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Landlords' attitudes towards age-friendly adaptations: Implications for the well-being of older private renters

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Abstract: A large share of private rental housing in Flanders, Belgium, is unsuitable for older people who want to age in place, which can negatively affect their well-being. Since it is often unclear what changes tenants are allowed to make, this study examines landlords' attitudes toward age-friendly housing adaptations and their impact on the tenant's well-being through the self-determination theory. Using student-designed adaptations, exploratory interviews were conducted with five landlords. Our findings reveal landlords' negative attitudes frequently stem from the desire to protect their own well-being by avoiding potential hassle and property damage. However, this can negatively impact tenants' feeling of autonomy and competence. Therefore, this research underscores that to design impactful, age-friendly adaptations, it's crucial to consider the well-being of both the tenant and the landlord. A focus on both may help create rental housing settings in which aging in place becomes a more realistic and sustainable option.

Keywords: well-being, ageing in place, age-friendly design, landlord-tenant dilemma

1. Introduction

1.1 *Ageing in place as an older private tenant in a home-owning society: the case of Flanders*

Since the end of the 19th century, homeownership has been stimulated in Flanders, Belgium, resulting in a primarily home-owning society where renting is a less desirable option (Herbers & Mulder, 2017; Meeus & De Decker, 2015). In 2023, 71% of Flanders' population owns their home, 23% is a private tenant and 5% is a social tenant (de Smalen & Van den Broeck, 2025). Private tenants are often people with a weak socio-economic position, starters who see renting as a temporary situation on the way to homeownership and older people who have moved to a dwelling more accustomed to their needs (Le Roy et al., 2008).



And yet, 74% of people aged 65 and over are still homeowners because of the institutionalization of stable homeownership and the governments strong encouragement for older people to ‘age in place’ (Meeus & De Decker, 2015; Smetcoren, 2016; de Smalen & Van den Broeck, 2025; Volckaert & De Decker, 2019). ‘Ageing in place’ can be defined as the opportunity for older people to remain in their home for as long as possible without having to move to a long-term care facility (Grimmer et al., 2015). However, it is not a ‘one size fits all’ approach (Smetcoren, 2016; Volckaert, 2022). Volckaert (2022) states that the concept of ‘ageing in place’ is based on an ideal older person and neighbourhood, undone of all context. In reality, people with different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, physical abilities and mental health situations are entering old age, displaying different housing expectations and needs (Pani-Harriman et al., 2020; Phlix, 2022; Smetcoren, 2016; Smetcoren et al., 2024; Volckaert, 2022; Vos et al., 2020). Additionally, they live in various environments, with some dwellings and neighbourhoods more fit to age in place than others (Smetcoren et al., 2024; Volckaert, 2022). In Flanders only 20% of the private rental housing stock is deemed fit to age in place (de Smalen & Van den Broeck, 2025). Living in an environment that fits one’s changing needs appears to be a crucial element of well-being in very old age (Golant, 2012; Iwarsson, 2005; Näsman et al., 2022). With 18% of people aged 65 and over being a private tenant, the importance of age-friendly adaptations in the private rental sector arises. However, tenants are highly dependent on their landlords’ willingness to allow alterations (Easthope, 2014; Rolfe et al. 2023). Hence, the aim of this research is twofold, first to examine landlords’ attitudes towards age-friendly housing adaptations and second to explore their implications for the well-being of the tenant through the lens of the self-determination theory.

1.2 Focus on policy: the Flemish rental regulations

Recently, to help older adults who rent on the private rental market to age in place, the Flemish government started handing out a tenant allowance to private renters aged 65 and above with a tenancy of at least three years to make their dwelling more age-friendly (Agentschap Wonen in Vlaanderen, 2024). This allowance covers two types of age-friendly adaptations as presented in Table 1: technical installations/tools and renovations to improve the accessibility of the dwelling. However, regulations on changes and improvements to the rental property are unclear, which can make these age-friendly adaptations encouraged by the government hard to execute and can become grounds for a landlord-tenant dispute (Ástmarsson et al., 2013). De Vlaamse huurdersbonden (Flemish tenants’ associations) (2020) clarify that under the common tenancy law, in case nothing about possible changes and improvements is mentioned in the rental agreement, tenants are allowed to execute alterations as long as they don’t change the form of the dwelling (e.g., removing or adding walls). Therefore, making structural alterations as a tenant is only possible with the landlord’s written permission. While non-removable alterations (e.g., installing a new bathroom) may not affect the property’s fundamental structure, De Vlaamse huurdersbonden (2020) state that the owner’s written permission is still necessary. According to the common tenancy law, tenants can make other alterations without permission, but the landlord can demand to restore the property at the end of the lease unless the alterations bring an objectively added value (De Vlaamse huurdersbonden, 2020). Hence, asking for written permission is still recommended to avoid conflict at the end of the lease. Consequently, since most of the adaptations encouraged by the government are

either structural or non-removable alterations (as shown in Table 1), the landlord's permission is necessary for older adults who want to adapt their rental dwelling to be able to age in place.

