A community designed for the coming 7 generations.

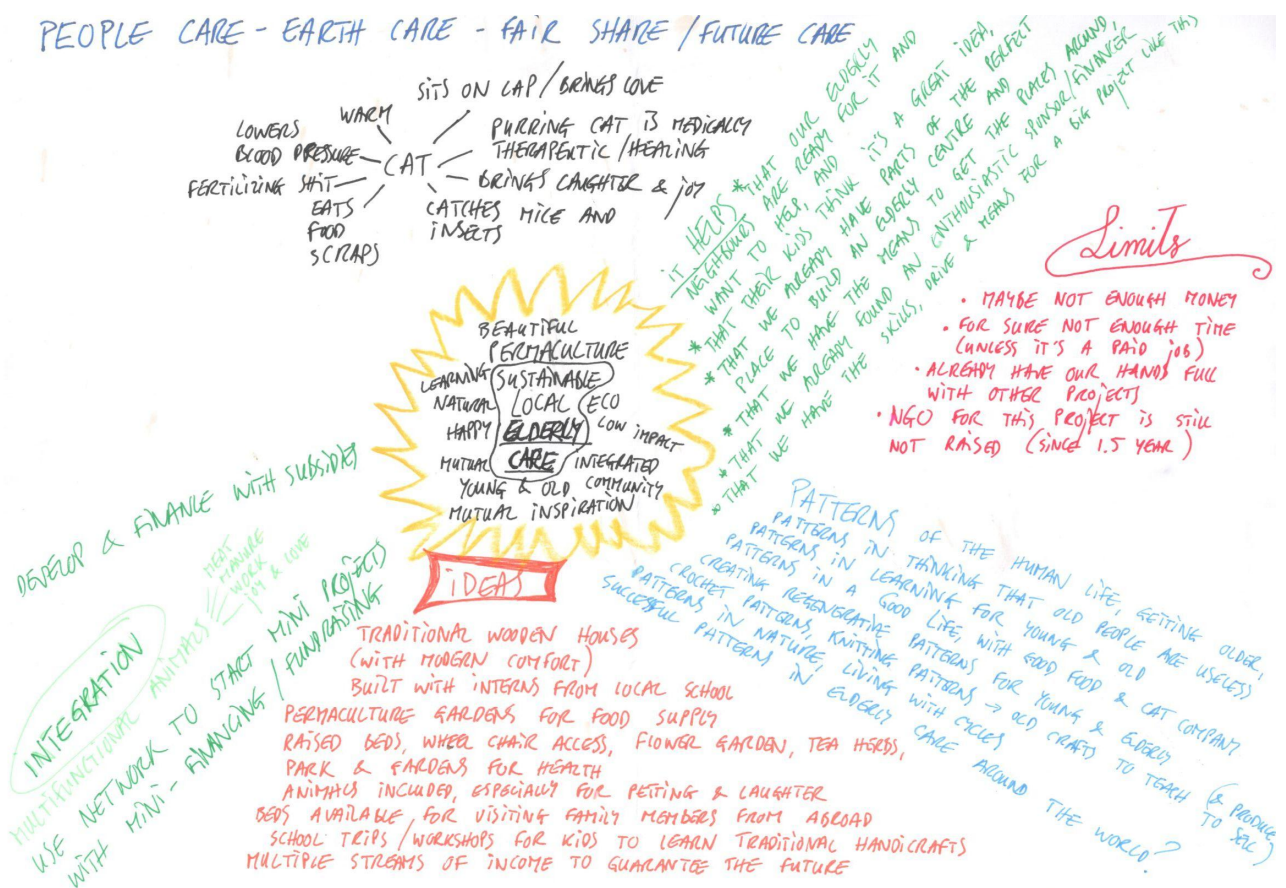
We want to start with buying the property of our neighbour Stevo and his wife Đuka (both approaching 80) and let them live here until they die. In this way they will be looked after, live a purposeful last years with others, and get money (from the transaction) so they can stay in their house and pay the bills. By the time they are less mobile or cannot take care of themselves any more, we have setup a care system for them, and for other elderly with similar needs.

