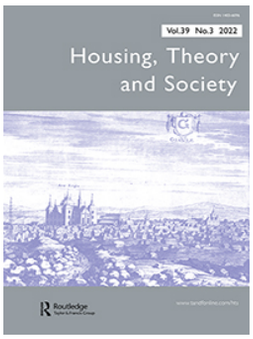

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Motivational Barriers to Shared Housing: The Importance of Meanings of "Home" in the Diffusion of Housing Innovations

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Introduction

In recent years, Flanders has witnessed a notable upsurge in the public attention for cohousing and other types of shared living arrangements (e.g. Jonckheere et al. 2010; Van den Houte et al. 2015; Verstraete and De Decker 2017; Brusselmans et al. 2019). The attention is sparked by discussions on substantial challenges currently faced by the Flemish housing market. First, there is a growing concern about the long term environmental and societal costs of urban sprawl in Flanders (Vermeiren et al. 2019). A long history of path dependent policy decisions has resulted in a landscape characterized by the dispersal of large single family houses in low density areas and ribbon development, putting an increasing amount of pressure on nature and mobility (De Decker 2011; Bervoets and Heynen 2013). Second, like in many countries in the Western world, the demographic set-up of Flanders is undergoing important changes. The ageing of society and the shrinking size of households exacerbate the problem of an undercrowded housing stock on the one hand, that of a growing need for mutual support and easy access to care on the other hand (Bervoets and Heynen 2013; Bervoets, Vanneste, and Ryckewaert 2014). Furthermore, the Flemish housing model seems ill-suited to accommodate the increasing de-standardization of family life (Luyten et al. 2015). Third, researchers have pointed to persistent problems pertaining to the quality and the affordability of housing, especially on the lower end of the private rental market (Depraetere et al. 2015; Heylen 2015; Verstraete and De Decker 2017). In all three respects, shared housing or shared living arrangements have been thematized by researchers and policy makers as one of the avenues for confronting such challenges. Flemish law has been considered too inflexible to be able to support a more important role for collective housing, however. This was one of the reasons why a decree was issued by the Flemish Government in 2017, installing a test environment for experimental housing forms, the results of which will be evaluated in 2023 (Vermeire 2017). As part of its "Vision 2050" the Flemish Government also committed to stimulating a gradual shift towards "smart housing and living" and strengthening public support for alternative, including collective, ways of living (Wonen Vlaanderen 2017).

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More or less simultaneously, scholars have begun to probe people's readiness to share (part of) their living space (Bervoets, Vanneste, and Ryckewaert 2014; Gerards, Nuyts, and Vanrie 2016; GfK Belgium 2017; Heylen and Vanderstraeten 2019). It is worthwhile to focus a bit more in detail on the two most recent studies, given their nation-wide scale. Both are large-scale surveys, generating results weighed to a representative sample of the Flemish population. The first study finds that 55% of Flemish citizens are not prepared to share any of their living spaces, whether interior or exterior (GfK Belgium 2017). Those who are prepared to do so, would be more keen on sharing a functional space (work place, office space, laundry area) than on sharing a more personal space, such as a kitchen or a living room. Family privacy is reported to be the most important obstacle. Results from the most recent survey (Heylen and Vanderstraeten 2019) are strongly in line with the earlier study. Here, the willingness to share ranges from 2.7% for a living room or kitchen (when no extra private living room or kitchen is available), over 27.5% for garden space, to 52.6% for parking space and bicycle storage, leading the authors to conclude that the mindset of Flemings is generally not collective in nature (Heylen and Vanderstraeten 2019).

Such statistics are very valuable for gaining a general overview, but still leave much to the interpretation when it comes to the deeper meanings of these obstacles to the people involved. Even a brief look at the notion of privacy (e.g. Margulis 2003), for example, reveals a quite complex plurality of possible meanings. Therefore, qualitative inquiry can provide more in-depth insights into the matter, complementing the findings from quantitative research, and handing more concrete tools for policy makers to build upon in their efforts to generate support for collective ways of living. The main focus of this study is to explore the various factors that impede people from considering shared housing arrangements in the Flemish context. By doing so, we also aim to contribute to a fuller understanding of obstacles from the point of view of "non-adopters" (Rogers 1983) more in general, which proves to be a somewhat neglected perspective in existing research on shared housing, as we will argue.

Overview of the Literature

Some Conceptual Clarifications

Before proceeding to a more detailed overview of the literature, some conceptual clarifications are needed with regard to the use of the notions of "shared housing", "shared living (arrangements)" and "cohousing" in this article. To keep in line with recent Flemish research (see above), we will use the notion of "shared housing" or "shared living (arrangements)" to refer to *any* type of housing situation in which (part of) one's dwelling is shared with co-residents who are not direct family members. This working definition is somewhat broader than its use in e.g. Clark et al. (2018) or Woo, Cho, and Kim (2019), where it mainly targets house sharing or flat sharing among young adults in the context of the private rental sector (PRS). An important goal of our research, however, is to map motivations or rationalizations behind (not) sharing various kinds of home spaces in various possible contexts, not only with reference to the PRS. As we will see, however, scholarly contributions from that field in particular are among the few that extensively deal with problems in relationships between co-residents. For that reason, literature on "shared housing" in the narrower sense has been integrated in our study as well.

