

Health and happy ageing

Real estate and housing

Research Summary Paper (9.1.2019)

The municipality "het Oldambt" has to do with shrinkage and ageing: young people leave the municipality and the proportion of older people is increasing. In the last few months, three third-year students of the study real estate at the Hanzehogeschool in Groningen researched this theme. The research was about how elderly people (80 years and older) could live at home as long as possible. The fieldwork of this research took place in three different villages in "het Oldambt" with the following names: "Finsterwolde, Scheemda and Bad Nieuweschans". The villages differ in terms of size, population and location.

The aim of the survey in partnership with AFEdeMy, Academy on Age-Friendly Environments in Europe BV, is to help elderly people, particularly in more rural environments, to live at home as long as possible. The results of the research can be used by other municipalities, welfare organizations, care institutions and by elderly themselves in Europe to advise how and what they can change to live at home longer.

The research started by literature research on shrinkage, ageing, general facilities for the people who are 80 years and older, existing facilities in the municipality and the population in general. After the literature research, 30 interviews were conducted. Besides the interviews, the students observed the houses and looked at the maintenance of the buildings. By using an observation list, the homes could be divided into different scores (good, reasonable or bad).

Results

Research has shown that all respondents want to continue living in their own homes until this is really no longer possible, many of the contributors are emotionally attached to their home. The needs of people who are 80 years and older are diverse, depending on their health. During the research, the type of houses where the elderly live in were observed and questions were asked about the maintenance, positive elements and the bottlenecks, what they think is necessary to remove the bottlenecks and what, according to the literature, is the best way to remove the bottlenecks.

The people of 80 years and older live in both detached houses and non-detached houses. Most of the elderly who are interviewed live in a detached house. In total, seventeen of the houses were detached and thirteen non-detached. There were regular detached houses and there were two particular detached houses: a protected city view and a monument. The research showed the difference in numbers of sale and rental housing. Twenty of the homes were owner-occupied and ten were rental properties.

Most people of 80 years and older who live in a owner-occupied house are doing the garden maintenance by themselves, except for a few who are physically no longer able to do so. This differs from mowing the grass to pruning the hedge only. The majority of the

maintenance of the rental properties, which are all owned by Acantus, is done by Acantus. The maintenance state of the rental properties differs. Everyone who is physically capable of doing the maintenance, does it himself. Others have help from family or external companies for big maintenance jobs such as painting window frames and doors.

Research has shown that the people of 80 years and older are most satisfied with the house itself: they live independently, and they are often not dependent on others. They are happy with the space and the garden. In addition, the location is mentioned and the (if) existing adjustments that have been made. Also, a lot of bottlenecks are mentioned during the research. The most common bottlenecks are no support brackets in the toilet and bathroom, a house with more floors than only a ground floor, doorsteps, a small and/or dangerous bathroom and a house that isn't wheelchair suitable.

According to the elderly, the changes that can be made are often simple solutions: install support brackets in the rooms where it is needed and remove doorsteps. The more difficult solutions are creating a bed- and bathroom on the ground floor and changing the small/dangerous bathroom. Some people of 80 year and older told us that it's good for younger people to look at a house with a bed- and bathroom downstairs with all the components that the elderly need when they get older. They often do not want to make any major adjustments to the house when they are older (80-plus). In addition, many people of 80 year and older are also not financially capable of making major changes in the house.

According to the literature, there are several solutions to keep the elderly living longer at home, for example doorstep aids, wall brackets in the bathroom and the toilet, a second handrail and a stair lift. The national government says that older people can live at home longer by adapting the current home using new technologies. The last option is domotics (or home automation): this can make a home safer, easier to use and can help older people stay at home for longer.