Table 1. Overview of age-friendly adaptations covered by the tenant allowance (based on Agentschap Wonen in Vlaanderen, 2024)

| | |
|---|---|
| Technical installations/tools | Installing a bathroom (with at least a shower or a sink) adapted to a person aged over 65 |
| | Installing an adapted toilet and/or a second toilet on a different floor |
| | Installing a stair chair lift or wheelchair elevator |
| | Installing fixed mechanical aids for mobility, anchored in the home |
| | Installing handles and support equipment in sanitary rooms |
| | Automating the existing entrance door, garage door or roller shutters |
| Renovations to improve the accessibility of the dwelling | Making the dwelling accessible via slopes, widening the entrance door (with or without automatic operation) and removing obstructive access barriers |
| | Creating sufficient space in the dwelling by adjusting the corridor width and doorways or enlarging/functionally redesigning living areas or sanitary facilities |
| | Bridging the height difference between floors by installing safely walkable stairs |
| | Eliminating level differences on the living floor of the home by raising or lowering floors |
| | Renovation and furnishing to create a residential unit in the home in which the older person can live independently and separately (e.g. living only on the ground floor) |

1.3 The impact of the landlord-tenant dilemma on older tenants' well-being according to the self-determination theory

The landlord-tenant dilemma arises when the interests of landlords and tenants misalign (Ástmarsson et al., 2013). Volckaert & De Decker (2019) uncovered that only a minority of the older private renters they interviewed were satisfied with their relationship with the landlord. Many found this relationship impersonal and thought their landlord placed his financial gain above the tenant's well-being. Some landlords not only refused to make alterations themselves, but they also refused to let tenants, who want to pay for it themselves, make alterations. This can possibly be explained by the large number of landlords in Flanders (71%) who only rent out one property (de Smalen & Van den Broeck, 2025). Martin et al. (2018) and Rolfe et al. (2023) found that small-scale landlords often lack the resources and skills for property management and do not plan on investing in several properties long-term. This can have a significant impact on older adults' well-being (McMahan & Estes, 2012), especially since older tenants' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness can be compromised. Deci & Ryan (2011) and Lataster et al. (2022) state that individuals whose three basic psychological needs are satisfied will likely experience healthy development and well-being throughout life. The inability to make autonomous choices regarding one's dwelling influences an older person's feeling of competence since the combination of functional decline and an unadapted dwelling can lead to environmental barriers, which causes problems with the person-environment fit (Iwarsson, 2005). Additionally, when tenants are prevented from

renovating a place to one's liking, the need for relatedness as well as a person's sense of home may also be depleted (Bate, 2021; Easthope, 2014; Rofle et al., 2023; Soaita & McKee, 2019; Van Steenwinkel et al., 2012). This illustrates that the self-determination theory of Deci & Ryan (2008) forms a clear link with the subjective well-being of older private renters, with the landlord-tenant dilemma being the most significant influential factor on their basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence. As a result, the need to uncover landlords' opinions on age-friendly adaptations arises, as adaptations designed through an 'age-friendly design lens' can positively affect older private renters' experiences (McGinley et al., 2022).

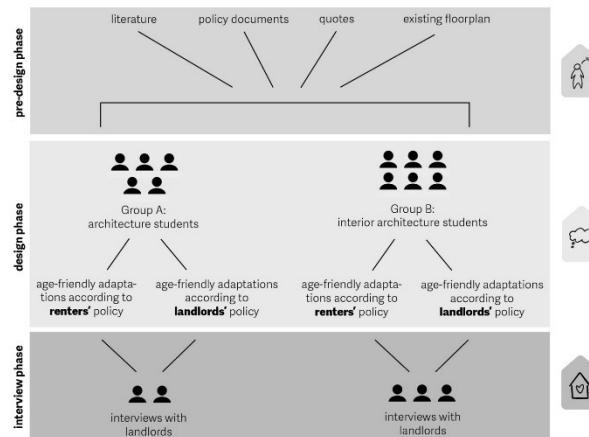


Figure 1 Three phases of the research project: pre-design phase, design phase and interview phase

2. Methods

This exploratory study has been embedded within a semestrial course for second-year bachelor (interior) architecture students with two main research questions: “How can you design age-friendly design solutions as an (interior) architect hired by an older tenant on the private rental market?” and “How can you design age-friendly design solutions as an (interior) architect hired by a landlord on the private rental market?”. By imbedding the study within this course, we aimed to gather information on landlords' attitudes on a variety of age-friendly design adaptations. The course contained of three phases, as seen in Figure 1, which are explained below.

