

## University of Groningen

### No place like home?

de Jong, Petra

DOI:  
[10.33612/diss.178356380](https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.178356380)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2021

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

de Jong, P. (2021). *No place like home? Residential mobility and housing preferences of older adults in the Netherlands*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. University of Groningen.  
<https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.178356380>

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# Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION



## 1.1. Background

The age structure of the Dutch population is projected to change in the upcoming decades from a pyramid shape to more of a rectangle (see Figure 1.1). The main factor driving this change is the large decline in the fertility rate since the 1960s. Although this rate has stabilized from 1985 on, at between 1.5 and 1.8 children per woman, it is not high enough to stabilize the overall population. Another factor contributing to population ageing is the rising life expectancy. Life expectancy at birth has increased markedly over the past century, to an average of 80.5 years for men and 83.6 years for women in 2019. Statistics Netherlands (2020) forecasts that life expectancy at birth will continue to rise in the coming decades, reaching 86.3 years for men and 90 years for women by 2060.

In general, improvements in health care and increasing prosperity have resulted in a steady rise in the number of older adults over the last 50 years. As a result, older people represent a proportionately larger share of the total population. This trend is expected to be reinforced in the coming decades as the baby boomers approach their retirement years. The increase in birth rates between 1946 and 1955, usually labelled as the 'baby boom generation', is therefore considered to be a third key factor contributing to the ageing of the Dutch population (Van Iersel et al., 2010).

Thus, the population aged 65 and above in the Netherlands is expected to increase, from 2.5 million in 2010 to 4.8 million in 2060. The number of older adults aged 80 and above is projected to triple, rising from 648,000 in 2010 to almost 2 million in 2060 (Statistics Netherlands, 2020). As the number and proportion of older people in our society change, this will have numerous implications (Kim, 2011). The increased number of older adults will place an enormous burden on existing income systems, health care systems, social services and retirement programmes. In addition, older adults are likely to demand a wide array of new services to meet their unique but diverse needs (Choi & Dinse, 1998). The changing age composition is also expected to affect the geographical mobility of populations (Plane & Rogerson, 1991), subsequently shaping the physical environment of society (Kim, 2011).

Over the past three decades, scholars have studied population ageing from the perspective of various disciplines, such as demography, sociology, economics, psychology and gerontology. At the macrolevel, they have investigated the impacts of ageing on the economy and society (e.g. Bloom et al., 2010; Disney, 1996; Clark et al., 1978). At the microlevel, previous studies have focused on the provision of social pension (see e.g. Bonenkamp et al., 2017; Jackson, 1989; Pestieau, 2003), psychological demands and the wellbeing of older adults (e.g. Deeg & Westerdorp-de Serriere, 1994; Resnick et al., 2015),

and their life activities and mobility (e.g. Berg et al., 2015; Horowitz & Vanner, 2010; Schwanen & Páez, 2010; Siren & Haustein, 2016). More recently, housing has become a research focus (e.g. Abramsson & Andersson, 2016; Ewen et al., 2014; Weeks et al., 2013).

One of the challenges in the years ahead is to provide proper housing conditions for older adults. Upon embarking this thesis in 2010, the shortage of houses suitable for older adults in the Netherlands was estimated at 406,000 for the period 2006-2015 (Sogelée & Van Galen, 2007). This estimate was based on the current shortage at that time, the expected extra demand due to the ageing population, as well as the expected additional demand arising from the fact that a growing number older adults preferred to live on an extramural basis (i.e. to 'age in place'). The Dutch government relied primarily on the addition of *nultredenwoningen* (single-storey houses) for the supply of appropriate housing for older adults (Van Iersel et al., 2010).

We know, in 2021, that the proportion of older adults in the Dutch population has continued to grow after 2015. We have also come to know that the predicted demand has failed to match the actual demand for suitable houses for older adults in the Dutch housing market (Leidemeijer et al., 2017), indicating that the housing policy described above has not been adequate for the long term. This raises the question whether we should continue the current housing policy for older adults, and if not, what policy changes need to be made?

This thesis can help to answer that question by providing insights into the potential future changes in the residential moving behaviour and housing choices of older adults in the Netherlands. The remainder of this chapter provides a background to the research in this thesis by defining concepts and identifying several policy issues with regard to ageing, mobility, and housing. The research aim and outline of the thesis are subsequently addressed.

