

British Society of Gerontology 49th Annual Conference.  
Ageing Past, Present and Future: Innovation and Change  
7 July – 9 July 2021 – online conference

Symposium Title:

**Understanding and exploring past, present and future housing choices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century among diverse ageing populations**

Chair: prof. dr. An-Sofie Smetcoren – *Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium*

Discussant: prof. dr. Ann Petermans – *Hasselt University, Belgium*

The ageing population is recognized to be a very diverse group, ranging from economically powerful baby-boomers, to over-75 people with a migration background and centenarians with high care and support needs. Planning for the housing situation of this diverse ageing population is a key challenge in many European countries. The home environment can be considered as the most significant place when ageing, as it offers a place of support but also the link between one's dwelling, wellbeing and identity. Although many people express the wish to age in place, others decide to relocate. Moving towards more traditional housing options such as a smaller apartment (with or without care services) or residential care facilities happens most often, but in past decennia interest has raised for more innovative housing formulas (e.g. cohousing). To increase our understanding of housing choices made in later life and to contribute to knowledge on housing-expectations, experiences and preferences of older people, three linked studies will explore older people's past, present and future housing choices. First, Schaff and colleagues present research on how older people who have already anticipated their housing situation for later life, reflect on their decision-making process and current home experience. Second, Phlix and colleagues explore ageing migrants' sense of home. A third paper by Smetcoren and colleagues discusses expectations and experiences of older adults, involved in developing a cohousing project. Finally, Ann Petermans will summarize and link the main messages of these papers, which is followed by some critical questions to discuss with the audience.

**Anticipating ageing: interviews on home experiences in Belgium**

*Gwendoline Schaff<sup>1,3</sup>, Catherine Elsen<sup>2</sup>, Ann Petermans<sup>3</sup>, Fabienne Courtejoie<sup>1</sup> & Jan Vanrie<sup>3</sup>*

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Although a majority of older people favor "ageing in place", few of them effectively anticipate the ageing process and the associated changes this can bring about in their daily lives and experiences of home. In parallel, research now also shows a strong need to diversify housing possibilities for ageing. In that regard, one might ask what alternatives are being developed today to allow older people to age well in their homes and how these are experienced.

To gain insights on this issue, we conducted interviews with (future) older people (55+) who have already undertaken a housing initiative by moving or transforming their dwelling with the aim of "ageing well at home", in Wallonia (Belgium). In particular, we sought to understand how the inhabitant-habitat relationship evolved over time and which elements of the environment had a particular impact on people's well-being. Three temporalities were thus explored:

- *The past*: how were the inhabitants experiencing the home before the move/transformation and what key factors were involved in their decision-making process towards investing in a renewed home?
- *The present*: which aspects of the house and the direct environment contribute to their well-being and which do not? Has the Covid-19 situation changed their perception and experience of their home?
- *The future*: where do they see themselves living in the last years of their lives and what components do they consider essential for this period?

Several factors associated to the comfort and well-being of the inhabitants in their environment are highlighted and allow further reflections on developing alternative housing for older people.

### **The (im)material home: Exploring ageing migrants' sense of home.**

*Micheline Phlix<sup>1</sup>, Ann Peterrmans<sup>1</sup>, Jan Vanrie<sup>1</sup>*

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Given the preference of most older people to age in place, the home and its immediate environment are considered important places in later life. In addition to this, the ageing population is becoming more diverse. In Belgium, the share of older people of foreign origin has increased considerably in recent years however not much is known about their sense of home. Research has shown that sense of home is not necessarily limited to one place. As many older people of foreign origin sustain connections with their country of origin, research on their relations-to-home could cast a unique light on the concept of 'home'. 21 older adults of foreign origin aged 60 and above were interviewed to explore their sense of home. Participants live in Limburg, a province known for its rich labour migration history. Photo-elicitation was used as it has proven to be valuable in people's narratives concerning their built environment, but also to grasp more intangible aspects of home. Most participants expressed they wanted to remain at home as long as possible in which the material environment can be supportive (e.g. bungalow) or disruptive (e.g. bathtub). However, the immaterial dimension of home (e.g. social relations, memories) was considered of great importance to be able to achieve a sense of home within the given material environment. The study uncovers the importance of both the material and immaterial dimension of home, which should be considered coherent rather than opposed to each other.

### **Care and living in community: expectations and experiences of involvement in an intergenerational co-housing project**

*An-Sofie Smetcoren<sup>1</sup>, Thomas Dawance<sup>1&2</sup>, Michael Ryckwaert<sup>2</sup>, Nele Aernouts<sup>2</sup>, Liesbeth De Donder<sup>1</sup>*

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The 'Care and living in community'-project (CALICO) an Innovative Urban Action project funded by the European Union's European Regional Development Fund (ERFD). The aim of the CALICO-project is to develop a caring environment within an innovative affordable housing scheme for specific vulnerable groups (older people, single women and people with a migration background) in Brussels Capital Region. This cohousing project will accommodate 34 families and will be community-led, intergenerational, multicultural and gender-sensitive. The study provides insights in the motivations of future residents for moving towards the project and how they experience the co-creative approach used to realise the project. Data was collected amongst future residents using survey (N=24) and individual qualitative interviews (N=10). Results indicate various main reasons for moving. Most residents highly value the opportunity it gives them to access housing of good quality. However, participant also show great interest in the proposed cohousing formula and in developing new caring relationships with other

residents. At the level of co-creation several inhabitants' assemblies have been set up, which today allow above all the future inhabitants to get to know each other. These assemblies make it possible to create a common reference base and are considered necessary to establish the conviviality between the inhabitants as well as their capacity to manage the common dimensions of the project once on site. However, the capacity of these assemblies to gradually become a decision-making body also poses challenges. The study discusses the role of citizen participation in leading change and how meaningful co-creation can lead to new innovative housing for later life.