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Introduction

One of the key roles that student organisations play on a daily basis is to support international students in finding an accommodation. Student organisations often act as pivotal bridges between students, universities, and housing providers and for this reason being empowered is important to better realise this role.

The HOME (Home of Mobile Europeans) project developed a set of quality labels which are based on a package of housing data standards that will define the future of student housing, but what does it mean simply put? The answer is very important for student organisations to be empowered and better support international students.

Each house has certain features like the number of rooms, the availability of internet, the presence of furniture, and all the other features that you can think of. The HOME project did careful research work cooperating with students, student organisations, housing providers, market intermediaries, and universities to gather all of these features that are most relevant when it comes to student accommodations specifically to create a common European standard. This is the HOME's innovative digital housing data standard (DDS in short).

This DDS is the stepping stone for the quality labels. In fact, the DDS is quite technical in nature and not appropriate to use to immediately and easily highlight what an accommodation has to offer. This is why the second important output of HOME has been to create a set of quality labels. These labels are like medals that are assigned to housing offers and these are obtained if the accommodation fulfils certain criteria which - you guessed - are the criteria deriving from the DDS. So, if a student housing offer has internet, furniture, an English contract, concierge service and more, the accommodation would be eligible to receive a quality label that would gather those features.

The section focusing on student organisations' role to support international students in finding accommodation will benefit from the work and the research previous done within the HousErasmus+ EU project



predecessor of HOME and which acted as one of the main driving forces leading to the current project.

Technical architecture

You might have already noticed something missing. How are these labels assigned in practice? The short answer is the following: HOME has the ambitious goal of integrating an online student housing search tool into the Erasmus+ App, which will gradually become the main way to access the Erasmus+ programme for students. The HOME solution will then provide the possibility to students to look for an accommodation within the Erasmus+ App. The accommodation will be featured with the quality labels and this will allow students to look for the best accommodation based on their needs while allowing housing providers to access a competitive platform to boost their market potential if they engage with the HOME labelling process, which aims at boosting transparency and quality.

As of now, the labels are already available and you can check them via a set of nice videos that the HOME partnership created available at thehomeproject.eu. Student organisations can already start using these labels to raise the awareness of universities, housing providers, and students to prepare them for the upcoming changes that HOME and the Erasmus+ App will be bringing to the European student housing world. In the meantime you can also take a look at the quality labels from the table below.

	<p>International friendliness:</p> <p>Accommodation adequate to the needs of international students. The criteria to receive this label include wi-fi, furniture, communication and contract in English, online booking available and more.</p>
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	<p>Room quality:</p> <p>Room provided with all necessary furniture. Accommodations with these labels are expected to have things like beds, pillows, bath towels, and bed line.</p>
	<p>Super secure:</p> <p>Accommodation providing above average safety features, including against fire accidents. You can sleep peacefully with security measures like lock on room door, security (armoured) door, and building surveillance(video or concierge 24/7)</p>
	<p>Premium accommodation:</p> <p>Accommodation providing exclusive features. Here you can expect at least two of the following facilities or services: gym, pool, game room, 24/7 concierge, cleaning services.</p>
	<p>Well-equipped kitchen:</p> <p>Well-equipped accommodation, displaying above average kitchen appliances like a dishwasher, oven, microwave, kitchenware and more.</p>
	<p>Well-equipped laundry:</p> <p>Well-equipped accommodation, displaying above average laundry appliances including washing machine, iron and iron board, drying rack.</p>

Student organisations' role to support international students in finding accommodation



Student organisations play a key role in supporting and facilitating for students the search for accommodations. Acting as a bridge between the key stakeholders that can allow students to find accommodations (like housing providers and Higher Education Institutions) student organisation can act as a key supporting factor and here are a few key areas where this can happen:

- **Foster awareness amongst stakeholders**

There is a clear mismatch of how mobile students perceive the challenges posed by accommodation and the awareness amongst Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), policymakers and housing providers.

- **Facilitate contacts between student housing stakeholders**

All stakeholders involved in student housing (HEIs, student organisations, housing providers, policymakers etc.) benefit from more cooperation and information and good practices exchange to get a better understanding of the challenges faced by mobility students when looking for accommodation. Moreover, cooperation among these stakeholders can help them work together on a more systematic HOME approach to solving those challenges.