For us this is a good transaction because it fits in our personal vision, and we guarantee an inspiring and caring community for our own life (and old age) and for the next 7 generations. We want to creatively use and respond to change, bring continuity in the community on this hill top, reconnect young and old, we want to let people learn from the elders how to live a sustainable life, give local elderly a purpose and a good quality life where they can peacefully die in a community, among friends.





## PEOPLE CARE - EARTH CARE - FAIR SHARE / FUTURE CARE



Mind map used as a start of this design

This design is about integrating (elderly) rather than segregating, using and valuing diversity, using the edges and valuing the marginal. About creatively using and responding to change in this world where people get more individualistic and move to cities.

This design is developed with the help of Looby Macnamara's Design Web. It uses 11 of her 12 anchor points, which you can find in the chapter titles. The anchor point "Look through the lens of permaculture principles" is used through the entire text.

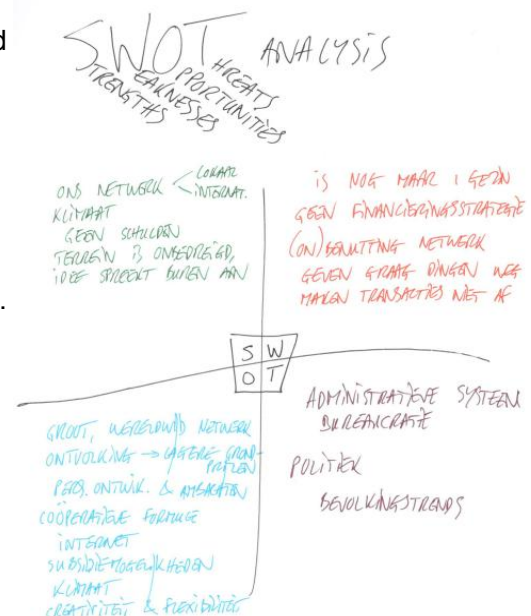
## Helps – how will we manage a big project?

- We can start simple & small. Use slow solutions. Design the project from big to small, from patterns to details.
- Peter and I both have 9 years experience with living, buying and developing in this area. Barbara has 20 years experience as a project manager, 30 years experience with organising things and leading teams, Peter has 15 years experience as an entrepreneur and has excellent business communication skills.
- We have 8 years experience with hosting and managing volunteers from all over the world, 6 years with hosting camping guests. That means: a lot of insight in people's behaviour and needs.
- Peter and I both have our crafts: Peter is a skilled personal development trainer, coach, blacksmith and wood worker, and Barbara knows various ways to teach people about permaculture and a sustainable way of living, and loves to work with wool and make herbal medicine. This can be a start of products to sell.
- We are learning about the successful Spanish Mondragón corporation and federation, a cooperative formula that takes care of itself. Observe a well working example and interact.

- Our (big, international, rich and diverse) network can be of (financial) help, including the volunteer organisations (helping hands) we have experience with. We can start fund raising campaigns for (parts of the) project and involve our networks.
- Our local network is also strong with people like Kruno (our accountant who knows “everyone” and is also in politics), Milena (who knows all about subsidies and now works for the Red Cross to organise activities for elderly) and the major who lives in our street. Our friend Siniša who knows how to construct beautiful things.
- We don't have debts, we don't need much money to live our life and we do have some money to invest, as a start.
- We have sent our friend Igor to “subsidy class”. He is learning to apply for local, regional, national and European subsidies.
- The local climate is of help. It is very liveable, not too hot (usually around 30° in summer) and not too cold (usually around freezing point in winter but the extreme is -20° in the night). Especially with a well insulated house you're “save”. In this climate you can grow a wide variety of food for summer and winter harvest, and with some extra care you can grow Mediterranean fruits on a south facing wall and in a heated glass house.
- The terrain we have in mind to start with, is clear and will not surprise us. The current owners (and their children) love our ideas. The current owners are Stevo and Đuka who are in their seventies and soon need care.
- Depopulation gives lower land prices.
- There are endless possibilities for products to sell from the land or from crafty people, like wool and herbal products, high end pepper or nut products, wooden toys...
- An opportunity is the internet, that can be of great help to sell local products world wide
- An opportunity is that there are many angles to get subsidy. For elderly care, for traditional constructions, for old, local varieties of animals, for ecological ways of using the land, for keeping alive the local traditions...
- An opportunity for the whole area, where there are many elderly living now, to grow into an active community where young take care of the elderly and the elderly help with providing a peaceful life in nature. Integrated rather than segregated.