2.1 Pre-design phase

In the pre-design phase, students received various forms of input to understand the target audience better and further nurture what Buse et al. (2017) call the ‘empathic process’. The students received four types of input: scientific literature (e.g., Easthope, 2014; Volckaert & De Decker, 2019; etc.), policy documents on the Flemish private rental market, quotes from older Flemish private tenants (from an earlier related research project) and an existing floor plan of a rental housing setting to redesign.

2.2 Design phase

The students received a neutral floorplan of a standard one-bedroom apartment which they needed to redesign. For several weeks, each group was guided by the first author to bring

together the input they processed during the pre-design phase into two new versions of the plan: one from the tenant's perspective and one from the landlord's perspective. Figure 2 shows the designs of both groups from the tenant's perspective, while Figure 3 shows the designs of both groups from the landlord's perspective. In both versions, all suggested alterations are shown in red on the floorplan and illustrated in an easily understandable manner (e.g., using 3D images as seen in the results section) since the respondents have no background knowledge of the property. The differences between both redesigned versions are the following: When designing age-friendly adaptations executed by the tenant, no structural changes, but some non-removable alterations, requiring approval from the landlord, have been suggested (e.g., custom furniture, painting kitchen cabinets). When designing age-friendly adaptations executed by the landlord, structural changes (e.g., removing walls) and non-removable changes to the dwelling (e.g., built-in handles) were suggested in the students' designs.

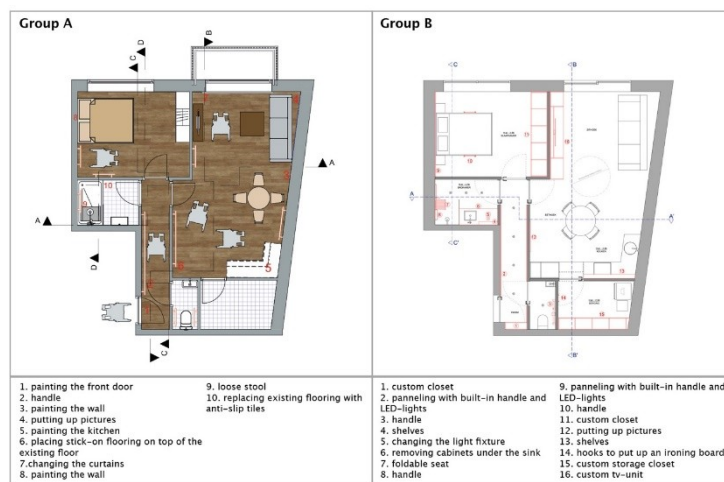


Figure 2 Students' designs of age-friendly adaptations from the tenant's perspective

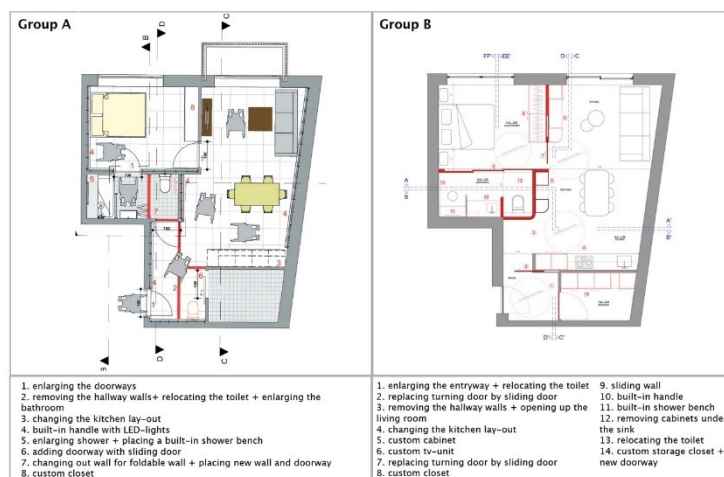


Figure 3 Students' designs of age-friendly adaptations from to the landlord's perspective

2.3 Interview phase

In total, the two groups of students interviewed five landlords (see Table 2) that rent out at least one dwelling on the private rental market that is listed as the tenant’s main residence (e.g., no vacation homes or student housing) and have a main job outside of being a landlord (i.e., no professional landlords). All respondents were contacted through the personal network of the first author. They were informed of the aim of the research, signed an informed consent and filled in a preparatory questionnaire before participating in the interview.

