

Making Private Rental Housing Age-Friendly in Flanders: Understanding Landlords' Perspectives

by Eva Severens | Nov 24, 2024

In this blog post, based on a small research project in collaboration with second-year bachelor students from Hasselt University, Eva Severens looks at landlords' attitudes toward allowing age-friendly modifications. Keep an eye on Eva's Linked-In page for future publications containing more information on this topic.

In Flanders, Belgium, many older adults want to “age in place”, staying in their homes as they grow older rather than moving to care facilities. However, much of the region's private rental housing isn't equipped to meet the needs of ageing tenants.

As mobility declines, older private renters may require home modifications to stay safe and comfortable. Yet, unclear Flemish housing policies make it difficult for tenants to know what changes they are allowed to make, leaving them in a vulnerable position.

Why It's Hard for Older Tenants to Adapt Their Homes

One of the major barriers to creating age-friendly rental homes is the uncertainty surrounding permissions for modifications.

While many older tenants need changes to make their homes feel safer or more accessible, current policies do not clearly outline what tenants can alter in rental properties.

Hence, landlords' permission seems to be a key element. This leaves many older people unsure if they can make essential adjustments.

Why Some Landlords Say “No”

Exploratory interviews with five Flemish landlords, executed by second bachelor (interior) architecture students from Hasselt University, revealed several factors that shape landlords' attitudes toward age-friendly home adaptations.

Interestingly, many landlords' resistance to modifications comes from a desire to protect their own well-being or peace of mind rather than a lack of empathy.

Some worry about the potential responsibility and costs of future repairs or fear that modifications might make it harder to rent the property to new tenants.

These concerns show that landlords' hesitation often stems from balancing their interests with those of the tenant.

Designing for Mutual Benefit

This study highlights that creating age-friendly rental housing requires considering both tenants' and landlords' well-being.

Clearer guidelines about which modifications are permitted and who is responsible for covering the costs could help reduce uncertainty and foster more cooperation between tenants and landlords.

Additionally, the role of designers becomes significantly important, since designing age-friendly adaptations that are easy to reverse or that appeal to a wide range of tenants could help ease landlords' concerns about future renters.

Moving Forward: Toward Age-Friendly Rentals

As the population in Flanders ages, the need for age-friendly rental housing will continue to grow.

This small research project emphasises the importance of understanding landlords' perspectives in developing policies and solutions that enable ageing in place.

By addressing financial and practical concerns, policymakers and designers can work together to create housing that meets the needs of both tenants and landlords.



By Eva Severens

Eva Severens is PhD-student at Hasselt University with a Masters in interior design and educational sciences. This blog post is based on a small research project in collaboration with second-year bachelor students from Hasselt University, which is situated in her larger doctoral project concerning “How housing affects the sense of home and well-being of older private renters in Flanders”.