## Limits – stretching edges

- This elderly community project is so big and diverse. It is about housing, construction, energy and water management, land development, people care and animal husbandry, self sufficiency and producing things to sell... Business, finances, marketing, communication, production.
- We don't have a financing strategy, we don't know how to safely exploit a place like this elderly home with maybe several NGOs and commercial companies (& exploit all different parts).
- Maybe we don't have, or can't find enough money or a sustainable income to make it all work.
- We don't have clarity about how to earn money with this project. Ask the elderly for a fee? What



if they don't have money (any more)? What if they create many products to sell? What if they cook daily for the whole community? What if they cannot take care of themselves any more and are a burden to their care takers?

- We may have issues with money: Barbara has a habit of giving things away for free, Peter has a habit of not charging the full price or not closing a deal.
- We don't have enough time to develop this big, multi faceted project (unless it is a paid job). We already have our hands full with other projects like our camp site, constructing barns and tiny holiday homes, the development of a polyculture nut orchard, the grey water cleaning swim pond, catching & storing more water...
- The NGO that we are starting for this project, is still not there (after working on the papers for 1.5 years and all the help we get from friends).
- We did not yet (fully) use our network(s).
- Trends in depopulation of rural areas can be a limit.
- The bureaucratic administrative system in Croatia is a limit.
- Politics in general are limiting, as we see it as a secretly hostile system.
- Until now it is only 1 family (us) that is prepared to "live" with 1 elderly couple (Stevo & Đuka), we didn't manage (or try) to attract another family (yet).
- Our "communication strategy" (which is not actively used) didn't lead to more families that want to live here.

## Patterns

- Patterns in nature, living with cycles, seasons, patterns of human life, growing, getting older, wiser, teaching the younger... patterns in learning for young and old.
- Patterns in time, beginning, middle, end, spring preparations, summer reaping, slowing down in fall, winter evaluation. Creating time by valuing it: a paid job.
- Patterns in thinking that older people are done, useless, redundant. Creating regenerative (thinking) patterns for (young &) elderly.
- Patterns in a Good Life, with good food and good human & animal company. Community life, working together to co-create a Good Life. Writing a blog about it to attract new people?
- Local patterns in beautiful wooden houses, natural construction materials, protected courtyards between a house and its barns.
- Local patterns of more generations living in 1 house with land around, and whole families living in the same area, exchanging tools and goods, working together as a community.
- Patterns of reaching out, asking for help. To finish the NGO, to start applying for subsidies and funds, starting fundraising campaigns.
- Crochet patterns, knitting patterns, old crafts to teach and produce and sell.
- What are successful patterns in elderly care around the world?
- Patterns in cat's purrs on a frequency of 25Hz, that have healing properties. Imagine a cat on each elderly lady's lap!







# Ideas – sustainable community life, housing, terrain and income

## Sustainable living/community

Living in a community, sharing life's joy, doing things together, sharing ideas, a car, knowledge and tools, caring for animals, preparing and enjoying meals together... we think that that is a healthy environment for humans (young and old).

We meet 10 to 15 young couples annually that are looking for an alternative lifestyle. They come to volunteer at our place, come to a course or workshop, or just visits us out of curiosity. If we start telling these people about our community ideas, we might find people that are interested in coming to live with us.

If we have an accommodation for another family to move into, it is an easier decision for that couple/family to make.

In this region in Croatia there are many elderly people that can hardly look after themselves. The pattern is that they live alone in badly self built concrete houses, they heat and cook on wood that they have to chop themselves. Their children live abroad, in Serbia, Germany or in the United States and one day it will all be too much.

For these people it would be great to move to a community with locals with the same life style. Chances are that they will feel at home and have a happy last period of their life.

There should be beds available for family members from abroad.

We can chunk down to smaller projects so the whole project becomes better manageable.

## Sustainable housing

We can build wooden houses (with modern comfort), with local, natural materials, according to local, traditional techniques.

The houses are well insulated so it is cool in summer and warm in winter. Catch and store energy. If we position them well and use techniques to catch winter sun and keep out summer sun, store warmth, use air ventilation systems and natural, "breathing" materials, we can save a lot on climate regulation energy.

