

## Research plan

# Aging in place for the growing number of elderlies

## A home suitable for the housing career after the children move out

**Keywords:** Aging in place, Elderly, Aged above 55, Housing Career

**Abstract:** *The Netherlands is coping with a housing shortage, which will only increase the coming years. This is not only due to an increase in inhabitants in the Netherlands, but also because the houses people need are not available, like family houses. These houses are often occupied by empty nesters and older people (Kamphuis, 2020). The issue is that people now do not want to move into a retirement home, but rather grow old in a place they are familiar with, so called aging in place (3Bplus, 2015). A possible solution for this is a building for people aged 55 and older, so they move to a place to grow old in earlier, to allow families to move into their houses. However, to find out if this works this paper tries to answer the following question. What are the functional needs of a building suitable for residents above the age of 55, whether they are healthy or physically impaired and considering that they come from different social and economic backgrounds? To answer this, the history of elderly housing will be researched, especially the development of elderly housing in the last century. On top of that participant observation will be done with people from several different stages in life above the age of approximately 55. This is to understand how they use their house during the day and figure out what works or what does not work. In addition to that, a case study research will be conducted, by analysing dwellings designed specifically for each of the groups and finally comparing these to each other and comparing that outcome to the participant observations.*

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## 1. Topic

For a long time, up until the 1960's when new laws were made for the elderly, it was very common that the elderly belonged to the poorest part of society. They often had to rely on their children, but often due to large families or lack of money, they could not take care of them. This does not mean that there was no housing for the elderly. Since the middle ages large cities had so called hofjes for the women and proveniershuizen for the men, often build by wealthy citizens as a form of charity for the elderly (IsGeschiedenis, 2011). However, these were later altered to a place where the elderly had to work, since at that time elderly were seen as an unproductive part of society and there was no place for that in society (Mens & Wagenaar, 2009, p. 17). A successor came in the form of nursing homes for the elderly. These however, were very different from how we know retirement homes now. The elderly were separated based on gender and they were put in large rooms that they shared with more than 20 others, so there was no privacy or whatsoever (Gulmans, 2014). This however changed in the 1960's when the government of prime minister Drees enforced the Algemene Ouderdoms Wet, or AOW, a law that ensured that elderly received enough money from the government each month to do basic things like groceries and live (Giebels, n.d.).



Figure 1 Large rooms for the elderly

Source: <https://www.anderetijden.nl/aflevering/56/Oud-zeer-zorg-voor-bejaarden>

Before the AOW, several steps were already taken into financial help for the elderly. In 1913 the Invaliditeits- en Ouderdomswet, which ensured a small compensation from the government. However, this was very little, and the family was obliged to add money to this allowance (Mens & Wagenaar, 2009, p. 17). After the second world war, the Noodwet Ouderdomsvoorziening was enforced in 1947, which allowed elderly to receive a small amount of money when they passed the retirement age of 65. This was seen as transitional arrangement. This meant that this amount slowly grew until it was the AOW was enforced and the amount was the same as the minimum income (Veldkamp, 1963). After the AOW we also saw the dawn of the modern retirement home. The organisers of the houses looked at elderly as one group, meaning that they made no distinction between social and economic differences between the elderly. On top of that the government had to specifically mention that elderly were part of society and not secondary to the working part of the environment, because that was still what most people thought just after the war. (Mens & Wagenaar, 2009, p. 11) These homes were very popular for the elderly and as a result there were long waiting lists, in some instances of more than 10 years. This was mainly because the idea of relaxing and being taken care of was a welcome idea for the just retired elderly, but at the same time they often felt like a burden to their children and therefore thought that going to a retirement home would be a good solution, for both themselves as well as their children (Jonkhoff, 2010). However, in the years that followed a lot of these retirement homes were build, but it turned out to be not as great as they thought it would be. Mainly still due to the long waiting lists causing the elderly to move to a retirement home far away from their old neighbourhood, but also because there was a lack of oversight on all the retirement homes, which resulted in the abuse and neglect of the elderly (Gulmans, 2014).

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Now people do not want to move to a retirement house when they get old, they prefer to grow old and spend their final years in a place that they know, that is familiar to them (3Bplus, 2015). So called “aging in place”. After 2015 this was also no longer an a choice, since getting into retirement houses became much harder after a new law was passed, the Wet Langdurige Zorg (WLZ) which meant that people were only allowed to move into a retirement home when it is no longer possible to take care of yourself and there is no possibility that this will change in the future (Zorginstituut Nederland, n.d.). However, this often means either large changes to their existing homes or parts of their large homes stay unused, either because it is multiple stories high and they are not able to use the stairs anymore, or their house is simply too big. An overview of this history can be found in figure 2 below.

