

## Blue Zones in the Built Environment: Innovative Strategies and lessons for Health and Community



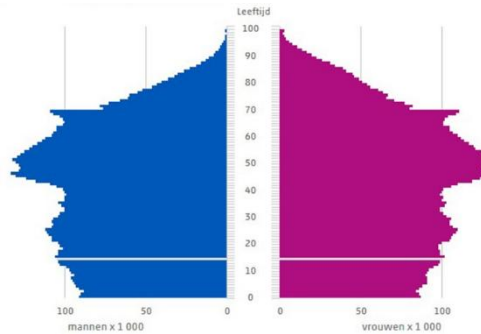
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Company: MaPaLaNa

### Who's Jan Luursema → Inspiration from the Netherlands

- Consultant with more than 30 years experience
- Workfield: Strategy and real estate
- Clients: Healthcare institutions and housing corporations
- Member of various supervisory boards in healthcare and NGO's
- Living in Elst, Netherlands



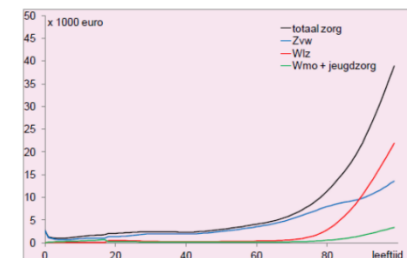
# A public issue



- The number of elderly people is set to double
- While number of care staff will be cut in half

- **Ageing in good health**
- **Dying sooner**

**50% OFF**



# The learning objectives



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## 1. What defines a Blue Zone?

What are the common characteristics that make people in these areas healthier, happier, and live longer?

## 2. How can Blue Zone principles inform the built environment?

What can we learn from these regions to guide the development and realization of healthier and more sustainable living spaces?

## 3. From theory to practice: Dutch case studies

What practical examples from the Netherlands show how Blue Zone principles are being implemented in real-world projects? What approaches have proven successful, and what challenges



# A study trip with a secret



- Studytrip Japan (Okinawa → Bluezone)
- Healthy aging → who doesn't want that?
  - a) connection with each other
  - b) having a purpose in life
  - c) lots of daily exercise such as walking and gardening
  - d) regular napsand
  - e) eat in moderation (especially beans and occasionally



# Being old and happy

- People are living longer and healthier lives in five places than anywhere else in the world. These places are called the Blue Zones. People living in one of these places live an average of 90 or even 100 years, in good health, without medication or disability.
- The five blue zones are:
  - Sardinië (Italy);
  - Okinawa (Japan);
  - Loma Linda (Californië);
  - Nicoya (Costa Rica);
  - Ikaria (Greece).