The working definition of "cohousing" used in our interviews, on the other hand, was also broader than the classic definition by McCamant and Durrett (e.g. quoted in Williams 2008), and consequently, broader than most of the definitions or descriptions used in the academic work on cohousing (e.g. Boyer and Leland 2018; Sanguinetti and Hibbert 2018; Jakobsen and Larsen 2019). The focus of our working definition during the interviews was mainly on the spatial outlay of such projects, and much less on the aspect of collaboration and communal activities: "Cohousing is a housing form in which several households each have their own housing units, but can make use of communal living areas as well." This description broadly follows the categorization of different types of communal living elaborated by Samenhuizen vzw, an organization that actively supports communal housing culture in Flanders, e.g. through the dissemination of knowledge about various forms of communal housing and specific projects (Jonckheere et al. 2010).

In Search of Obstacles to Shared Housing

In a recent literature review on shared housing among young adults, Clark et al. (2018) give an account of what they interpret to be the paucity of research on the matter. One of the main reasons found in the literature, they argue, is the hegemony of a housing culture structured around the dominance of single family households. This is not only manifested in the marginalization of shared living in research as such, but also by the fact that traditional households are seldom analysed in terms of sharing space. In the midst of a society where private homeownership is still the norm, sharing is at best considered as a necessary but temporary step (Green and McCarthy 2015), or something you get over once you get older (Bervoets and Heynen 2013; Clark et al. 2018).

Nonetheless, as Lang, Carriou, and Czischke (2018) have demonstrated in their extensive review on collaborative housing, we already know a great deal about who lives in shared housing arrangements, who would potentially benefit from it, and the various motivations behind projects or the people engaging in them. Studies about young adults, for instance, often highlight the financial and social advantages of sharing a flat (see also Verhetsel et al. 2017; Clark et al. 2018; Woo, Cho, and Kim 2019). For seniors as well, sharing could be beneficial both in financial and social respect, preventing loneliness and isolation, and providing opportunities for the distribution of care tasks and daily chores among residents (see also Bervoets, Vanneste, and Ryckewaert 2014). Other studies focus on motivations that are somewhat less pragmatic in nature, and represent more ideologically or politically informed considerations, such as ecological awareness, the struggle for gender equality or the post-capitalist transformation of urban space (e.g. Marckmann, Gram-Hanssen, and Christensen 2012; Vestbro and Horelli 2012; Chatterton 2016).

However, not all studies exclusively highlight the attractive features of shared housing. With respect to cohousing projects in particular, several recent quantitative studies have for instance emphasized their limited scope and diffusion. Compared to the sociodemographic profile of their respective countries in general, participants in cohousing projects in the USA and Denmark tend to be more affluent, more highly educated, and more often white (Williams 2008; Boyer and Leland 2018; Sanguinetti and Hibbert 2018; Jakobsen and Larsen 2019). This has led to the question whether "cohousing [will] be adopted by the mainstream or will [. . .] continue to be a niche market" (Williams 2008, 275).

Obstacles to the Diffusion of (Housing) Innovations

Williams' (2008) study signalled the start of the application of a particular conceptual framework to analyse adoption processes in the field of cohousing research (in the narrow sense), namely Rogers' (1983) diffusion of innovations theory. Rogers developed the theory as an analytical framework for mapping the plurality of factors that have an influence on the diffusion of innovations throughout society. Williams (2008) himself mainly analysed the role of the characteristics of the innovation itself. Chances of innovations getting diffused are higher, for instance, when the relative advantage is higher compared to more familiar tools or technologies, when there is a higher degree of compatibility with existing cultural values, experiences and needs, when innovations are not too complex in their application, when there is a possibility to try them out, and when they are visibly present in society. Although emphasizing the opportunities of cohousing in each of these dimensions, Williams also problematizes disbenefits and inconsistencies in the context of a strong culture of privacy and individual autonomy. Other scholars within this research tradition have focused more on what Rogers (1983) calls the "innovation-decisions process", analysing the role of knowledge about and interest in cohousing as important preconditions for its eventual uptake. Not only is knowledge quite low in general (Sanguinetti and Hibbert 2018), those who know about it are not entirely the same as those who are interested, and those who are interested are not entirely the same as those who do it (Boyer and Leland 2018; Sanguinetti and Hibbert 2018). In these studies, demographics are the main focus, although Sanguinetti and Hibbert (2018, 153) point to the need to include the "influence of cultural norms regarding privacy" in such models. Other research on attitudinal determinants of interest in shared housing shows that the importance accorded to privacy, perhaps unsurprisingly, is indeed often negatively related to the willingness to share, whether in the context of flatting among young adults (Verhetsel et al. 2017; Woo, Cho, and Kim 2019) or sharing spaces in multigenerational households (Bervoets and Heynen 2013; Gerards, Nuyts, and Vanrie 2016).

