

## Introduction to La Maison de Babayagas

**Website:** <http://www.lamaisondesbabayagas.fr/leprojet31mai.html>

### The House of Baba Yagas

An innovative project that will permit us (and you), even to an advanced age, to pursue and complete our lives within our own walls, surrounded by companions who have made the same life choices as ourselves.

Baba Yaga House will be:

**SELF-MANAGED:** We will manage our house ourselves, accepting the least possible outside help, only that which would mitigate our declining strength, or would help with the care of the body—gymnastics, therapy, massage, [which we would consider] at the same time pleasure and necessity, which would help a great deal.

**FEMINIST:** Because we all emerge from the women's liberation movement. This engagement will last all of our lives.

**INTERCONNECTED** (*solidaire*): While respecting and preserving each person's privacy, together we will help each other to live and to die well.

**CITIZENS:** Far from closing ourselves off in some ghetto, we will be open to the city, and remain active there as long as possible, articulating our views through commitments to political, social and cultural life.

**ECOLOGICAL:** Baba Yaga House will be built on the basis of the requirements of energy economy and environmental respect. In its operation, we will oversee especially rigorously the management of water, energy and waste.



Our house will be open to those neighbours who want to participate in the same spirit that animates Baba Yaga House.

We will be residents who, responding to the HLM criteria [?], will be drawn to and engaged in joint, collective activities.

Those who are seeking to join us will be chosen as a function of their aspirations and their capacity to live according to the choices described in this text. The decision will be made at the end of a period of mutual assessment.

Inspired by convent life, the House will offer each resident her own space—a well insulated (noise too) studio with a kitchenette and washroom, where she can invite whomever she pleases, continuing to lead her life according to her own habits and predilections. Moreover, for our joint life we will have the benefit of group spaces—

among others, a meeting room, library, gym, reception area; and of course a small garden.

We will take on the activities of maintenance and animation as long as we are able. Together, we will practice mutual aid in the broadest sense, and we will take care of the costs of operation together in the spirit of social economics and solidarity. When we need essential help [that we cannot provide ourselves], we will call upon the city's aid services.

We want to show that the absence of social imagination concerning the elderly drags with it practices that need to be changed; so that we can put into place innovations demonstrating that old age, for anyone who is willing to take on its requirements and demands, is a good age of life, full of experiences, wisdom and—indeed—a future.



### **Birth of the Project**

Babayaga House was born from an idea long nurtured by Thérèse Clerc. Having attended to her aged parents to the end of their lives while she was still working and taking care of her own children, she was able to measure to what extent daily life could become a source of complications, tensions, even anguish. As she grew older, her life, hitherto as a successful single woman, threatened to tip over into solitude and to weigh on those close to her.

On a day in 1999, Therese took her pen in hand and launched a call, sketching in broad strokes an alternative life for the future—a 'Babayaga House.'

As time passed, other emergencies demanded her attention.

Little by little, several women followed her, convinced that this project responded to their own pressing questions, their own aspirations.



### **Political and civic response to the societal stakes [of an aging population] viewed through the lens of economics**

From 2010, when baby boomers began reaching age 65 and, concurrently, medical doctors began retiring en masse, people feared the worst. No one really knew how society would respond to this challenge, how it would concern itself with the social and health aspects, as well as the costs, tied to this inevitable aging.

The project 'House of the Babayagas' therefore modestly presents—at a moment that seems opportune—its own response to the stakes posed [by the aging of the

population], by making a political and civic wager that the people themselves could, individually and collectively, take charge of their lives; doing so together, in a space that stays totally open to the city and society.

This alternative view posed on life allows us to consider the consequences of population aging on health expenses in a different light, as well as considering technical and social supports that are not merely theoretical or superficial.

Society is generally called upon to respond in a medical fashion to a heavy and costly individual demand, because problems are communicated or revealed too late. The collective environment of Babayaga House, with the arrangements of its daily life which permit the restoration of the natural solidarities of neighbours, works to anticipate, to prevent and to tend to [the needs of the aging person], by opting for the creation of a social, collective environment which respects the aging person, considering first and foremost her capacities for agency and autonomy, and not her fragilities and dependencies.

The project 'Maison des Babayagas' is a wager on an evolving concept [of society's aged]: one of taking charge and of helping others. It considers individuals as persons, not as potential patients.

And this would be a way of thumbing one's nose at those economists who want to evaluate to .9% of PIB [?] the impact of aging on society in 2020, without counting long-term illnesses nor the costs connected with dependency which, according to general agreement, will explode.

It is a matter of changing this economicist view of the too-heavy costs of a life that continues beyond the time [of 'productivity'] that has been dedicated to work and the education of children and domestic tasks, because (keeping in mind the unequal demographic men/women [among the elderly]) above all, this is an observation on aging women, an observation too often unfavorable and pessimistic [heavy and hard]. [from a speech in 2005]

We are making a political and civic wager that people themselves can take charge of their lives together in a space completely open to the city and to society.

### **Vieillir c'est Vivre-—"Aging Means Living"**

To live longer might be considered a bit of luck provided one feels oneself the actor/agent of one's choices in life and a citizen in one's society.'

*[AS: Not translated here: letters of acceptance of the role of 'godfather/godmother' to the project—They, the 'godparents', become an **advisory committee** of **influential people** committed to the success of the Babayaga venture.]*