# Blue zones → from a scientific perspective

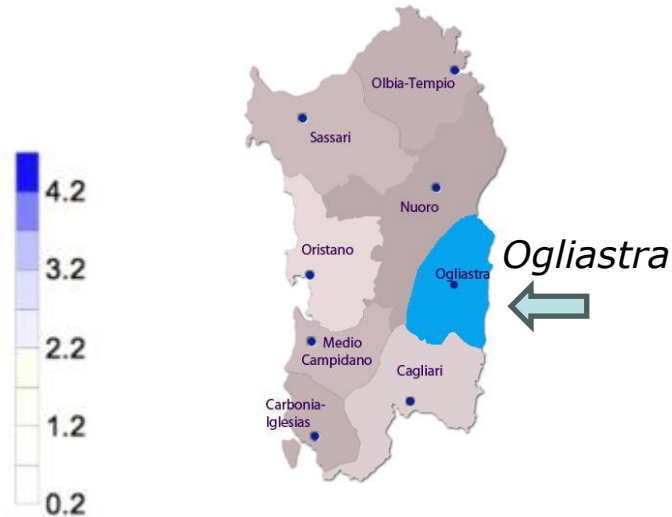
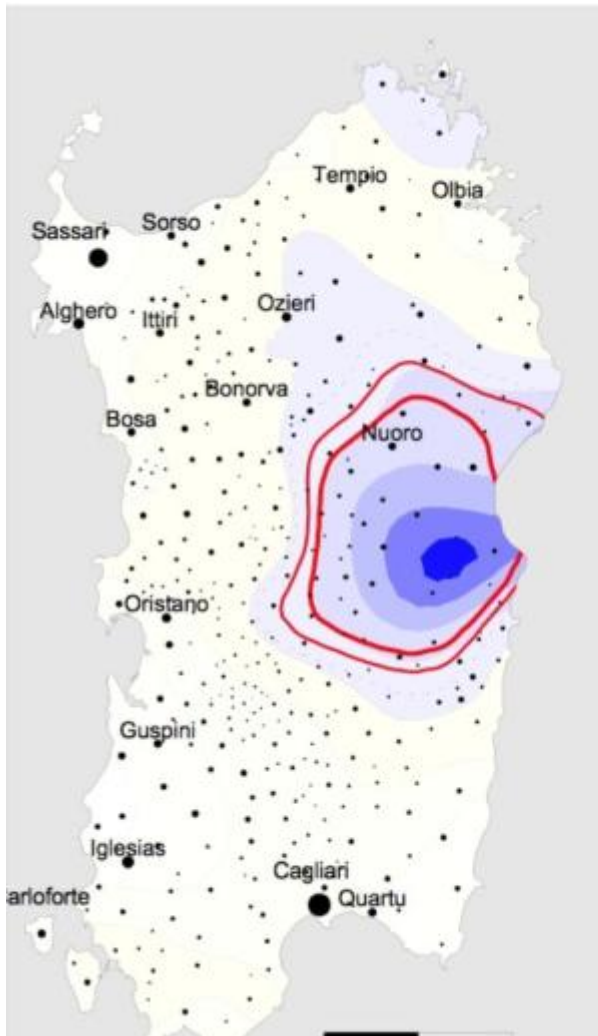


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- 1) Move naturally:** no gym but live in an environment that encourages movement without thinking about it.
  - 2) Know your purpose:** know what you wake up for in the morning. Having a purpose can add up to seven years of life expectancy.
  - 3) Reduce stress:** take daily time to relax.
  - 4) The 80% rule:** stop eating when your stomach is 80% full; reduce calorie intake by 20%.
  - 5) Plant-based diet:** grow your own food; beans are part of the daily diet of most centenarians.
  - 6) Wine:** drink regularly, in moderation, and preferably with meals in the company of friends.
  - 7) Belonging:** being part of a group with regular gatherings has a positive impact on health.
  - 8) Family first:** put family and loved ones before everything else.
  - 9) Friendship:** maintain a strong circle of friends and plenty of social connections.





# Sardinië → Centenarians: is it true?



*Average number of  
centenarians per  
1,000 inhabitants*



# The region Ogliastro



## Village:

- Perdasdefogu
  - Jerzu
  - Gairo
  - Lunasie
  - Torre di Bari
- Remote villages

## Altitude:

Tot 1.260 – 1.500 m  
→ Mountain villages



## Inhabitants:

1.500 á 3.000  
Dunst bevokt  
→ Small and remote

## Economy

Pour region  
Agriculture  
Youth migration



- In the heart of the Blue Zone (Lanusei) Research
- Research on DNA and vitality → life expectancy
- Collecting data over 20 + 20 years
- Life expectancy: DNA → 60%, lifestyle → 40%

***Living a healthy life — with exercise, purpose, social ties and good nutrition — makes a difference, but it offers no guarantee***



# The Village, Perdasefogu

MaPaLaNa  
Inspirare &  
Verbinden





# A few more impressions





# Is it correct?

MaPaLaNa  
Inspire & Verbinden



**Born:**  
1880 – 1920  
Do the papers match?  
Specific group?  
Lost generation?  
Incomplete research?





# Sardinië

- Lifestyle
  - Rest and avoid stress
- Social encounters
  - Strong family ties
  - Respect for elderly
- Food and drinks
  - Beans, seasonal vegetables, potatoes, herbs and as little as possible meat
- Lesson for the built environment → Walkability and active design, nature, intergenerational living



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# Blue Zone: Principles and the Built Environment (1)

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## 1. Walkability and active design

In Blue Zones, people move naturally every day: walking to work, the market, or to visit neighbors → design compact, walkable neighborhoods with safe pedestrian routes, bike paths, and attractive public spaces.