To guarantee fresh and healthy drinking water at all times, we connect one of the local well water sources to the housing and have an extra tap in the kitchen.

We can consider having compost toilets and using compost warmth in the house, shower with rain water and water the garden with shower water.

The electricity can come from the local power company and (partly?) from off grid sources, to bring more independence.



## Sustainable gardening and terrain maintenance

We can create well designed permaculture gardens and integrate rather than segregate animals. Well designed with the users and visitors (and functions) in mind. Gardens and orchards to obtain a yield for a self sufficient life and some extra income.





## Sustainable income

There should be multiple streams of income to be less dependent and guarantee the money needed to pay bills.

**Subsidy** for traditional building, for teaching young people about traditional techniques, for elderly care, for landscape management, for local breeds of animals.

**Tourism or day visitors:** people pay an entrance fee to see old traditions and crafts in action in an open air museum. You can even stay the night in one of the available rooms.

**Educational workshops and courses** can give some extra money, also for schools/school trips or after school activities (crafts).

**Events** like an annual traditional farmers market, like hosting a historic re-enactment group, hosting a blacksmith's festival or a wool products market...

**Products** that can be sold are the artisan products that crafts people make, the wool that is spun or knitted socks, wooden toys, health products made with our herbs...

And also products from the land. The herbs, teas, tinctures, oils, nut spreads, honey, canned tomatoes, ajvar, dried mushrooms, flowers, trees and shrubs from the nursery, seedlings...



*Picture from the internet that gives an impression of an open air museum*

## Integration – identifying key needs and ideas to meet them

The key functions in this design are:

1. How to create a community that “works” for young and old, eventually impaired people?
2. Getting a family to join us in this project
3. Earning ongoing income when the project is running

Living in a community, sharing resources, knowledge, tasks, seems to be a more sustainable way of living. People live longer, healthier and happier when they have a purpose in life. Like caring for animals or other community members, cooking the food, creating things...

Together you can grow food that has much more nutritional value than vegetables from the supermarket. It also saves driving to the supermarket, and you can spend your money more wisely. Growing your own food makes you independent, it is a free gym and it gives you a sense of purpose. You provide the food for your community. That can work for young *and* old people (function 1).

It is probably easy to find other “old” community members. But to find “young” ones, we have to setup a good communication plan and get media. We can start with writing a design about communicating this kind of life, maybe write a blog or article(s) about it, make a YouTube film, start asking for community members on social media, get media attention for this way of living... (function 2)

We can create well designed permaculture gardens (function 1) for our food supply, as an example of old traditions, with:

- raised beds for easy (wheel chair) access,
- a flower garden to feed the bees and pick a gift for the person you visit,
- a herb garden for everyone's health and to make herbal products to sell,
- and a vegetable park and food forest for our food supply.

Orchards can be turned into food forests to obtain more yield with companion plants to make the trees thrive. Current local orchards grow mainly grass; planting companion plants will reduce the (high maintenance) grass and increase the yield.

With healthy food (and healthy water from our well water sources) less external health care is needed. With herbs from the land we can make teas, tinctures and syrups to take care of inconveniences. In this way we can apply more self regulation of our health. Function 1.

Animals should be included to help us with the work: chickens as compost turners, goats as terrain cleaners, sheep and rabbits as lawnmowers, ducks as pest reducers, dogs as living guards and doorbells, cats for catching mice and their healing purrs... Let's use and value diversity.

Make sure the floors are easy to sweep: sweeping floors brings light physical activity and meditation.

Bills to pay, money that goes out of the project, should be avoided/as low as possible. Small, slow and low tech solutions are usually more sustainable, and being independent or self sufficient saves bills. Grow and forage your own food, animals and animal food, and sweep, scythe and bike. (Function 3)

With the help of our network we can fundraise the start of this project: generating a salary for a project manager. With that money as a salary we can make time to start the project. (function 3)

Start with small and slow solutions: sub projects that are easier to manage and finance, and use our network to fundraise it. (function 3)

If we build the traditional wooden houses with interns from local carpentry schools, we have an example of young (students) learning from old (craftsmen like Siniša) and we can get subsidy for that (3).