## Summarized Timeline Elderly housing

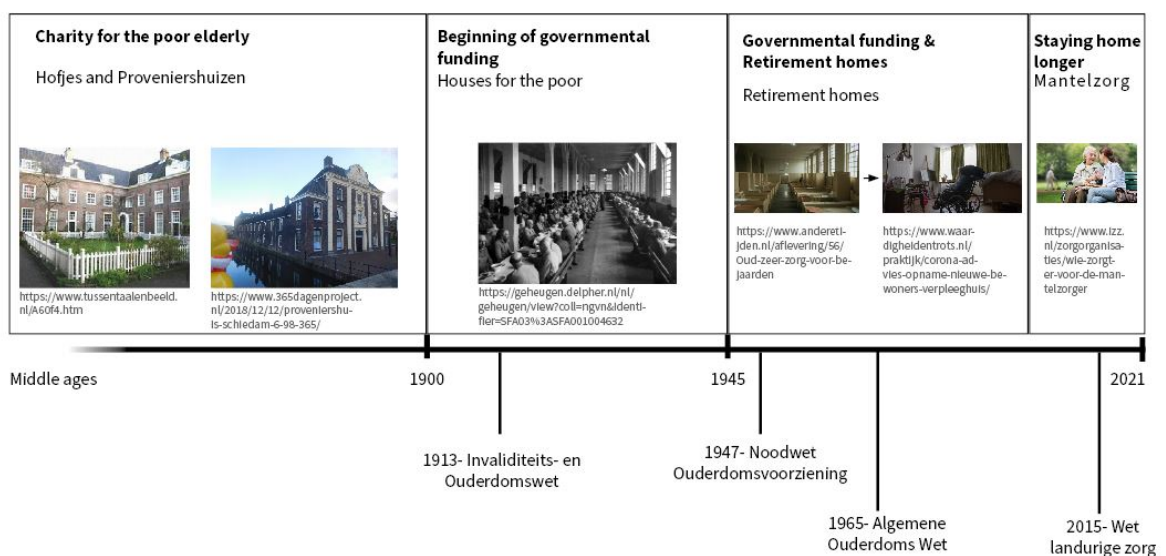


Figure 2 Timeline of the elderly housing, made by author, based on sources in the text.

For a long time already there has been a housing shortage in the Netherlands and it will only get bigger the coming years. This housing shortage is mainly due to people needing different types of houses (Gaaff, 2020). This has several causes. Firstly, young people that are forced to keep living with their parents. The rise in housing prices is one of the reasons for this but they still move out earlier than in a lot of other countries. For instance, a research into young men leaving their parents’ home by Lonneke van den Berg shows that the percentage of men aged 25 or older that still live at home is 20 percent in the Netherlands, whereas in countries like Spain and Italy it is 67% and 84% respectively (van den Berg, 2019, p. 15). Secondly there are families that are stuck with smaller houses and thirdly the elderly that cannot move out of their larger houses since there is a lack of apartments specifically designed for elderly (Kraniotis, 2021). The needs for families and elderly go hand in hand, since the elderly cannot move into retirement homes and therefore keep the houses suited for families occupied, causing those families to not find suitable housing (Kamphuis, 2020). This means that there is not a lack of housing for young families, but a lack of housing for elderly and even empty nesters that do not need the large houses anymore.

A possible solution that might help solve these issues is a building block where people can move to after their children move out, that is still located close to their old neighbourhood. The idea is that the houses in this building will be able to change to fit the changing needs that come with growing old. This building will in the end consist of people from different life stages after the age of approximately 55 years old. This means that you have people that are still mobile and still have jobs. People that are mobile and active but recently retired, so they have a lot of free time. People that are retired and need help with daily activities. On top of that there is a difference in social backgrounds and financial backgrounds. Where the elderly used to belong to the poorest part of society not too long ago, now the population above 65 is among the wealthiest part of the population. This is mostly since the majority owns homes on which they make a lot of profit when they sell it, because of the rise in housing prices. However, there are still elderly living in poverty, either due to not owning a home or low income during their working life (Nieuwsuur, 2017).