Privacy and the Meaning of Home

This links up with a long-standing theme in the literature on the "meaning of home" (e.g. Mallett 2004; Claessens, Vlerick, and De Decker 2009; Nasreen and Ruming 2020). A home is more than the material construction constituting a house or a dwelling. It denotes a complex set of social and personal meanings interwoven with these material structures. It is associated with the place one can always return to, that offers protection from a more dangerous and complex outside, where one can find rest, be free, be oneself, and have a reassuring degree of control over one's social and material surroundings. "Home", therefore, is an indispensable concept to gain a deeper understanding of potential obstacles to shared living, since it brings to the fore questions of privacy, personal boundaries and control. From a different perspective, a similar case was recently made by Nasreen and Ruming (2020), who emphasized the importance of examining practices of "home making" and "home unmaking" in shared room housing. They find that feelings of home strongly hinge on the extent to which one is capable of manipulating one's own material environment, to use it in boundary making, and having personal boundaries

secured vis-à-vis unwanted intrusion by noise, people, etc. In other words, the conceptual merits of this approach lie in its capacity to link the diffusion of housing innovations processes to the lived experience of dwellers on a societal micro-level. In the remainder of this literature overview, we will outline two ways in which privacy and personal boundaries have been conceptualized with regard to home and home making.

Firstly, the home can be observed in terms of Goffman's (1990) distinction between frontstage and backstage (see also Schwartz 1968; Rechavi 2009). Not only does the home as such constitute an important instance of the societal "backstage", allowing people to relax from efforts of self-presentation in other domains of social life. Also, it is generally accepted that some spaces within the home may (temporarily) have a more public character (e.g. the living room, the garden, the kitchen), whereas other rooms are considered to be private almost by default (e.g. bathrooms and bedrooms). The presence of others may be experienced as being too intrusive when one is not granted control over one's self-presentation (e.g. when sleeping). In the vocabulary of Belk (1988, 2010), the home can be seen as part of the "extended self", in the sense that it helps to define the boundary between self and others. Family relations, however, constitute an important prototype of sharing according to Belk (1988, 2010), which also explains why they are hardly ever explicitly discussed in the context of shared living (Clark et al. 2018). The house, therefore, not only provides a backstage for individuals, but also for the family, in that it often constitutes a "symbolic body for the family" (Belk 1988, 152).

Secondly, some scholars relate the concept of privacy to Giddens' notion of ontological security (Saunders 1989; Dupuis and Thorns 1998; Easthope et al. 2015; Nasreen and Ruming 2020). Ontological security denotes "the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of their social and material environments. Basic to a feeling of ontological security is a sense of the reliability of persons and things." (Giddens, as quoted in Easthope et al. 2015, 153) Two aspects are particularly noteworthy about this concept: the importance of routine activities, and the importance of control. Through routines, a stable relationship with the world is built, the experience of which in turn induces the expectation that people and things will be familiar, allowing one to "go on" with one's daily life. Control, on the other hand, refers to the conditions of access to this state. Famously, Saunders (1989) has pointed to homeownership as an important condition of ontological security, firmly tying feelings of subjective wellbeing to the laws of individual property. To Easthope et al. (2015), however, tenure is but one of the possible means of control over the dwelling, next to control over the use of spaces and the power to make decisions regarding the dwelling (see also Nasreen and Ruming 2020).

The broader issue of control over space, routines and decisions is a recurring theme in empirical studies that have focused on the experiences of (ex-)residents of shared living arrangements or cohousing projects (e.g. Kenyon and Heath 2001; Williams 2008; Easthope et al. 2015; Clark et al. 2018; Nasreen and Ruming 2020). Respondents in such studies openly speak about the difficulties in the process of finding the right balance between privacy and communal living, between autonomy and dependency, and of the conflicts ensuing from it. Common types of conflict reported in shared living among young adults, for example, revolve around cleanliness, chores and the problem of free-loading (Clark et al. 2018). Similar obstacles, however, emerge in studies that focus on people who neither necessarily have any experience with shared living nor have the

immediate intention to make that choice (Bervoets and Heynen 2013; Bervoets, Vanneste, and Ryckewaert 2014; Green and McCarthy 2015; GfK Belgium 2017). The wish to remain independent, to be able to continue one's own rhythm of life, and fear of conflict are all reasons mentioned for not seriously considering sharing (part of) one's house. Vulnerable groups in housing need still have additional reasons to be wary of other people's habits and decisions; for them, the reluctance to share might also be out of self-protection and safety reasons (Green and McCarthy 2015; Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar 2019; Nasreen and Ruming 2020).

Methods

The data for this study were collected in the context of a broader interdisciplinary research project on housing, the increasingly dynamic nature of contemporary family life, and alternative housing solutions. A qualitative research design was used. In order to gain a detailed understanding of people's individual experiences and opinions about home and housing, we decided to gather data through face-to-face in-depth interviews. Since gender (male/female), age differences (20–35yo/36-55yo/56-80yo), family type (families with children, couples and singles without children, single parent families, reconstituted families) and socio-economic background (financially vulnerable/not financially vulnerable) were believed to potentially impact individual experiences and opinions on the matter, a quota sample was designed, so as to make sure that various subgroups along these axes were incorporated in the sample for analysis.