## 1.2. Defining old age and later-life migration

There is no universal threshold age at which a society becomes 'old' (Atkins, 2018). The most commonly used measure of population ageing is the proportion of the population aged 65 years and over (Moore & Pacey, 2004; Rogerson, 1996), although others have taken a broader approach and included people as young as 55 (Axelson & Penfield, 1983; Moehrle, 1990). What defines an 'older person' is therefore contentious and varies according to situation and context (Davy et al., 2010).

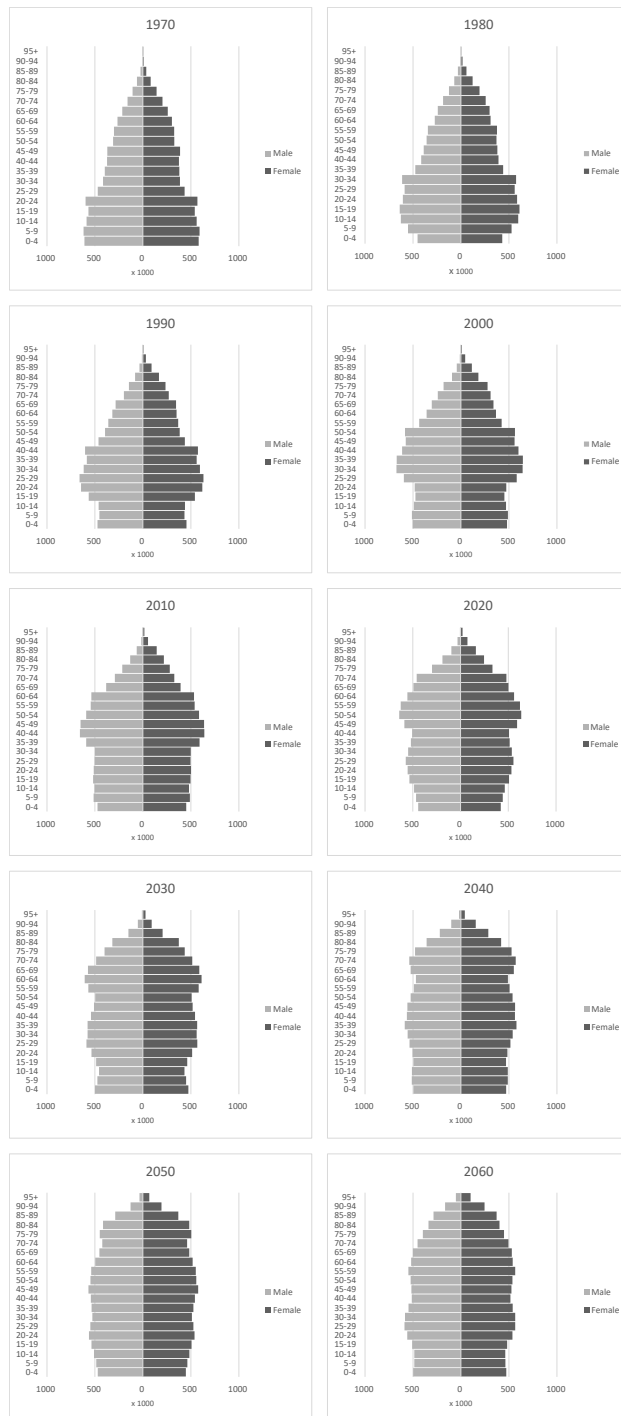


Figure 1.1 Population age structure (Source: Statistics Netherlands, 2020)

While most studies aggregate older adults into one group, which is useful for describing broad patterns of ageing (Atkins, 2018), this can mask significant trends within subgroups (Dennett & Stillwell, 2008; McCracken, 1985; Plane et al., 2005). Thus, several age groups have been distinguished in research (e.g. Abdel-Ghany & Sharpe, 1997; Conway & Houtenville, 2003; Täuber, 1983), although there are no agreed cut-off age ranges (Kim et al., 2003).