## 2. Community and social connection

Strong social networks and meeting places contribute to wellbeing and longevity → create squares, community centers, parks, and shared gardens where residents can meet and interact naturally.

## 3. Nature and green integration

In Blue Zones, nature is always close by and part of daily life. → integrate greenery into streets, rooftops, and urban gardens, and ensure proximity to natural areas to support relaxation and health.

***Make health and wellbeing the  
easy and natural choice***

## 4. Mixed-use development

In traditional Blue Zones, living, working, and amenities are closely intertwined. → encourage mixed functions (housing, healthcare, shops, sports, culture) to foster vitality and a sense of community.

# Blue Zone: Principles and the Built Environment (2)

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## 5. Healthy food environment

Food in Blue Zones is local, plant-based, and often prepared and consumed together. → support urban food production, shared kitchens, and easy access to healthy food options.

## 6. Meaning and belonging

Having a purpose in life ("ikigai") and feeling connected to the community are essential. → provide space for community centers, religious and cultural venues, and programs that strengthen purpose and meaning.

## 7. Inclusivity and intergenerational living

Blue Zones emphasize respect for elders and integration of generations. → develop housing models where young and old live together and support each other, with care services integrated into the neighborhood



***Make health and wellbeing the  
easy and natural choice***

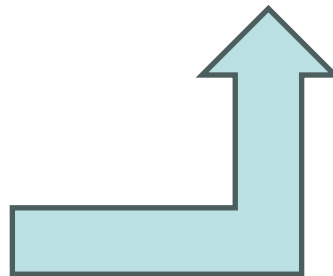


# Checklist 'Blue zones'

- connection with each other → **space for meeting**
- having a purpose in life → **space for meaning**
- a lot of daily movement → **connection with the outdoors, movement challenge**
- regular nap → **restful**
- and eat in moderation → **nice and healthy food**

A study trip with a secret

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# Examples in Dutch real estate

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- Heart of the community (2016 - Amersfoort)
- Live together (2023 - Voorthuizen)
- Vitality Center based on inclusion (2027 – Terborg)



*Amersfoort*



*Voorthuizen*



*Terborg*







# Who are your partners ?



Neighborhood fellows meet in the central hall:



Barber



**Workshops**

**Exchange and work together**

**Quiet place**

Youthlessness

**Alzheimercafé**

Meet other  
mothers and  
children

**Having lunch**

to get to know  
other informal  
caregivers



**Business lounge**

**Combining functions in which  
the added value for all  
involved parties comes from  
the combination**



Accolade Zorggroep



SPARK

# Live, believe, grow -> thats why!



# How do you work?

## Why? → vision → together ....

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### To grow

To discover  
To learn  
To move  
Educate  
To care

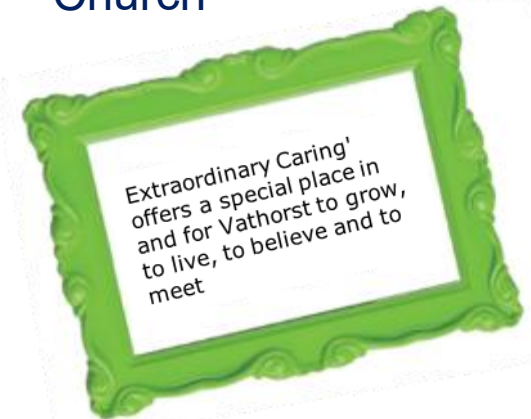
### Life

The enjoyment  
**The meeting**  
The contact  
The parents  
The inhabitants

### To believe

Experience  
Life  
Accommodation  
Services  
Church

**Collaboration based on mutual trust and a shared vision**









# Heart of the community

## The concept

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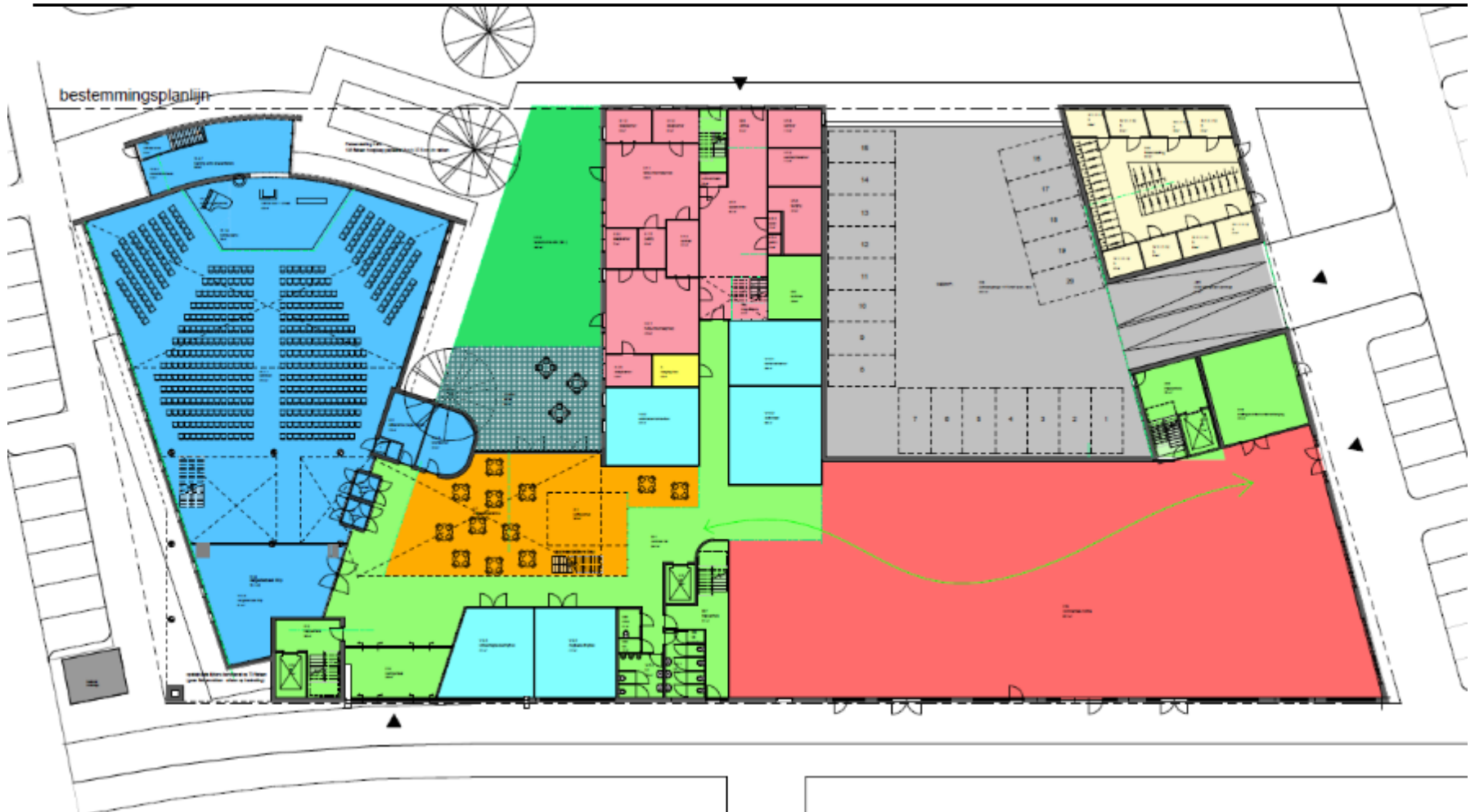
- Real inclusion in society → change institute for support paradigm
- Living as normal as possible → from the start of the project
- Connect different parties → care, education, sport, church, ...
- Involve people from the neighborhood
- Make a vision → Living, growing, believing and meeting
- Work and live together → organization - software)
- Construct facilities → building – hardware)