Build a beautiful village with traditional wooden houses, have people performing crafts, have traditional animals around, integrate and ask day visitors entrance fee. A life like this can be an example/open air museum of rural life in Croatia (1).

Of course there is a souvenir shop with the home made products at the exit.

The products made by the crafts persons, can also be sold world wide on platforms like Etsy.com. (3)

Some functions can be done by our company Bogata Šuma. Like providing work space and the construction of things like windows and doors. In that way we keep money close to home. (3)

Ask a local influential politician in our NGO to open doors and get things done in this area. (function 1)

## Action – how to make it happen

We need to define the whole project/every aspect of it, and find a good starting point. Maybe something like: turn Stevo's stable into a nice, ground floor apartment. When Stevo and Đuka move into this apartment, we can start renovating their house and create rooms for others to move in.

Write designs for sub projects:

- business/organisational & administrative design, communication
- community culture & development design, and communication to the rest of the world
- land design/park design/site development, designs for various gardens and a food forest.
- architecture & sustainable building of an elderly home
- design for the educational parts

Choose a subproject, make a plan for (part of) it, apply for subsidies and setup a fundraising campaign. When that works, we can "copy" the formula for other subprojects.

Make a financial plan about costs for setup, costs for living, possible income streams, possible subsidies.

Find financiers.

Make a calendar for year 1-7. Creating facilities and community in the beginning, turning it all into an open air museum later. Cats and a dog soon, cattle later. This calendar can help to create an overview of the projects.

Define the functions that we want on the terrain, the functions that can be facilitated by our company Bogata Šuma, and the functions that we need to outsource.

Kitchen, diner/restaurant, cooled storage, bathrooms inside, compost toilets outside for visitors, an entrance/exit with a shop, blacksmith's workshop, wood crafts workshop... But also things like storage of a snow plough and other machines.

Finish the paperwork for the NGO: ask Kruno the papers back, adjust the text, ask someone to help us with the details and visit NGO office again.

Find a subsidy writer, ideally someone that we can also hire for a business plan and communication plan and do administrative paperwork for the NGO. Someone like Ana. (This might be a full time job that pays itself with subsidy)

Make a list of functions & wishes for the apartments for the elderly: sleeping in a warm & comfortable room where you can make tea & coffee, have a closet for storing, a desk or table with chairs and an area to sit comfortably... Stack functions.

Setup an integrated plan for the architect, together with our carpenter.

Contact local schools for doing projects together, like constructing traditional houses or setting up a sustainable household or farm.

Make a plan to create an active community: define the community culture and write a communication plan.

Start a blog about this kind of simple but fulfilling life on the land, in harmony with nature.

Write 5 articles before publishing the 1<sup>st</sup>.





## Momentum – keep on track

With all the different aspects of this project, it shouldn't be too difficult to keep momentum once the project is started.

Especially when we can hire someone to manage all projects. Maybe a Croat that can apply for subsidies and creates his/her own job with that. Igor? Kaja?

## Appreciation

This project started out of appreciation for our neighbours Stevo & Đuka Mrđenović.

A little history of our hill: the last name of all our neighbours is Mrđenović and our area is called "Mrđenovići". The first family Mrđenović probably moved here around 500 years ago, from what is now called Serbia. Emperor Ferdinand 1 granted Serbs the right to settle on the military frontier, a cordon, against the Turkish (Ottoman) empire. The region is called "Kordun".

In this area the oldest son usually stays in the house with his parents; his wife moves in with them. Younger sons build a new house on the terrain, if necessary. And so a village grows. Our "village" Mrđenovići has now 5 houses, where there used to be around 15.



When we moved here, only 3 houses were in use.

We were welcomed, and over the years we got accepted as "almost a Mrđenović". That is a compliment.

## Reflection

Designing for me (Barbara) is putting thoughts on paper in an organised way. Turning chaotic clouds of images, feelings and half-ideas into well formulated sentences. Therefore it is also a step towards sharing ideas.

This general design could be a basis for a few more detailed designs about specific subjects. So the next steps are:

- business/organisational & administrative design, communication
- architecture & sustainable building of an elderly home
- community culture & development design, and communication to the rest of the world
- design for the educational parts
- land design/park design/site development, designs for various gardens and a food forest.

## Pause

Pffffff.....

Peter & Barbara Scheltus  
24 September 2018