Similarly, defining later-life migration is no straightforward matter. In the light of current demographic ageing trends, later-life mobility is an area of growing academic interest (e.g. Andrews et al., 2009; Friedrich & Warnes, 2000; King & Newbold, 2009; King, 2012; Litwak & Longino, 1987; Mulder & Hooimeijer, 1999; Pope & Kang, 2010; Wiseman, 1980; Wulff et al., 2010). As a result, research on later-life migration has been based on a fragmented set of concepts and theories that were developed using a variety of perspectives and disciplinary approaches (Sander et al., 2010). In the absence of a universally agreed operational definition of later-life migration, terms like 'elderly migration', 'later-life migration', and 'retirement migration' are often used interchangeably in the literature (e.g. Conway & Houtenville, 2003; Friedrich & Warnes, 2000; Longino & Bradley, 2003; Stockdale et al., 2013; Walters, 2002). The interchangeable use of terms often results in uncertainty about which type of mobility is the focus of the empirical study.

For the purpose of this thesis, an older adult is defined as a person aged 55 years and over. The age of 55 is also used as a cut-off point, above which movements are classified as later-life moves. Since older adults are not a homogenous group (Atkins, 2018), they are further divided into three age groups: 'pre-elderly' (55-64), 'young- elderly' (65-74), and 'old-elderly' (aged 75 and over). This distinction is deemed relevant in order to capture the potentially divergent migration decisions that older and younger older adults make (e.g. Conway & Houtenville, 2003).

### 1.3. Spatial unevenness of population ageing

Due to complex demographic, economic, social, political, and environmental forces, ageing does not occur evenly across cities and countries (Davies & James, 2011). The spatial unevenness of ageing is particularly affected by migration and 'ageing in place' (Atkins, 2018; Sabater et al., 2017). First, attention is given to the role of migration in changing the spatial concentrations of older people.

In general, residential mobility is seen as the mechanism that brings a family's housing in line with their residential needs (Rossi, 1955). Various social, economic, cultural, and life course factors are understood to produce a housing disequilibrium, 'triggering' the

mobility decision-making process (Mulder & Hooimeijer, 1999). It a complex process, that is place- and time-specific (Clark & Maas, 2015). Migration motives can vary, depending on migration distance and migrant characteristics (Coulter & Van Ham, 2013; Niedomysl, 2011). The spatial mobility pattern of older adults, traditionally ranges from long-distance migration, such as ‘snowbird’ travel to warmer climates in winter months (Happel & Hogan, 2002; King & Newbold, 2009; King et al., 2000; Mings, 1997), to shorter-distance residential mobility, triggered more often than not by a need to be closer to amenities, services, or family members in the face of declining health and abilities (Joseph & Chalmers, 1996; Pope & Kang, 2010) or changing life course circumstances such as retirement and widowhood (Bonnet et al., 2010; Bures, 1997).

‘Ageing in place’ highlights an important possible mechanism that is expected to increase age segregation. Ageing in place has been defined as “the desire and tendency of older persons to stay in their current dwelling units for as long as possible” (Pynoos et al., 2007, p. 711). In the Netherlands, as well as in other countries, it is usually viewed as the policy ideal of enabling people to remain in their existing homes while ageing (Cutchin, 2003; Golant, 2011; Löfqvist et al., 2013), hence postponing and decreasing expensive institutionalized care (Wiles et al., 2012; Kendig et al., 2017). As a result, the residential immobility of older adults is expected to increase. While the short-term effect may be to slow the pace of age segregation, in the longer term, as the population ages, this can act as a driver of age segregation in particular places (Sabater et al., 2017).

Whether or not it is older adults who initiate the process of age segregation is yet to be investigated (Sabater et al., 2017). There is, for example, growing evidence that young age has become more important over time as a delineator of high-density living (Moos, 2016), resulting in a higher share of the young adult population living in high-density neighbourhoods than in the past. The pronounced ‘youthification’ of cities, the result of a young adult population increasingly being ‘stuck in place’ by the recent housing crisis, suggests that the immobility of younger adults also contributes to age segregation processes (Sabater et al., 2017).

The number of studies on the spatial dimension of ageing has increased in recent years. Some studies have investigated intrametropolitan ageing mobility (Hugo, 2000; Lowdell et al., 2000). Others have focused on smaller spatial scales, which can give a better picture of residential mobility and the localization of ageing in place, such as the township, street or neighbourhood scale (Zhou et al., 2018; Lager, 2015). For the purpose of this thesis, the origin and destination patterns of migrants (of all ages) are analysed in order to understand the flows and magnitudes of interregional migration in the Netherlands.