**Healthy people, sick people, people with disabilities, the elderly, (young) adults, families and children in all ages live, work, play and go to church in Hart van Vathorst. It goes (much) further than a collaboration between different parties. In Heart of Community residents get the opportunity to fully participate in society and be part of the neighborhood.**



# Ground level



# First floor





# Live together, Voorthuizen



# Live together → Who?



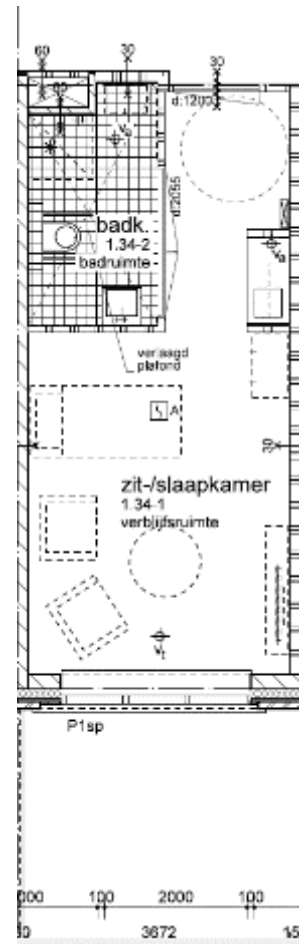
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- - 36 residents with advanced dementia
  - - 6 apartments for couples (one of the partners has advanced dementia)
  - - 34 Apartments
  - - day care and alzheimer cafe for the elderly
  - - Childcare and after-school care
  - - Living room of the neighborhood

*Different forms of life, living and care together.  
Because we believe that people – young and old –  
need each other to flourish.*





# Live together



# Vitality center based on inclusion

(in progress)



# Vitality center based on inclusion

(In progress)

schetsplan - concept



- the center for vitality is an inviting eye-catcher of the area
- they live in a park-like and publicly accessible environment
- the angular rotations in and positioning **of the buildings contribute to a varied image**
- there is a nature-inclusive and biodiverse design of the living environment, water contributes to this
- there are optimal visual and physical connections in the plan area and with the surrounding area
- the shape of the building naturally creates a more private outdoor space for the houses
- the parking is small-scale, surrounded by greenery and a short distance from the buildings



# Vitality center based on inclusion

(in progress)





# VitaalThuus → VitalHome



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## ***Community and social connection***

The design emphasizes meeting and interaction (Ontmoeten), with communal living rooms, a restaurant, hobby spaces, and public facilities that encourage encounters between young and old.

## ***Purposeful and active lifestyle***

The program stimulates activation (Activeren) through exercise gardens, a sports hall, physiotherapy, wellness, and creative workshops – promoting daily movement as a natural part of life .

## ***Relaxation and stress reduction***

A strong focus on relaxation and well-being (Ontspannen) in a healing environment, with natural light, greenery, water, and materials designed to reduce stress .

## ***Integration with nature***

The plan follows biophilic design principles: logical connections between indoor and outdoor spaces, a green park-like setting, vegetable gardens, and easy access to the surrounding landscape .

## ***Healthy nutrition and food culture***

Facilities include a kitchen studio, restaurant, and vegetable garden, encouraging healthy, plant-rich diets and communal meals, reflecting Blue Zone dietary habits .

## ***Intergenerational and inclusive living***

Housing is mixed: regular apartments, social housing, and care units. The concept avoids an “institutional” look, instead creating an open neighborhood that welcomes all generations .

## ***Sustainability and long-term vitality***

The project is designed to be energy-neutral and climate-adaptive, ensuring a resilient, future-proof environment that supports health and longevity



# Questions?



**MaPaLaNa**

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