Both the interview questions and the preparatory questionnaire were based on existing scientific literature on the landlord-tenant dilemma (e.g., Bate, 2018, 2021; Byrne & McArdle, 2022; Rolfe et al., 2023; etc.), Flemish regulations on changes and improvements to the rental dwelling (De Vlaamse huurdersbonden, 2020) and the alterations covered by the tenant allowance (Agentschap Wonen in Vlaanderen, 2024). As each interview was executed by a different group of second-year bachelor students, we opted for a semi-structured interview to guard uniformity. The interview structure, written out by the first author, consisted of a set of obligatory main questions and examples of possible sub-questions (see appendix). The interview consisted of two main parts, each with a specific focus. In part one respondents were asked about their own properties and experiences as a landlord. In part two the respondents were asked about their opinions on the students’ designs and the alterations covered by the tenant allowance. All interviews lasted one to two hours and were conducted at the respondents’ house by two or three students, who audio-recorded and transcribed the interview in Word. Afterwards, the interviews were analysed by the first author, following the steps of thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006).

Table 2 Respondents’ profiles

| | R1 | R2 | R3 | R4 | R5 |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Identity | male | couple | female | male | female |
| 1 property | | | X | | X |
| 2 properties | | X | | X | |
| +2 properties | X | | | | |
| At least 1 tenant +55 | X | | X | X | X |
| Investment property | X | X | X | X | |
| Years of experience | 8 | 11 | 7 | 3 | 8 |
| Description | expertise in interior design sector always does total renovations before renting out properties | external firm manages properties no interest in renovating considering selling outdated properties | one small, basic, single-person studio-apartment target audience is tenants with a weaker socio-economic position | often renovates in free time always does thorough renovations before renting out properties | inherited parental home renting as temporary solution until daughter moves in |

3. Results

During the thematic analysis, the landlords' opinions were organised per suggested alteration, revealing significant difference in attitudes towards tenant-led versus landlord-led adaptations, as discussed in the first section below. In the second section, the impact of the attitudes towards both tenant-led and landlord-led alterations on the tenant's well-being are discussed through the self-determination theory. For tenant-executed adaptations, themes included: negativity towards structural, non-removable, or messy adaptations; positivity (with conditions) towards removable, minor, or standard adaptations; positivity (with conditions) towards non-removable adaptations with added value. For landlord-executed adaptations, themes included: negativity towards structural, costly, or high-maintenance alterations; divided positive attitudes; personal bond, cost-division and good timing as conditions for approval.

3.1 Landlords' attitudes towards age-friendly housing adaptations

Landlords were primarily positive about the tenant-led adaptations presented in the students' designs, since none actually touched upon the structure of the dwelling. Most landlords specifically stated they would not allow this because of the hassle. Therefore, three out of five landlords preferred the technical installations/tools of Table 1 over the renovations to improve the accessibility of the dwelling. Only R4 would allow all alterations of Table 1 as they would add value to the property, while R3 would not allow any alterations as they would be too invasive. Tenant-executed alterations designed by the students that were not liked by the property owners were the ones that would make too much of a mess (e.g., putting up a handle or fold-out seat in the shower, as shown in Figure 4, since it could mess with the waterproof finish), cannot be easily removed or repaired (e.g., painting kitchen cabinets) or have too many repercussions (e.g., adding new flooring on top of an existing floor since surrounding doors would not be able to open because of the added height). Overall, the property owners preferred alternatives (also for the adaptations in Table 1) that would not damage the property such as handles with suction cups, putting a loose stool in the shower and removable systems to put up pictures.

"Yes, breaking down walls and all that stuff. Because we sometimes get people saying, well, erm, we once had the question: "That bedroom is next to the living room. Would you mind if we make an opening in the wall there so I can be close to my husband?" Well, no, we don't think that's a good idea. Simply because very often, when you break through structures, you must have a building permit, or a notification must be made. And then it all starts again." (R1)



Figure 4 foldable seat and handles in the shower

Landlords were, overall, open to tenants making minor changes that don't take a lot of effort or are standard in most homes (e.g., changing the curtains, putting up shelves) and alterations that would improve the tenant's sense of home and make the dwelling feel like their own (e.g., putting up pictures, painting the walls), especially when using removable systems or loose furniture since they don't damage the property. The owners preferred if tenants would give them a heads-up in advance so they would be able to see if the alterations add value to the property. If not, the property needs to be restored at the end of the lease (e.g., painting walls back in their original colour). Some landlords preferred to execute alterations themselves to ensure they are done properly and will not be taken down at the end of the lease. For example, two landlords preferred to put holes in the walls themselves (e.g., to put up pictures) out of fear that the tenant would accidentally hit electrical lines or pipelines which are stored behind the walls.

