



The Mindful Scapes.

Project Concept

Dwell-Well: Designing Belonging in Rental Housing



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Dwell-Well: Designing Belonging in Rental Housing

A toolkit to design belonging in rental housing for students & early professionals through co-creation, storytelling & spatial design.

Project Summary

Dwell-Well is a design-led research and innovation project that explores how the spatial, social, and emotional dimensions of rental housing can foster a sense of belonging and wellbeing for students and early-career professionals living in rental housing in European cities.

As urban living becomes more transitory and impersonal, especially for young people in early life stages or career transitions, Dwell-Well seeks to humanize temporary homes. The project argues that *rental housing must be more than functional—it must be emotionally resonant, inclusive, and supportive.*

By drawing on insights from environmental psychology, participatory design, and interior/spatial design, the project will produce a toolkit and design framework for creating rental environments that:

- Encourage place attachment and emotional safety
- Support identity expression in rented spaces
- Foster community integration in transient housing contexts
- Enhance wellbeing through beauty, personalization, and comfort

Core Activities (Starting Phase)

- 1. Define Focused Research Questions**
 - a. What makes rental spaces feel like home to students and early professionals?
 - b. How do spatial design, personal agency, and aesthetics influence belonging?
- 2. Targeted Literature Review & Gap Analysis**
 - a. Focus on existing design interventions in rental housing and their emotional impacts
 - b. Identify gaps in current architectural practice and policy regarding renters' needs
- 3. Tenant-Centered Engagement**
 - a. Interviews, focus groups, and visual diaries with student and young professional tenants in selected European cities
 - b. Co-creation sessions to identify shared emotional and spatial needs
- 4. Design Framework Development**



- a. Translate findings into design concepts and spatial strategies
- b. Develop a prototype-based toolkit using low-cost, high-impact design principles adaptable to rental constraints

5. Mapping Stakeholder Ecosystem

- a. Identify potential collaborators including housing providers, student housing operators, municipal authorities, and local designers
- b. Prepare for piloting in diverse rental contexts

Design Approach

The project will employ a participatory and iterative design methodology, grounded in the following approaches:

- **Co-Design & Storytelling:** Engaging tenants in narrating their experiences, visualizing ideal spaces, and co-developing design interventions
- **Spatial Prototyping:** Testing low-barrier interior interventions (e.g. flexible furnishings, color schemes, adaptable layouts) in real rental units
- **Design Thinking & Environmental Psychology:** Bridging theory and practice by aligning user needs with evidence-based spatial design

Target Group

- **Primary:** Students and early-career professionals (typically aged 18–35) in mid-market or semi-furnished rental housing
- **Secondary:** Housing providers, landlords, municipal policymakers, and design professionals focused on youth and housing accessibility

Relevance & Innovation

While rental housing has been studied from economic and policy perspectives, its emotional, aesthetic, and psychological dimensions remain underexplored—especially in non-luxury contexts. *Dwell-Well* provides a much-needed shift from viewing tenants as transients to valuing them as residents with emotional and social needs.

The project adds new knowledge, methodologies, and tools to the field of architecture and interior design by:

- Focusing on non-ownership housing
- Addressing underrepresented tenant groups



- Connecting spatial design with mental wellbeing and identity
- Proposing scalable, implementable design principles and policies

Contribution to Diversity and Inclusion

Dwell-Well actively promotes equity in housing design by centering the voices of a diverse tenant population—across backgrounds, gender, cultures, and abilities. It challenges the one-size-fits-all rental model and introduces personalized, culturally sensitive, and emotionally enriching alternatives.

Potential Collaborators

- Housing Associations and Housing Providers
- Municipalities
- Universities
- Designers, Architects, Real estate developers
- Community organizations
- Social and inclusive designers