

You are kindly invited to the public defense to obtain the degree of

**DOCTOR OF ADULT EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES (VUB)
AND DOCTOR IN ARCHITECTURE (UH)**

of **drs. Ariane Vanbellinghen**

Which will take place on the 28th of April 2026, 6pm-8pm CET
Promotiezaal D.2.01 ([Building D](#)) – [VUB Main Campus Brussels](#)
Pleinlaan 2 – 1050 Brussel

EVERY HOUSE A STORY: LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVES ON PRECARIOUS HOUSING IN LATER LIFE

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Universiteit Brussel)**

**Prof. Dr. Liesbeth De Donder (Vrije
Universiteit Brussel)**

**Prof. Dr. Ann Petermans (Hasselt
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You are also invited to the reception afterwards.

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SUMMARY

This PhD departs from a couple of key observations. First, housing plays a crucial role in the wellbeing of older adults. Yet wellbeing is often assessed primarily through objective criteria, such as housing quality and safety, referring to *being well*, while the question of *how one feels* receives far less attention. Second, although good housing is widely recognised as essential for wellbeing, older adults frequently adopt a wait-and-see attitude towards their future housing situation. As a result, questions about how and where they will live in later life often remain unanswered. Third, access to a place to age 'well' is unequally distributed. Financially precarious older adults and tenants are more often confronted with housing insecurities, not only in the present, but also earlier in life and when looking towards the future. Therefore, housing in later life cannot be understood by focusing solely on the current living situation. Past experiences, accumulated resources, and changing life circumstances shape how people live and what they come to value in housing at older ages.

This PhD therefore aims to understand (1) how a life course perspective can be adopted on housing in later life, (2) how housing for wellbeing takes place in later life, (3) how financial precariousness shapes housing experiences in later life, and (4) older adults' housing preparedness and future housing preferences. Using both qualitative life story interviews and quantitative data to address the research questions, this PhD shows how a life course perspective highlights the complex and dynamic nature of housing. Housing in later life is shaped by a continuous interplay of past, present, and future and cannot be understood in isolation from other life domains (such as income, relationships, health, or work). Moreover, the findings demonstrate that housing for wellbeing goes beyond physical quality standards. It also includes the emotional value of home, the stability it provides, and the degree of mastery older adults have over where and how they live. At the same time, it is important to recognise that housing precariousness is more than an issue affecting only tenants or people with a low income, as it may involve poor housing quality, power imbalances in housing relations, forced relocation, or housing instability across the life course, and therefore goes beyond housing tenure and income status. Lastly, when considering the future of housing for older people, it is important to move beyond the question of what individuals would like in the future. The question of what is possible is equally important and points to possible obstacles shaping future housing.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Educational background

2016-2019

Bachelor in social work, Hogeschool Gent

2019-2021

Master in public management, Ghent University

Key publications

International peer-reviewed article

Vanbellinghen A, Petermans A, Campfort CV, Smetcoren AS, De Donder L. Residential Normalcy in Later Life: A Life Course Perspective. *Journal of Aging and Environment*. 2025 May 14. doi: 10.1080/26892618.2025.2496157

National peer-reviewed contribution in a book

Vanbellinghen A, Severens E, Petermans A, De Donder L, Smetcoren AS. "En toen viel het kaartenhuis ineen": inzichten uit woonpaden van financieel kwetsbare ouderen. In Coene J, Degerickx H, Dewilde C, Ghys T, Hubeau B, Marchal S, Remmen R, Vandenhole W, editors, *Armoede en Ongelijkheid: Jaarboek 2024*. Acco. 2024. p. 229-245