“And preferably, if I am the owner, I would like to hang it myself. Yes. And then I would say to those people, for example: “Look, if you buy it, I will hang it up. You don't even have to pay me for it, but then I can rest assured that it will hang properly.” And if there is anything, it's my problem.” (R1)

Non-removable adaptations with added value executed by the tenant were especially well received by the property owners, on the condition that mutual agreements would be made beforehand such as cost-division and the landlord's involvement in the decision-making process. Most owners only wanted to grant permission when they had seen plans or drawings beforehand (e.g., to ensure the construction would be durable, the alterations aren't too major and don't have any repercussions) and with guarantee that the alterations would be of a certain quality and decent execution (i.e., done by people with experience). Additionally, the landlord-tenant relationship has a big influence on their opinion. A good, trustworthy and respectful relationship with a tenant who is already living in the property for a long time and plans on staying for a long time still, has the owners being more open-minded. On the contrary, R5 mentioned she would not let her current tenant make any more non-removable alterations to the property since he does not let her in. She allowed him to install a new bathroom years ago, but she has never been able to see it.

“Yes indeed, but in consultation. Because, gosh, I understand that the person who lives there wants his style, but he will do that with something fixed. Not with something you can remove. So then I would say, okay, you can do that, but then in consultation and let's have a look.” (R3)

Another important topic was timing. Most would be open to tenant-executed modifications if the affected objects were outdated (e.g., floors, kitchen, bathroom). Additionally, most landlords wanted to have a say in the choice of materials and colours and preferred light or neutral colours to ensure it would fit with the rest of the dwelling and the alterations would be sustainable for future tenants of all ages. Most owners seemed to consider the implications for other future tenants, which is why multifunctional alterations that could be useful for the next tenant (e.g., anti-slip tiles in the bathroom, custom closets) were so well received, but alterations that seemed too personal (e.g., a built-in tv-unit as seen in Figure 5) were not. Landlords did question if, in reality, tenants would invest in placing custom furniture that they would not be able to take with them at the end of the lease.



Figure 5 Custom tv-unit

Landlords' attitudes were negative, overall, about making structural alterations to their rental property themselves (e.g., removing walls, widening doorframes) since these are too big of a hassle. This is also why they would not want to execute any of the renovations to improve the accessibility of the dwelling from Table 1. Some suggested that if tenants wanted them to make such drastic changes to the property, maybe they should look elsewhere, or perhaps it's the task of the social housing company to find these people a suitable dwelling. Even though most landlords agreed that the suggested adaptations would benefit older private renters, they did not see themselves executing them in an existing property with tenants since it would be almost impossible to keep living there during the renovation. Some would only implement them in the context of an extensive renovation or newly built, empty apartment, or they would wait until the end of the lease. However, they would be open to execute some of the adaptations covered by the tenant allowance (see Table 1) in an altered, more simplified manner.

“So yes, I would say, for a purchased house, I think it's okay, then I would understand that people do that. If you are going to put something on the rental market for someone, in reality, you would hardly make any adjustments.” (R4)

The cost of the alterations seemed to be a major influential factor for all landlords. Since renting out properties is not their core business, most did not want to invest as much time and money as it would take to make significant alterations since renting out their properties still needs to be financially beneficial. Some would reduce the costs of certain alterations by building something themselves, opting for cheaper materials or going to Ikea. Others could envision themselves having a different opinion if they would have been renting out multiple properties. Due to earlier bad experiences with previous tenants, some landlords were also concerned about the maintenance of certain alterations (e.g., a built-in handle in the shower as seen in Figure 6).

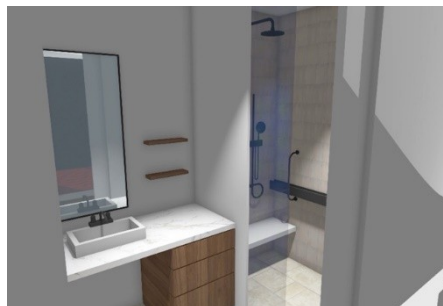


Figure 6 Built-in shower bench and handles

The list of alterations the landlords would execute themselves is not very long. The attitude of R1, who has expertise in the interior design sector, is remarkable since he liked almost every suggested alteration. The other landlords' opinions were more divided, for example, on custom closets. While some already put them in their rental properties or would be open to it, others did not find this necessary since they had to bring their own furniture as well when they used to be a tenant or preferred Ikea furniture instead. Either an agreement on cost-division with the tenant or the right timing (e.g., the kitchen has become outdated) could persuade the owners into making an exception. The only other reason landlords would make age-friendly alterations to their property would be to be able to attend to a broader target audience (e.g., multifunctional adaptations such as a built-in shower bench as seen in Figure 6) or to only cater to older tenants.