Respondents were recruited through personal networks of students, a process which was simultaneously directed and monitored by the imperatives of the quota sample, so that the various strata would be present in the sample (see below for information on the final respondent group). After a primary reading, the data for this sample of 70 respondents were considered saturated with regard to the obstacles to shared housing; basic arguments about obstacles were rehearsed multiple times, by respondents with various profiles.

Data collection mainly focused on the province of Limburg, situated in the Eastern part of Flanders. Some specific characteristics of the spatial outlay of the province have informed our focus on this area for sampling purposes. When aiming to have an in-depth insight into the obstacles to shared housing more in particular, these characteristics are expected to be of added value. Limburg has a population of 872.923[1] inhabitants, representing 13.3% of the Flemish population. With 360 inhabitants per square kilometre, population density is substantially below the Flemish average of 485 inhabitants per square kilometre. The two largest urban centres in Limburg, Hasselt and Genk, have a population of 77.709 and 66.159 inhabitants respectively. In terms of the current housing stock, the share of single family houses is higher in Limburg (74.1%) than in Flanders as a whole (68.7%). In the stock of single family houses, detached housing is significantly more present in Limburg (57.3%) than in the whole of Flanders (41.3%).

A total of 70 persons were eventually interviewed in October and November 2018, dispersed throughout the province. A detailed description of the realized sample in terms of its socio-demographic composition is provided in Table 1.

The interviews were held using a semi-structured questionnaire, including topics such as past and current housing situation, future housing plans, attitudes towards specific

Table 1. Respondent characteristics.

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	21	30.0%
	Female	49	70.0%
Age	18–34yo	37	52.9%
	35–54yo	25	35.7%
	55–80yo	8	11.4%
Education	No higher education	33	52.9%
	Higher education	37	47.1%
Household type	Single person household	7	10.0%
	Single parent household	13	18.6%
	Couple without children	13	18.6%
	Couple with children (not including reconstituted families)	24	34.3%
	Reconstituted family	10	14.3%
	Other	3	4.3%
Tenure type	Owner	43	61.4%
	Private renter	12	17.1%
	Social renter	7	10.0%
	Free of charge	8	11.4%

types of alternative housing forms (including cohousing), and willingness to share specific areas of the house with people other than direct family members. All interviews were transcribed and subsequently submitted to a thematic coding analysis.

Findings

Relevance

Out of the 70 participants in our study, only a minority showed actual interest in some form of shared living. With regard to cohousing in particular, for instance, 10 respondents reported they would consider it, albeit very conditionally in most cases. It is not so much that respondents did not see the benefits, but there were obstacles that put more weight into the balance. Quite often, respondents referred to some objective aspect of their life circumstances to explain why it would not apply to them. The following quote contains a combination of elements, each brought up separately by other respondents as well:

> Probably it will never happen, but I think it's an interesting form. I think if I were any younger, I would have been more interested [. . .]. I think that if you are together with several young families, than financially, ecologically . . . You have much more possibilities than when you start to build a house by yourself, and when you're younger it's more difficult financially than when you're older, and maybe you see things differently. (R17, man, 45yo)

Although sympathetic to the idea of cohousing, this respondent shows reluctancy because he links it with a younger age group, a group which can also benefit from creative housing solutions given their limited financial resources. This can be taken to mean two different things, both of which are confirmed by statements in other interviews. First, it may mean that age, or one's current life phase more in general, constitutes legitimate ground for not having to seriously consider housing alternatives for oneself (e.g. R8, woman, 47yo; R33, woman, 47yo). Homeownership plays a role for some: one already has a house one is satisfied with (R4, woman, 74yo) or one would dread the prospect of having to go through cumbersome administrative processes again (R17, man, 45yo). Secondly, and relatedly, it

alludes to the existence of a normative housing career embedded in age categories or life cycle stages. What constitutes an appropriate home is viewed as age-specific (see also Meeus and De Decker 2015), and this in turn impacts to what extent shared spaces can justifiably be part of one's own "home".

This rationalization in terms of "normal" age boundaries for shared housing solutions surfaces in a number of other ways as well. Apart from clear benefits for a younger generation, it is also hailed as a potentially valuable means to tackle loneliness in old age (R17, man, 45yo), or to provide practical support in the face of decreasing physical self-reliance. Like in the case of limited financial resourcefulness, however, sharing appears as a choice on a "needs must" basis, as something you would resort to when life does not leave you much other options (yet):

> Well, if I wouldn't be sufficiently self-reliant anymore, or if I wouldn't be sufficiently financially resourceful anymore, then it could be a solution, and the two groups can actually help each other. Because if you're not financially resourceful and you get involved in such a project with a good mix of people, being a young person wanting to save some money, you can help people that are not sufficiently self-reliant anymore. And if costs are divided well, then you can get into such a project later on in life when you become less self-reliant, and give a chance to people who are less financially resourceful. (R24, man, 50yo)

