Ageing, Wellbeing and Architectural Design

Ann Petermans & An-Sofie Smetcoren
Overview

- Introduction: collaboration (interior) architecture and adult educational sciences
- Greying of population in Belgium
- Need for innovation in housing design
- Innovative housing projects for older people
- Conclusion
Architecture & interior architecture: design for subjective wellbeing

Adult Education: housing in later life, age friendly communities
Greying of population in Belgium
Structure of Belgian population in 1881
Per age class of 5 years and for 10,000 inhabitants
Greying of population in Belgium

- 23.8% of people aged 60+
- 18th oldest country in the world (in 2017)
Expectancy of greying of Belgian population
Figure 1. Demographic prognoses older population, in the three Belgian regions (source: FPBS, 2016)
Diversity of (future generations of) older people
Need for innovation in housing design
Zeeman et al., 2016:

‘current housing design practice is shaped by solution-focused approaches rather than guided by sound theoretical frameworks and research-based principles’

Need for architectural design concepts that can have an impact on the subjective wellbeing of older people
Home:
architecture, interior architecture, objects

- Importance of other people
- Importance of wider context

People want ‘to feel good’

- Space needs to offer opportunities for meaningful activities
- When we grow older, the importance of a ‘good’ living environment increases
Importance of attention for objective architectural parameters, but also growing request to consider issues regarding people’s subjective wellbeing

Home = primary setting for growing old
Ageing in place?

- What can we understand by this concept?
  - ‘The ability to live in one’s own home and community safely, independently, and comfortably, regardless of age, income, or ability level.’ (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013)

- How older people reflect on this concept?
  - Desire expressed by many older people, even when care is needed, economic difficulties are experienced or when older people live in inadequate houses or deprived areas (Gilleard et al., 2007; Löfqvist et al., 2013; Peace et al., 2011; Wagner et al., 2010; Weeks, et al., 2013; Wiles et al., 2012)

- How policy could contribute to this desire?
  - ‘Meeting the desire and ability of people, through the provision of appropriate services and assistance, to remain living relatively independently in the community in his or her current home or an appropriate level of housing.’ (WHO, 2009, p.4)
Housing situation of older people in Belgium?

- Belgians are born with a ‘brick’ in their stomach
  - **High homeownership rate**: 72.4% of all households in Belgium own their residence, but this increases to 82.7% among Flemish people aged 60 and over
    - Belgian government has stimulated and subsidized homeownership since World War II
    - Having a home of its own is considered to be a determined step in our housing career
  - Belgium is recognized to have a **static housing system**, which refers to a low level of household mobility  
    (van der Heijden, Dol, & Oxley, 2011)
Ownership (De Witte et al., 2012)

- Homeowner: 82.9%
- Renter private market: 8.1%
- Others: 4.8%
- Renter sociale market: 4.2%

(Data as of April 24, 2012)
Housing situation of older people in Belgium?

- Some of these ‘bricks’ have seen better days
  - The Belgian housing stock ‘is rather old, with many elderly households concentrated in badly-equipped and badly-isolated houses, which are often too large for their needs’ (De Decker & Dewilde, 2010)
  
- Results indicated that 37% of the housing stock in Flanders is of insufficient quality (Winters et al., 2015)

- Inadequate and inaccessible homes form a risk for the health, wellbeing, and the independence of older people (Iwarsson & Isacsson, 1998; Oswald et al., 2007; Sixsmith & Sixsmith, 2008 etc.)

- Alternative forms of housing are not a generalized solution, but they can be an addition to the current range of housing that is available for older people (Bamford, 2005; Glass, 2013, Lawton, 1981, Smetcoren et al., 2014)
Housing conditions older people in Belgium (De Witte et al., 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Living Independent at Home</th>
<th>Living with Children</th>
<th>Alternative Forms of Housing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60 - 69 years</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 - 79 years</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 years and older</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 60 - 69 years
- 70 - 79 years
- 80 years and older
Innovative housing projects for older people

“She’ll come round to the idea of a Granny Flat eventually.”
Abbeyfield, Etterbeek (Brussels)
Housing facility for older people, South London, design door Witherford Watson Mann Arch.  
Source: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2016/01/23/loneliness-old-people-elderly-home-southwark-witherford-watson-mann_n_9058786.html
Maison Biloba Huis (Brussels)
Conclusion
- Designers can be inspired to stimulate the creation of a built environment with the potential to contribute to the SWB of current and future generations of older people.

- Huge challenge and opportunity!
  - Self management of older people
  - Keep control over own life & own choices: mastery
  - Involve older people during the process
  - Stimulate pro-active behaviour and anticipation, create awareness about housing possibilities and options
Wellbeing elements should carry at least as much weight as technical, rational and economic considerations in the [(interior) architectural design] process (Knudstrup, 2011)

THANK YOU!

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