“But I was thinking now. We also have a good tenant, Sam. If he were to say to us one day, Luc, my kitchen and my drawers, they are so worn out and so on... Then, I would be inclined to say, “Sam, you will get that kitchen from me.” [...] No, but I just want to say, everything depends on the bond you have with that person, and if it is a good one, then more is possible. But even then, if I think about enlarging the doorframe, I would say: “Sorry, Sam, but we're not going to do that.” (R2)

The relationship with the tenant seemed to have significant influence on the decision-making process. For example, R2 would execute all adaptations covered by the tenant allowance (see Table 1) for a family-member, but few for a regular tenant. Most landlords agreed they would do more for a family-member or a good, long-term tenant who shows mutual respect and loyalty and wants to stay for a prolonged time. Almost all landlords had at least one (ex) tenant they spoke fondly of and would do a little extra for (e.g., placing a handle, changing an outdated kitchen).

3.2 Implications for the well-being of the tenant

Overall, landlords did not want any structural alterations executed, neither by the landlord nor the tenant. Most of them want to avoid the hassle and the constraint on their well-being of having to invest too much time and attention since being a landlord is not their main job. Most landlords rent out a property because of the financial benefits, which is why they don't want to invest a lot of money in making alterations if they don't gain anything. However, when no structural adaptations are made and mobility issues arise, the execution of daily activities can become harder for older tenants, as structural adaptations (e.g., widening doorways, relocating the toilet closer to the bedroom, eliminating thresholds) largely impact the circulation throughout the dwelling. Not being allowed to execute structural adaptations, such as the ones covered by the tenant allowance, can therefore deplete older tenants' sense of competence.

Landlords' past experiences (e.g., as a tenant, with problematic renters, in renovation) heavily influence their decision-making. For example, landlords with particular knowledge about renovations seem more critical of the execution and prefer their tenants to ask their permission even for minor alterations (e.g., putting holes in the wall to put up pictures). Having a certain amount of knowledge seems to have a more significant influence on the attitude of the interviewed landlords than the number of properties they rent out or the reason for becoming a landlord (e.g., buying properties as an investment or coming into possession of a property through inheritance). Landlords' permission can also come with

some conditions depending on the relationship with the tenant and the timing of the alterations. They prefer to be given a heads-up, even for minor alterations, and when the tenant wants to execute more extensive alterations, the landlords prefer to be involved in the decision-making process. Depending on the owner's opinion and the added value, the tenant can be asked to restore the property or leave the alteration as it is. Hence, the importance of a mutual written agreement, as suggested by the common tenancy law in Flanders, becomes apparent. Most landlords only want to execute certain alterations if the tenant pays for part of it or if they can increase the rent. However, suppose the tenant executes (and thus pays for) the alterations, and the landlord wants them to leave the alterations at the end of the lease, then the landlord should pay a compensation fee unless their rental agreement states otherwise (De Vlaamse huurdersbonden, 2020), which is only the case for two of the interviewed landlords. This example illustrates the importance of a clear agreement before alterations are made to avoid any implications on the well-being of the tenant afterwards. Tenants' need for a written agreement and landlords' strong desire for consultation before the execution of adaptations strongly impacts older tenants' autonomy over the dwelling. As landlords want to retain control over the dwelling, tenants become heavily dependent on their opinion, consequently losing their ability to make autonomous choices over their living environment. Being able to discuss the execution of adaptations is, therefore, crucial for the autonomy of older tenants.

Adaptations related to tenants' sense of relatedness are usually received more positively, as they are often less invasive, removable or decorative (e.g. putting up pictures, changing the curtains). The landlords specifically stated that tenants can make non-damaging, standard, or aesthetically pleasant improvements that add value to the property to increase their sense of home and length of stay. They also seem more empathetic towards a good, long-term tenant who wants to stay for a long time still. As we've seen in earlier research (e.g., Rolfe et al. 2023) a good landlord-tenant relationship improves tenants' sense of home, which consequently improves their sense of relatedness. Additionally, as landlords seem to be more open-minded towards adaptations when having a good relationship with the tenant, this can also impact the needs of autonomy and competence.