## 1.4. Housing for an ageing population

There is a growing realization that we need to plan for the ageing population and to provide housing for the aged that caters for their needs. In order to successfully plan housing provision, knowledge about the housing preferences of older adults is crucial (Abramsson & Andersson, 2016). Housing preferences are traditionally predicted on the basis of several socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, income and household composition (Van Diepen & Arnoldus, 2003). This method assumes that social background may both create opportunities and limit choices (Ganzeboom, 1988), and that all persons of a certain age behave in the same way in the housing market (Moschis et al., 2003). However, Hooimeijer (2007) observed that the relationship between age and housing is expected to change for successive cohort due to social-cultural and social-economic dynamics.

As a result, there has been growing academic interest in investigating the mobility behaviour of the baby boomer generation in particular. There is evidence to suggest that this demographic cohort is significantly different economically, socially, and culturally from preceding generations and will have different needs and expectations in their postretirement years (Hugo, 2013; Pinnegar et al., 2012; Wulff et al., 2010). It is likewise expected that they will exhibit “unique migration patterns” that differ from those of previous generations (Bures, 1997, p. 117) and that these will have significant policy and planning implications for matters such as the provision of housing (Han & Corcoran, 2014).

This suggests that prognoses based on averages for the older population will become less and less meaningful. For policy, this might imply that a generalized housing policy of the type described above will become increasingly ineffective and inefficient (Hooimeijer, 2007). This thesis aims to improve the estimation of housing preferences by offering an insight into the relative importance that older adults give to various housing characteristics and by differentiating older adults by age, attitudes, and personality traits.

## 1.5. Research aim and thesis outline

In the context of rapid population ageing and the impending retirement of the baby boomer generation, this thesis aims to shed light on the factors influencing residential mobility and the housing preferences of older adults. In particular, it focuses on the possible differences in residential choice behaviour among (future) older adults.

### 1.5.1. Thesis outline

From previous research it is known that migration propensities vary greatly over the life course. The passage through the life course results not only in different age-specific propensities to move, but also in shifting likelihoods of residing in larger or smaller settlements. In 2009, Plane and Jurjevich demonstrated that, when interregional migration flows are disaggregated by age, different patterns of net upward and downward population redistributions operate within the urban hierarchy in the USA. By replicating the seminal methodological approach of Plane and Jurjevich, **chapter 2** reflects on the possible repercussions of residential mobility patterns up and down the Dutch urban hierarchy in the light of demographic change and, in particular, the ageing of the Dutch population.

In **chapter 3**, the residential moving behaviour of older adults in the Netherlands is further examined by analysing which factors are likely to influence considerations about moving and actual mobility. Using pooled data from the Housing Research Netherlands (HRN) surveys from 2006 to 2012, a binary logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of a number of factors on the likelihood that older adults would report that they had moved, or had a propensity to move.

While chapter 3 reflects on what makes older people move or consider moving, **chapter 4** is concerned with the residential immobility of older adults. This chapter explores whether the tendency of older Dutch people to stay in their current dwelling is motivated by choice (i.e. the desire to age in place) or by constraint (i.e. the lack of alternatives). The analysis is based on a carefully constructed questionnaire, designed as a conjoint choice experiment. It involves presenting older adults with a choice between their existing home and several (hypothetical) alternative dwellings. Chapter 4 also examines the relative importance that older adults assign to various housing characteristics and explores whether these preferences are stable for different age groups.

**Chapter 5** aims to improve the housing preference estimates found in chapter 4 by recognizing the growing differentiation among older adults (i.e. other than by age). The possible heterogeneity is analysed by differentiating older adults according to lifestyle (operationalized as values), using latent class analysis as a clustering technique. This results in older adults being classified into five segments on the basis of their viewpoints, motivations and attitude. A separate discrete choice model is then estimated for each 'lifestyle segment' (similar to the analysis in chapter 4), showing the relative importance that these segments give to various housing characteristics.

Finally, **chapter 6** presents an overview of the main findings from chapter 2 to 5. It also reflects on policy implications and on other new issues relating to research on the residential mobility of older adults.

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