- **Cooperate with HEIs**

HEIs such as universities, for instance, are an important actor to help students find accommodation. Housing providers often get in contact with HEIs to have a platform to share their offers and access the student's market for their housing offers. Student organisations can facilitate such contacts by mapping these offers and having direct contacts with HEIs to convey these offers to students. Moreover, student organisations should involve themselves in the development of their HEI's internationalisation strategy. Student organisations working on housing issues should showcase their work and the complementarity that a peer-to-peer HOME approach can have to the services provided by HEIs. This will ultimately lead to more recognition of the organisation's work by the HEI and therefore prepare the ground for more structured relations with the international relation office of their HEI. Student organisations not working



on housing issues should discuss how they can best support their HEI with these matters.

- **Housing providers and making it public**

Students often look up to student organisations to know who are the housing providers that they can refer to in order to find accommodation. It is positive hence for student organisations to do a mapping of such providers, create a database and make it available for students.

- **Promote quality information**

Students struggle to find the necessary information on finding accommodation, leading to problems in finding accommodation. In many cases, students go abroad without having permanent accommodation arranged. Student organisations' contribution can be a game changer in helping students by sharing with them and leading them toward quality and streamlined information about accommodations (for example, housing providers' websites, national regulation concerning rights and obligations related to accommodation, etc.)

- **Quality assurance, discrimination & fraud**

Many students report discrimination and attempted fraud. Little is being done in terms of quality assurance for accommodation and the information provided to students. Student organisations can help students by raising awareness on the risks of discrimination and fraud and by empowering them with information on how to protect themselves from these risks. Practical and easy-to-implement examples of how this support can take place is by providing students with guidelines of what a transparent and trustworthy housing offer has to have, sharing with students their rights as tenants, pointing to students the key areas that they should look for in their housing contracts, and more.

- **Easing financial burden**

The additional financial burden of taking part in a mobility programme is still the number one obstacle to student mobility and the costs of accommodation make up a majority of these additional costs. Student organisations can help mobility students by providing information about



available grants both at the EU level, international grants, and also at the national and local level.

- **Help bring down language barriers and cultural differences**

Differences in the way of living and lack of cultural awareness, as well as the language barrier amplify already existing challenges in finding accommodations for students. Local student organisations can bring about strong benefits by helping mobility students via translations or directing them to international-friendly housing providers (for example, which offer English housing contracts and showcase offers in various languages).

The integration of HOME student accommodation search function in the HOME platform

The Erasmus+ App is the official one-stop-shop of Erasmus+ mobilities allowing international students to apply and manage their mobilities. The Erasmus+ App is set to be one of the main game-changers of the Erasmus+ programme since its inception fostering accessibility to mobilities thanks to its digital elements, connecting students via community-based tools within the Erasmus+ App, and streamlining all mobility-relevant information in the App itself.

One of the main ambitions of HOME has been that of guaranteeing accessibility and sustainability and the result of this strong desire has been the integration of HOME's student housing search function within the Erasmus+ App.

This integration is currently under development and would see the creation of a housing-section within the Erasmus+ App which provides students with quality accommodation directly in their Erasmus environment. Students will be able to look for accommodation from the App within the framework built by HOME.



The technical infrastructure built by HOME will gather housing data from housing providers according to our previously developed digital data standard (DDS). This digital data standard gathers all the relevant features that student housing can offer. Once an accommodation in the HOME system has certain features from the standard they will be eligible to be assigned a HOME quality labels that will showcase easily, with transparency, and accessibly some key services that the accommodation offers. The offer will then be showcased with all the relevant details directly in the Erasmus+ App and international students will be able to get in touch with the housing provider.

The housing offers will come from different housing providers so that students will not have to dispersively search the internet. Also, housing providers showcasing their offers in the Erasmus+ App will be aware that their offer will be visible to international students and will work to ensure that the information shown is consequently accessible and accurate. The benefit for housing providers is to be able to showcase their offer in a key channel which is the Erasmus+ App and boost their market potential.

The main advice at this stage for student organisations is to promote Erasmus+ App as much as possible via your channels using the communication resources that you can access via hello.erasmusapp.eu while highlighting the HOME integration within the Erasmus+ App during your communications. You can also find information on HOME and the videos on the quality labels in the HOME website at thhomeproject.eu.

Conclusion

Student organisations have a fundamental role in supporting students and even more so when it comes to supporting international students who are not acquainted with the local context and their host society.

With their knowledge of the local context, the networks with relevant stakeholders, and with the experience of supporting many students, these organisations are key focal points for international students when it comes to student accommodation.

This support can take place leading students to platforms and spaces where they can find offers but also acting as liaison between students and higher education institutions to represent them. Another key point is the role that student organisations can play to map information and resources



about student housing. As well as contributing more generally to bring down barriers faced by students in finding a good accommodation.

Finally, student organisations can act as a main promoter locally of tools such as the ones offered by HOME including the quality labels and the Erasmus+ App HOME's student housing search function in the future.

References

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