4. Discussion & conclusion

To age in place as a private renter in Flanders, where only 20% of the private rental housing stock is accustomed to changing living conditions, being able to make age-friendly adaptations to the dwelling is a necessity (Golant, 2020, de Smalen & Van den Broeck, 2025; Iwarsson, 2005; Volckaert & De Decker, 2019). Hence, this research explored landlords' attitudes towards age-friendly adaptations and their impact on the basic psychological needs of older private tenants. When analysing the feasibility of these adaptations, we uncovered a clear contrast between the statutory rights of the tenant and the actual expectations of the landlord. According to the common tenancy law, tenants are required to ask their landlords' written permission for structural or non-removable alterations (Vlaamse huurdersbonden, 2020). For other alterations, asking for written permission is only recommended. Yet, the interviews uncovered that landlords do not permit structural changes to the dwelling and expect to always be informed, even for minor alterations. Additionally, written permission is always necessary if tenants want to avoid possible friction at the end of the lease. According

to Bate (2018) and Byrne & McArdle (2022), these attitudes could be explained by cultural norms. This was noticeable in the landlords' responses since they mostly considered the impact for the next tenant over the needs of the current tenant. While Martin et al. (2018) and Rolfe et al. (2023) tried to further explain this attitude by stating that small-scale landlords often lack the resources and skills for property management and do not plan on investing in several properties long-term, the interviews uncovered that this is not the case for all small-scale landlords.

The self-determination theory shows that the landlord-tenant dilemma can greatly influence older private tenants' subjective well-being and sense of home (Deci & Ryan, 2011; Lataster et al., 2022). Interviews illustrate this link further by showing that landlords do not like giving up control over their dwelling, which directly influences all three basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence and relatedness) central to the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008). However, the need for relatedness seems to be the least compromised, since decorative alterations that help tenants feel at home are more often allowed than structural or non-removable alterations that impact the need for competence. Having a good relationship with the landlord seems to influence tenants' need for autonomy, since good tenants are often allowed more. According to Volckaert & De Decker (2019), some tenants think their landlord places his financial gain above the tenant's well-being. However, as we've seen during these interviews, landlords' attitudes do not only stem from financial gain. They're also trying to protect their own well-being by minimising the hassle and the damage to the property. This is also why landlords do not welcome most adaptations covered by the tenant allowance.

To explore landlords' attitudes towards age-friendly adaptations, this study was based on a semestrial course with second-year bachelor students. The students involved in the project designed and proposed alterations from both the perspective of the landlord and the tenant. This dual approach made it possible to generate a broad answer to the research question. As the interviews were executed by the students as well, their inexperience in the qualitative method of interviewing and the subject of professional property management can be seen as limitations to the study. While this might have shaped some of the landlords' responses, we noticed that the majority of the respondents answered the questions in an open and honest way, often motivated by a responsibility to educate the students on the real-life practices they might encounter during their professional carrier. Another limitation of this study is the small sample of small-scale landlords. While small-scale landlords are the majority in Flanders (de Smalen & Van den Broeck, 2025), their responses can be influenced by particular experiences with good or bad tenants, which might not be representative for all landlords. We, therefore, acknowledge further research is required on the attitudes of different landlord types, but also on tenants' perspectives, as securing permission for alterations does not guarantee tenants have the necessary resources (e.g., financial, practical) to implement them.

Despite the limitations of this study, the results offer valuable insights into Flemish landlords' attitudes towards age-friendly adaptations, given the scarcity of research on this topic. (Easthope, 2014; Rolfe et al., 2023; Volckaert & De Decker, 2019). Additionally, these insights offer a clear direction for necessary adjustments in current housing policies. Changing policy focus from providing an allowance for tenants to providing an allowance for landlords, supported by professional project management, can be a crucial first step to relieve

landlords' financial and practical concerns. However, it doesn't fully resolve landlords' concerns about future tenants. Considering a monthly financial incentive to reward property owners who choose to rent to an older demographic, might therefore be a more viable option, as the needs of current and future tenants will be more aligned. An alternative might be for policymakers to invest in design research on affordable and aesthetically pleasing age-friendly design adaptations that can be interesting for all target audiences and protect the well-being of both the tenant and the landlord. This way, the landlord-tenant dilemma would not arise as quickly because their interests (i.e., improving the well-being of both parties) would align, making aging in place in a rental environment a more realistic and sustainable option.