To avoid the generalisation made after the war where all elderly people were placed in one group, these social and economic aspects need to be considered (Mens & Wagenaar, 2009, p. 11). Therefore, the building should not only suit one type based on age, a one size fits all solution. There will be two distinct groups, first you have the empty nesters or 55 years and older until retirement and secondly you have the retirees, aged 68 and up. In these groups there will be differences. They might be wealthy or poor and require social housing, but they might also be ill or maybe active and fit. Therefore, care needs to be considered. "Mantelzorg", the informal and unpaid care for the elderly, could take place in one way or another, where the younger and more mobile inhabitants can take care of the older inhabitants or maybe even healthy retirees taking care of 55-year-olds that need help (Mantelzorg NL, n.d.). So, a cycle occurs of helping and getting help while staying in the same building. The main idea is that they move to this building located nearby on their own terms, meaning that they do not have to wait until something happens and are forced to move to such a place, but if a situation occurs that they need help while they already live there, they can get it without moving again and therefore age in place in a familiar place.

The purpose of this research is to not only make clear that such a concept is necessary, but also to find out what is necessary for such a building to even be a possible solution to this problem. This type of building will try to be a continuation of the current housing for elderly and use what worked and try to improve on what did not work. On top of that I will find out how to convince empty nesters of the necessity, but also how to make such a complex attractive to live in and not only make it look like a dull home for people that are nearing the end of their life.

## 2. Research question

The main research question that belongs to this topic will be:

What are the functional needs of a building suitable for residents above the age of 55, whether they are healthy or physically impaired and considering that they come from different social and economic backgrounds?

Supporting questions will be:

1. How has housing for the elderly changed in the Netherlands, from housing through charity up to and well into the twentieth century to nursing homes after WWII and Mantelzorg in the last couple of decades? (historical research into housing)
2. Where and how do 55-year-olds and retirees live now? (Case studies into current housing complexes for the groups)?
3. What are the differences in the needs in their living environments for both 55-year-olds and retirees?
4. What social and economical backgrounds should be taken into consideration?

## 3. Method

For the research I will be using different types of methods to answer those questions. Historical research into housing for the elderly in the Netherlands will be used to answer the first supporting question. Case study analyses, mainly a plan analysis of dwellings in buildings designed for people over the age of 55 and modern nursing homes will be used to answer the questions of where and how they live, but also a start for the question on the differences between the groups. This will be followed up by participant observations and questioning add to the findings to answer that question. To answer the fourth, a data analyses will be done to find data on the different aspects for both the people above 55 years old, but also the retirees, people older than 68 as it is the current age of retirement in the Netherlands.

The historical research will mainly concern the housing for the elderly. This will be an analysis of the architectural history of elderly housing in the Netherlands and will be a continuation of the brief part written in the topic description. This will focus first on how the elderly housing was organized in the Netherlands, starting around 1900. The main reason for this is that before 1900 elderly care was mainly done as part of charity by the church or rich citizens to show how much they care, but after 1900 the government starts to issue laws that directly impacted the care for elderly and to ensure that they even had money for their final years (Deen, 2004). Then I will look at the different types of elderly housing there were, and this will also coincide with how society looked upon the elderly. For this part of the analyses, I will mainly use documentaries, for instance the documentary done by Andere Tijden in 2010 about the harsh living conditions in elderly housing in the 1950's in the Netherlands (Jonkhoff, 2010). But also, the book *De architectuur van de ouderenhuisvesting Bouwen voor wonen en zorg* by Noor Mens and Cor Wagenaar, which describes the housing for the elderly after the second world war. On top of that news articles and government documents from that time commenting on the decisions made at that time, how the laws in the Netherlands eventually changed and how that changed the elderly homes into the retirement homes in the Netherlands. The change afterwards to what we now call Mantelzorg in the Netherlands, unpaid care for elderly, will also be discussed and used as a starting point to emphasize why a complex that supports aging in place is necessary.

After this I will employ another method, Participant observations of people from the different target groups. This means spending a day with them but in a passive way, just observing how they use their space, look for possible flaws in the design of the space and aspects that work well or things that they miss. After that, a short conversation about their house, questioning why they live where they live, where they used to live and how they experience their house. Are there things missing or are some things a big improvement compared to previous homes?

This method will hopefully give a clear overview of the similarities in the way they live as well as key differences. This overview will help with defining the needs for groups and how they might be applied in an eventual dwelling.