Furthermore, age-related family situations are mentioned. Having a partner or, even more so, having children is sometimes seen as incompatible with shared housing. This is not only because there is a fear of losing part of the intimate family experience (see below), but also because there is a feeling that life will become too complicated once there are family obligations. "I think it's all OK when you're single and you don't have any obligations, but from the moment you have a partner . . . maybe that would still be OK, but when you have children, it's not an option anymore." (R6, woman, 35yo) The complexity of the household required her to do things whenever she was able to, without having to take into account schedules or rules about using the laundry room. "I wouldn't want it for myself, as a student maybe, but now with my family . . . I don't live according to a fixed schedule." The persistent association with single status or (post-)student life, a life without pressing responsibilities, reinforces the idea that shared housing is normally or preferably a temporary thing (e.g. Bervoets, Vanneste, and Ryckewaert 2014; Green and McCarthy 2015). This may be due, at least in part, to the specific cultural cues one actually uses to give meaning to shared housing. When asked about their familiarity with the idea of cohousing, for example, some respondents took their own definitions automatically in the direction of student life: "Is it like living together with someone else? And share everything? A bit like a student home?" (R46, woman, 22yo) "Yes, when friends all buy a house together, but it more often occurs in Leuven [a university town near Brussels] I think, no?" (R6, woman, 35yo) In other words, the strong cultural embeddedness of very specific types of shared housing, such as student homes in the Belgian context, combined with a relative lack of knowledge about (or relative lack of visibility of) other types of shared housing, colours perceptions about "ideal" target audiences for shared housing more in general.

Not all relevance issues were explicitly linked to age or life cycle stages, however. For instance, a young man (R26, man, 24yo) pointed to the lack of financial problems as a reason in and of itself for not having to be interested in shared housing at the moment.

The perception of one's place of residence can play a role as well. More in particular, cohousing carries associations with an urban context. "I would never do it, I would not like it at all. But I think in cities, where building plots are scarce, you can really cut costs by doing it." (R2, woman, 44yo) Lack of space was repeatedly mentioned as an urban problem, implying that policy measures or development should focus on urban areas and not on rural communities: "It's more something for cities, but not for . . . I believe everyone needs his own space and his own things." (R20, woman, 39yo)

In what follows, we will discuss in more detail what it is exactly about the idea of sharing space that people find problematic. There are three factors in particular which for many respondents tilt the balance unequivocally towards the disadvantages of shared living: privacy issues, routine activities and fear of conflict.

Privacy

By far the most frequently mentioned obstacle to sharing living space is the prospect of having to give up "privacy". Although the privacy argument might seem self-explanatory, it came up in quite different meaning contexts. In all of the meanings, however, the immediate presence of other people was described as potentially disturbing in some respect.

One obvious consequence of the presence of other people is that it becomes busier around the house, noisier, potentially threatening the feeling of quietness and peace of mind that is often associated with home. "I like to be alone. You know, just by myself. Not too many people around me. Just enjoy, you know." (R7, woman, 51yo) This enjoyment is often contrasted with the world of work, and its intensity of social contacts and interactions:

> I think when you're at home, you like to have some peace. When I return home from work, I very much like to be at ease. I think that's possible when you're by yourself, when your children are present as well, family also, but with strange people . . . (R2, woman, 44yo)

Here and in similar comments (e.g. R12, man, 26yo; R15, man, 52yo), returning home means entering a space where one can be at ease and be oneself, where no "strangers" are present. Shared housing forms, for many interviewees, entail the risk of losing (part of) the Goffmanian backstage, and, thereby, crucial opportunities to relax from social contacts and obligations. The presence of strangers brings extra work with regard to self-presentation; the "peace of mind" associated with home depends on opportunities to relax from such efforts.

In line with Goffman's (1990) observations (see also Rechavi 2009), various types of rooms or home spaces are also differentially positioned with regard to this frontstage/backstage logic. Especially when aspects of bodily care are concerned, there is a great deal of reluctancy, not only in view of keeping preparations for public performance backstage, but also to protect oneself (or one's family members) from the potentially indiscrete looks of strangers. In that respect, most respondents declared bedrooms and bathrooms off limits. Laundry rooms as well can be too intimate to share: "[. . .] it's a piece of your private life you put on display for other people to see, and I don't like that." (R40, woman, 42yo) Being able to relax from self-presentation, of course, is also important in rooms or spaces

that are specifically used for leisure and relaxation purposes, such as gardens (e.g. R17, man, 45yo) and living rooms. Being able to let one's guard down is a crucial reason for some respondents to strictly limit access to such spaces:

> For me, the living room is the moment [sic] when I can sink into the couch in my pyjamas without having to worry about how I look like. Watching television under a blanket . . . this is one of the rooms where I really need my privacy. (R6, woman, 35yo; see also R22, woman, 48yo)

The degree of "strangeness" of others depends on whether or not frontstage behaviour is warranted. It is clear from earlier comments (R2), for example, that this state of privacy can also be attained in the presence of very specific others, mostly family members. This echoes Belk's (1988) idea that family can be seen as part of an extended self, and that home, in turn, can constitute a symbolic body for the family. Throughout the interviews, this was illustrated in a number of other ways as well. Firstly, some fear it would become more difficult to reserve spaces and occasions exclusively for family quality time. "There are moments you want to be alone with your family, and then you can't just say the garden is ours, we are all alone here, that would be inappropriate." (R22, woman, 48yo) Similar comments were made about living rooms and kitchens (e.g. R28, woman, 22yo; R31, man, 53yo). Secondly, family privacy is reported to be needed in case of discussions on family matters or arguments between family members (R19, woman, 34yo; R55, woman, 23yo). One fears not being able to "be oneself" (R55) when having to put too much effort into controlling the image that "strangers" may have of internal family affairs. Viewed from this perspective, a home should provide ample space where such family interaction can take place freely, and where a sufficient degree of discretion can be guaranteed. This means retaining exclusive access to a proper family living room, a private garden and/or a family kitchen, depending on the customs of the family in question.