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6. Appendix

| Interview theme | Main questions | Sub-questions |
|--|---|--|
| <i>Part 1: general questions</i> | | |
| 1. Rental context | Do you currently rent out property on the private rental market or through a social housing agency? Do you currently rent out one or multiple properties? Do you rent out property as a primary residence? | |
| 2. Description of the rental property | Could you tell us a bit more about the property you rent out?/In case the respondent rents out multiple properties, then: Could you tell us a bit more about the property you have rented out the longest? | <p>What is the construction year of the property? Since when have you been renting out the property? How did you acquire the property? When was this? Are you the sole owner, or do you share ownership? Why did you decide to rent it out? Where is the property located? What does the surrounding area, neighbourhood, and street look like? Is this close to where you live? What does the property look like? (e.g., old/new, detached/semi-detached/terraced house/apartment/studio, number of floors, number of bedrooms, number of bathrooms, outdoor space, materials, colours...) Have you ever carried out renovations on the property? If yes, what renovations did you carry out? Why did you carry out these renovations? When was this? How did it go? Did you do the renovations yourself or have them done by a professional? Did you hire an architect or interior architect for this? How was this experience for you? Were you renting out the property at that time? Did the tenants continue to live there during the renovation? Were the tenants involved in the choices regarding the renovation? Did you increase the rent afterwards? Are you planning to do any renovations in the future? Or would you be open to carrying out renovations in the future if the situation arises? Which ones? Why or why not? Would you do the renovations yourself or have them done? Would you hire an architect or interior architect for this? What should an architect or interior architect take into account for you? Would you ask for input from the tenants for this? Would the tenants be allowed to continue living there during the renovation? Would you increase the rent after the renovation?</p> |
| 3. Landlord experience | Have you ever been a tenant yourself? How do you like being a landlord? How many tenants have occupied the property prior to the current residents? How long have the current tenants been living in the property? | <p>Could you tell us a bit more about this experience? Are there things from that experience that you now apply to your role as a landlord? What are the positive aspects? What are the negative aspects? Are there any positive or negative experiences you have had over the years that stand out to you and that you would like to mention? What kind of people were they? (e.g., Young/old; Couple/single; Family/friends/acquaintances/third parties; Pets) How was your relationship with these tenants? What kind of changes did the tenants make to the property? What did you think about it? What was the reason for the termination of the rental agreements? What kind of people are they? (e.g., Young/old; Couple/single; Family/friends/acquaintances/third parties; Pets)</p> |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | | How is your relationship with the current tenants? Do you visit the tenants often? If yes, why? Have the current tenants made any changes to the property? If yes, what did they change and what did you think about it? What is the duration of the rental agreement with the current tenants? What is typically the duration of the rental agreements you enter into? Do you prefer to rent out short-term or do you prefer to rent out for a longer period? Why? |
| | Do you consider the age of the tenant important? Have you included specific agreements in your rental contract regarding making adaptations to the rental property? | Why or why not? Why or why not? What are some examples of adaptations that you allow tenants to make? What are some examples of adaptations that you strictly do not allow tenants to make? |
| | Imagine that the current tenants, due to age, health issues, mobility problems, an accident... need adaptations to the property in order to continue living there. | Would you make adaptations to the property yourself? Why (not)? Which ones definitely yes/no and why? Would you allow the tenant to make adaptations themselves? Why (not)? Which ones definitely yes/no and why? |
| | How would you describe a "sense of home" for yourself? | |
| | Imagine that the current tenants would like to make adaptations to the property to improve their feeling of home. | Would you make adaptations to the property yourself? Why (not)? Which ones definitely yes/no and why? Would you allow the tenant to make adaptations themselves? Why (not)? Which ones definitely yes/no and why? |
| <i>Part 2: questions on the students' designs & tenant allowance</i> | | |
| 4. Tenant-led adaptations | The students present the floorplan redesigned from the tenant's perspective. They discuss all adaptations. After each adaptation they ask the respondent about their opinion. After the students discussed all adaptations, they ask the respondent to rank the adaptations from the one they are most open to, to the one they are least open to. The students present the adaptations covered by the tenant allowance (which the respondents already received in the preliminary questionnaire). The students ask the respondent to talk about the adaptations, if they would be open to let a tenant execute them or not, and why. | What do you think of this adaptation? Why? Would you be okay with a tenant making this adaptation? Why (not)? If not, can you give an alternative? Has your perspective on certain adaptations changed after our conversation? |
| 5. Landlord-led adaptations | The students present the floorplan redesigned from the landlord's perspective. They discuss all adaptations. After each adaptation they ask the respondent about their opinion. After the students discussed all adaptations, they ask the respondent to rank the adaptations from the one they are most open to, to the one they are least open to. The students present the adaptations covered by the tenant allowance (which the respondents already received in the preliminary questionnaire). The students ask the respondent to talk about the adaptations, if they would be open to execute them or not, and why. | What do you think of this adaptation? Would you be okay with making this adaptation? Has your perspective on certain adaptations changed after our conversation? |