The case study analyses are an analysis of several buildings that are currently either designed for people over the age of 55 or retirement homes for people that need daily care, so the two extremes that might live in the building of the project. The purpose for this is to find out what makes them fit the specific age group, but also to find out what similarities there are that can form a base for the dwellings on top of which several specific design aspects can be added later. First, De Akropolis in Amsterdam, a building for people above the age of 55 with a focus on social contact, mainly due to a mandatory membership to the buildings organisation that organises events, to stimulate contact between the residents (Studioninedots, n.d.). Second, De Makroon in Amsterdam, a senior complex with care housing as well as independent housing in the centre of Amsterdam (Architekten Cie., n.d.). Third, Steinfeld Retirement and Nursing home by Dietger Wissounig Architekten in Austria, a care facility with caretakers living in as well and communal dining and living facilities (Schittich, 2007, pp. 104-109). The fourth building is OCMW in Nevele, Belgium, by 51N4E, a care complex for elderly with a concept for extending the living room into the hallway, creating a larger communal space (51N4E, n.d.). This combination of care housing and independent housing might be interesting. By looking at the way these projects' function, i.e., how are the floorplans organised, how do the inhabitants use it and compare this to the other buildings designed for different age groups. A final building will be analysed slightly different, not focussing on the architecture but mainly on the concept. This is the Knarrenhof concept that is currently used in the Netherlands in several locations, like in Zwolle. This building is meant for active elderly that can take care of each other, but everyone from every age group is welcome. How does this work in practice? (Knarrenhof, n.d.)

These case studies will be analysed on the following themes:

- Context (Why was it build and where is it located)
- Inhabitant's profile (Who lives there?)
- Spatial program (Circulation, dwelling types, communal spaces, private spaces)
- Care facilities
- Ease of use of the dwellings (Spatially)



De Akropolis in Amsterdam/  
studioninedots



Photo by: Peter Cuypers

De Makroon in Amsterdam/  
Architekten Cie.



Photo by: De Architekten Cie.

Steinfeld Retirement and Nursing Home/  
Dietger Wissounig Architekten



Photo by: Paul Ott

OCMW in Nevele, Belgium/  
51N4E



Photo by: Filip Dujardin

Knarrenhof in Zwolle/  
INBO



Photo by: INBO

The outcome of this comparison can be compared to the overview of the participant observations. Hopefully, this will give a conclusive idea of the differences in living environment for the different groups, but also an overview of similarities that can help form an advice for a complex that can house groups ranging from empty nesters that are still in the prime of their life and full of energy, as well as elderly that are nearing the end of their life and need help with daily tasks.

## 4. Relevance

This research will try to find out if building a complex for the later stages in your housing career is a viable option to solve part of the problem of a housing shortage in the Netherlands. By having a complex that is lived in by people in different stages in their lives they stay part of the society for longer.

For the future this also means that housing does not need to be designed specifically for elderly or for empty nesters, but that for a large portion of the population one solution will work, with exceptions of course. But this in turn might make it easier to quickly build these kinds of complexes.

Of course, this will not be the final solution, the thing that solves all the problems concerning elderly housing and them wanting to grow old near the place they lived most of their lives. The reason for this research is a design assignment in Rotterdam, therefore such a building would be suited for people living in Rotterdam, a large city. However, if you live in a small village somewhere on the outskirts of the Netherlands, such a complex would not be viable solution for such a small group and therefore it will not be so close to their homes. This is therefore mainly a solution for the larger cities in the Netherlands to allow for aging in place in a centralized location. For solutions in rural areas in the Netherlands perhaps smaller communities like for instance the Knarrenhof concept mentioned before is more suited.

Also, there is still the issue that people might not want to live in such a building. The purpose of this research is to show a way that people might be interested in living in such a building, but in the end, you cannot force people, so even though it might seem attractive, people might not want to give up their large house and that is something architecture might not be able to fix. In the end the people are free to do what they want, but this is just meant to show it can be done differently and show the necessity for maybe a bit more drastic solution like this. But this building will give a certain insurance for the residents. They might be very healthy and still in the prime of their life, but they know that when something happens to them, that makes them become immobile or otherwise in the need for care, the idea that they do not have to move to another place somewhere far away from family and friends might sound reassuring for a lot of people.

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Appendix:

# Research Diagram