Routines

Another category of reasons why people don't consider shared living to be a feasible option has to do with routines. It is not only about the sheer presence of strangers, but also about how they do things, and how this impacts the way I (or we) do things. All types of rooms are to some extent affected by and constitute an inherent part of day-to-day routines. Whereas the preferred exclusivity of bedrooms, bathrooms, living rooms and gardens to a great extent derives from concerns with securing a "backstage" space, concerns with routines easily translate into a reluctancy to share more functional spaces as well. There are two types of concerns with routines we would like to consider here: what we would term "first order concerns" (1), or concerns about the intersection of routines in terms of time and space, and "second order concerns" (2), concerns about the organization of such routines.

1) First order concerns with regard to routines revolve around the more or less direct incompatibility of routines of different people. Some respondents, for example, expressed the concern that they would not be able to watch their preferred television programmes when having to share a living room, or that they would feel bad forcing their own preferences on someone else (e.g. R11, man, 68yo). Intersecting routines are also

expected to be particularly annoying with regard to kitchen and bathroom use, causing fears of bathrooms being overburdened (R9, man, 22yo) and kitchens with chaotic circulation of residents (R16, man, 49yo). This impacts routines in a spatial sense as well, leading to worries about orderliness and cleanliness standards, particularly in bathroom and kitchen areas. For some, this type of concern is strong enough to prefer a shared living room over a shared kitchen (e.g. R27, man, 34yo). The worry to be confronted with other people's spatial habits could go in two directions: either orderliness standards could be too low (as is the case for R27), or they could be too high in the sense that co-residents expect you to clean up right away (R7, woman, 51yo). By being used, spaces are left with imprints of the presence of others, affecting one's own feeling of orientation. Apart from "less space for my own stuff" (R35, woman, 52yo), this might entail the risk of things being misplaced, things getting lost (R16, man, 49yo) or things getting damaged. For that reason, some would not be happy to share even a garage, storage space, or laundry room, despite the fact that they are mostly meant for putting stuff.

2) Second order concerns, rather than flowing from direct disturbances caused by the routines of others, have to do with a loss of autonomy in the organization of one's own routines. Above, we already quoted the woman (R6) who would not be prepared to compromise on her laundry habits. Schedules would be an effective way to organize routines of different people or households, but would, in her eyes, also hamper the flexibility needed to meet the pressing demands of a busy household. Organizational autonomy is valued because it is a guarantee for controlling the efficacy of one's own routines: "I don't like others to move my stuff around. I kind of have my own . . . I am not the kind of person that would easily adapt to someone else." (R20, woman, 39yo) "The laundry room is my area, because I'm using it practically every day. It would be chaos when someone else would use it." (R37, woman, 39yo) Such comments strongly attest to the idea that being able to control one's routines is considered to be an important precondition of feeling at home somewhere and gaining a sense of ontological security (Easthope et al. 2015; Nasreen and Ruming 2020).

Fear of Conflict

Given some of the above comments, it is not surprising that many respondents are wary of sharing living space mainly because they fear conflicts with co-residents. The language used sometimes refers to a kind of inescapability, of a law-like mechanism automatically resulting in conflict: "For a short period of time, it will work just fine, but in the long run, I foresee nothing but problems." (R25, woman, 36yo) A home, for many interviewees, should be kept free of problems, arguments, conflicts or tensions as much as possible. Any factor that would add to such an environment should be avoided, because it would undermine the feeling of ease and peace of mind that a home symbolizes. There are several perceived sources of conflict.

The first source of conflict are straightforward differences in opinion. Different people have different views and preferences, which can make decision processes difficult and cumbersome. "Take ten residents, you'll have ten opinions. [. . .] Ten captains on a ship: that doesn't work." (R16, man, 49yo)

A second potential source of conflict has been suggested already in the previous paragraph: discrepancies in routines can easily result in unsurmountable problems,

both with regard to temporal intersections and with regard to the use of space and orderliness standards. As described by this respondent, not only do intersecting habits potentially lead to personal frustrations, but also to clashes between co-residents:

> [E]veryone has a different biorhythm, a different time of arriving and leaving, you name it. I think it's a nice story on paper, but if it really was such a success story, we would all be living together by now, and sharing costs. But because everyone likes to have his own privacy and has his own way of doing things, it is bound to clash. (R16, man, 49yo)

A third potential source of conflict are discussions about the written or unwritten rules of cohabitation, especially the rules pertaining to a fair division of tasks and responsibilities. There's always a risk of some residents not taking their responsibilities. "A disadvantage [is] that everyone has to put in an equal amount of time. If not, people will start to accuse each other of not wanting to cooperate." (R25, woman, 36yo) For some respondents, this would also complicate matters when they would have to share housing with people who are financially less well off; they fear it would increase the likeliness that problems or difficulties regarding financial contributions arise along the way. Assuming responsibilities is difficult, however, when the rules themselves are not clear:

> You can never divide it entirely fairly. Question is: does it have to be? But you have so many children, six and seven years old, and others have children of 20 years old, and you have to divide the food, you know those teenagers can eat until you're poor so to speak. Where do you draw the line? Very difficult. (R16, man, 49yo)

Some situations are indeed perceived to be underdefined in terms of what constitutes a fair contribution, leaving little clues as to how to solve them in a way that is acceptable for everyone involved. This relates to Rogers' (1983) (and Williams' [2008]) point that innovations that are complex in their application, will be less likely to diffuse easily. Even when people showed openness to or very concrete interest in the idea of cohousing, unclarities about rules and responsibilities would prevent them to pursue their interests. One woman, for instance, explains how she was left with important questions after attending a local information meeting on cohousing:

> I had the impression that things were presented very beautifully, but some questions were left unanswered. For instance: what if one of my children would damage common property, how would it be solved? (R25, woman, 36yo)

A fourth source of conflict, finally, are differences between personalities. Some personalities simply do not match, or are believed to be too difficult to make things work. Although many respondents believed that clear agreements are able to prevent a good deal of conflict, there is still the lingering uncertainty about people's characters. "In every cohousing project, there will always be a peacock, let's be honest, someone that thinks he knows better, which will lead to conflict. Even when you agree upon common rules, then there will still be conflict." (R16, man, 49yo) Other respondents equally fear the one antisocial person that will spoil it (R17, man, 49yo), the people that meddle in someone else's business (R20, woman, 39yo) or the one "that always complains about 'this is not good, that is not good'" (R23, man, 51yo).

Keeping a safe distance to strangers is seen as a way to avoid serious issues: "You don't know what they are like, what their values and norms are. They can be annoying people, bad people, or they might turn out to be good people." (R35, woman, 50yo) In a worst case

scenario, as a young ex-homeless man explains, they will "pull you back" (R47, man, 25yo) and ruin your life. Therefore, most respondents would also prefer to share living arrangements with people who they already know sufficiently well, like family or friends. However, some would opt for a different strategy and would avoid sharing with friends or family, mainly because they fear the detrimental effects of conflicts on close relationships (R10, man, 80yo; R20, woman, 39yo).

These findings are in line with previous studies that highlight some of the "bad experiences" of ex-residents in shared housing contexts (e.g. Kenyon and Heath 2001; Clark et al. 2018; Nasreen and Ruming 2020) as well as the fears voiced by "non-adopters" when probed about their views on shared housing solutions (Bervoets and Heynen 2013; Bervoets, Vanneste, and Ryckewaert 2014; Green and McCarthy 2015; GfK Belgium 2017). From the point of view of the meaning of home, we can add, the prospect of conflict or power imbalances paints a picture of an environment fraught with social friction and permanent unease (see also Nasreen and Ruming 2020). It is perceived to cause disruptions in the relationship between self and home, potentially putting strain on personal wellbeing.

Contrast Foils: Physical Boundaries and Private Property

Throughout the interviews, two main principles emerged that consistently functioned as a contrast foil against which many of the disadvantages of shared housing were evaluated. The first one is the principle of strong physical boundaries. Boundaries prevent unwanted things from intruding, whether it be noise, weeds, or indiscrete looks. A feeling of "being at ease" results from having your private space fenced off effectively. "It's very quiet here. It's all very well fenced off. Our neighbours are no nuisance to us. Delightful!" (R6, woman, 35yo) "Everything is fenced off outside, and the children can do whatever they want without being watched." (R20, woman, 39yo) The same function can be fulfilled by a buffer zone, marking a reasonable distance to property boundaries or next door neighbours. This is manifested in the discourse surrounding the preference for a spacious (detached) housing style. "You'll have more freedom, more privacy [than in a terraced house]" (R18, woman, 23yo).

Secondly, there is the principle of private property, which is believed to constitute an effective means for protecting autonomous decision making and for avoiding conflicts ensuing from problematic decisions and routines of others. "Just leave me by myself, I'll invite friends when I want to. I work every day for that, for me to be able to be by myself. [. . .] I would rather work a week longer and have my own thing." (R16, man, 49yo) Here, the idea is hailed that home is something that can be bought, that property allows you to maximize control of (access to) the home, and, at the same time, to minimize disruption of this sense of "being by yourself". A very similar remark was made by a different man. To be able to own something increases the opportunity to prevent problems, problems that potentially disrupt the home in terms of the harmonious relationship between self and environment:

> I've bought a piece [of land] from my neighbours, to be able to rest easy. Because they weren't doing anything about it. It was full of poison ivy and thistles, and the seeds always blew into my garden, and I constantly needed to spray [herbicides]. And because they really didn't do anything about it, I just bought it. (R1, man, 63yo)

This comment makes clear that (home)ownership still provides an important cultural backdrop against which new and alternative ideas of home are evaluated. Ownership in terms of tenure may not represent the pinnacle of ontological security in any normative sense, as argued by Saunders (1989), but it definitely circulates as an important cultural and political standard (De Decker 2011; Meeus and De Decker 2015).

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to give an in-depth account of the various obstacles people see to share (part of) their living environment. If shared housing constitutes part of the answer to important current and future challenges with regard to housing, it is of paramount importance to gain an insight into the obstacles seen by "non-adopters". Our main aim has been to fill this gap in the literature, as most existing studies deal with disadvantages or problems experienced by (ex-)residents of shared housing itself, as testified by the reviews by Clark et al. (2018) and Lang, Carriou, and Czischke (2018).

Theoretically, we have made a case for extending the diffusion of innovations perspective (Rogers 1983; Williams 2008; Boyer and Leland 2018; Sanguinetti and Hibbert 2018) with a meaning of home perspective (e.g. Mallett 2004; Claessens, Vlerick, and De Decker 2009). The potential merits of this theoretical perspective for research on shared housing in general has been highlighted in recent scholarly work on the matter (Easthope et al. 2015; Nasreen and Ruming 2020). Elaborating on these contributions, we have emphasized its central role for studying obstacles to the diffusion of shared housing solutions, given its focus on people's lived experience of home and cultural ideals about home. The diffusion of innovations perspective identifies a number of macro-societal factors influencing the take-up and institutionalization of innovations. With regard to housing innovations, a meaning of home perspective, however, allows to further flesh out these factors systematically from the point of view of the "micro-world" of individuals. And if public support for shared or collective housing forms (in the broad sense of the term) is to be increased, this micro-perspective of non-adopters needs special attention.

A first important finding pertains to the perceived limited relevance of shared housing, justified or rationalized in terms of assumptions about "normal" housing careers. There are strong cultural scripts for shared housing for young adults and students, but still much less so for families with children, or for rural communities. This is in line with studies that have emphasized the persistent dominance of aspirations tied to the classical housing ladder, both in Flanders (Meeus and De Decker 2015) and elsewhere (e.g. Green and McCarthy 2015; Clark et al. 2018). Although Flemish policy measures have primarily focused on reducing legal obstacles (by way of creating a testing environment), these findings suggest it is of paramount importance to support the development and diffusion of cultural examples for less obvious target groups as well. These efforts are in fact already part of the planning in the context of the Vision 2050 of the Flemish government (Wonen Vlaanderen 2017), but should indeed be sustained, if collective housing solutions are to receive broad public support as part of this shift towards "a smart way of living".

Secondly, and relatedly, an important factor in people's reservations about shared housing forms may be the strong norm of homeownership, combined with the dominance of a (semi-)detached housing style. Flanders, like Belgium more in general, is a homeowner society, with 71.6% homeowners (Heylen and Vanderstraeten 2019), and past government policies have contributed heavily to this situation (De Decker 2011; Bervoets and Heynen 2013; Meeus and De Decker 2015). In some interviews, ownership in terms of individual property is indeed explicitly mentioned as a crucial precondition for creating an ontologically secure environment (see also Saunders 1989; Easthope et al. 2015). Although further research is needed to substantiate these findings, deviations from this norm might be perceived as suboptimal in the quest for a "proper" home. Tenure-neutral housing policies, therefore, could contribute to a broader public support base for shared housing in the long run, in a more indirect manner.

Thirdly, with regard to privacy, our results seem to confirm the findings of previous research that there is a difference with regard to the level of privacy needed for various types of spaces, with bedrooms and bathrooms being off limits, with living rooms and kitchens (and gardens) being important to safeguard as backstage spaces (Goffman 1990) for relaxing and intimate conversation, and the more functional rooms constituting much less of an issue (Gerards, Nuyts, and Vanrie 2016; GfK Belgium 2017; Heylen and Vanderstraeten 2019). However, this hierarchy in the need for personal space does not apply to everyone invariably. While some would indeed mainly fear the idea of not being able to regulate when or where to enter into a backstage mode, others rather dread the idea of losing control of one's routines in terms of access to spaces and use of objects or facilities. Further research is certainly required to analyse these preference patterns more in detail. Our results, however, urge policy makers, planners, architects and developers to take account of this ostensible plurality of obstacles and preferences, and to diversify designs, concepts, project plans or marketing campaigns accordingly.

Fourthly and lastly, rehearsing the idea of home as a friction-free environment (see also Bervoets, Vanneste, and Ryckewaert 2014; Easthope et al. 2015; Green and McCarthy 2015; Woo, Cho, and Kim 2019; Nasreen and Ruming 2020), many respondents dread both the conflicts that would ensue from shared housing and the complexity to resolve them. Therefore, it remains crucial for policy makers and advocates of shared housing to take seriously people's fear of conflicts, whether they are instigated by a lack of knowledge about the right rules, or about ways to disentangle the knot when things go wrong. Reducing legal obstacles may be part of the answer, but it seems crucial as well to initiate (or stimulate) clear communication about rules and about ways to prevent or resolve conflicts in various types of shared living arrangements. In any attempt to strengthen public support, consideration should therefore also be given to models or examples that allow to relieve the group of co-residents in terms of conflict management.

Note

1. Population statistics are based on National Registry data for 2018, housing stock statistics on Land Registry data for the same year (Limburg in cijfers 2019).

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