The spaces of democratic self-management and collective care in cooperative student housing: Insights from Ghent and Collegium Academicum Heidelberg.

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How do ownership models in student housing shape the spatial practices of self-management, and how do these contribute to affordability, (social) sustainability, and democratic forms of collective living?

How can insights from these practices influence the development of a student cooperative in Ghent and stimulate a critical re-evaluation of established ideas regarding the design of student housing?

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Lies De Saegher, May 28, 2026

Word of thanks

Looking back on the past year, I am struck by how much I have learned and how much these experiences have shaped me. Researching this topic, experimenting with new methodological approaches and writing this thesis have been incredibly enriching. I am grateful for the opportunity to work on a subject that has gradually revealed where my true interests lie. During my architecture studies, I explored many themes, but through my work on student cooperatives, I realised how strongly I am drawn to issues surrounding collective living, governance and spatial planning. I am grateful for the opportunities the past five years have offered me, and for the personal and academic growth they have brought.

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I am deeply grateful to all the interviewees who so generously shared their time and experiences with me. In particular, I would like to thank the residents of the Collegium Academicum in Heidelberg, who welcomed me so warmly into their community. Living with them was one of the most meaningful and educational experiences of my studies.

Finally, I would like to thank the people who have supported me unconditionally. My parents and brother: thank you for your endless encouragement, for the daily walks and conversations. My grandparents – two of whom I have recently had to say goodbye to, whilst the other two remain my greatest source of support – you continue to be an inexhaustible source of strength and inspiration. I am grateful for every good wish and every moment of encouragement. My boyfriend, whom I met through this course: thank you for your support, your love, and for making me laugh every day. And my dearest friends, with whom I have shared countless study trips, late nights in the studios, and many fun moments: thank you for making these years unforgettable.

I write these words with a full heart and a big smile. I am incredibly grateful to you all.

Abstract

Student housing in Ghent is currently characterised by rising rents, a predominantly private rental market, and institutional models that offer limited opportunities for resident participation. Over the past twenty years, the number of students has increased by more than 34.000, while only 3.800 officially recognised rooms have been added. This structural imbalance intensifies competition for affordable student housing and underscores the need for alternative models that promote social sustainability and democratic forms of collective living.

Existing research conceptualises cooperatives as urban commons, as environments for democratic learning, and as socially embedded forms of collective organisation. However, it offers little insight into how ownership structures shape the spatial practices of daily self-management. This thesis fills that gap by investigating how university-managed and cooperative ownership models organise self-governance, how these arrangements shape collective life, and how the resulting spatial practices subsequently influence and transform the governance structure. The research also examines how these insights can influence the development of a student cooperative in Ghent and stimulate a critical re-evaluation of established ideas regarding the design of student housing – understood here as a process completed by use, appropriation, and collective routines.

The research combines a comparative analysis of the housing situation in Ghent and Heidelberg with an architectural ethnography of the Collegium Academicum (CA), a self-managed student cooperative in Heidelberg. The empirical material is based on an intensive two-week field stay at the CA, including participatory observations, semi-structured interviews, policy documents, and ethnographic drawings. The thesis is embedded in a transdisciplinary master's workshop with five fellow students and developed in close consultation with the City of Ghent.

The findings demonstrate that ownership models have a decisive influence on collective maintenance, organisational continuity, and resident involvement. Cooperative living at CA enables forms of care and shared responsibility that are lacking in university-managed student housing. The thesis concludes with a framework that outlines the institutional, organisational, and spatial conditions necessary for the establishment of a student cooperative in Ghent. It argues that design emerges from practice – shaped by how residents manage shared spaces, maintain infrastructure, and live together.

Extended abstract

In the first decades of the 21st century, Ghent developed into a distinctly student-oriented city. More than 41.000 students live there permanently, whilst a further 50.000 commute to the city every day. This growth was not accompanied by a proportional increase in the supply of student accommodation. In twenty years, only 3.800 officially recognised rooms were added, whilst the student population increased by 34.000.[1] This shortage leads to high rents, a shift towards the regular rental market and increasing pressure on multi-family dwellings in the regular housing segment.[2] The City of Ghent estimates that at least 10.000 additional student rooms are needed.[3] This structural tension raises a broader question: Which alternative housing models offer relevant solutions for a socially embedded, affordable and participatory expansion of student housing in Ghent?

The theoretical framework builds on literature that approaches cooperatives as urban commons, as spaces for democratic learning and as systems that are socially and spatially embedded.[4] These authors demonstrate how cooperative living enables new forms of collective responsibility and solidarity. However, little attention has been paid to the way in which ownership structures shape everyday community life: how residents use shared spaces, how they organise maintenance, and how knowledge and responsibilities circulate between generations. To address this gap, this thesis focuses on the ways in which institutional and cooperative models of student housing shape self-management and how these models structure everyday life.

Two research questions are central:

> *How do ownership models in student housing shape the spatial practices of self management, and how do these contribute to affordability, (social) sustainability, and democratic forms of collective living?*
>
> *How can insights from these practices influence the development of a student cooperative in Ghent and stimulate a critical re-evaluation of established ideas regarding the design of student housing?*

The research is part of a transdisciplinary programme within the *Stadsacademie*. Together with five other master students, I am investigating the possibilities of a student cooperative in Ghent, in collaboration with the *Stadsbouwmeester*, the Housing Department and various urban stakeholders. Two economics students are developing a long-term financial model, three urban planners are investigating non-speculative development strategies, and my contribution focuses on the spatial dimension of self-

[1] Stad Gent, *Studie Studentenhuisvesting in de Gentse Woonstad* (2021), https://stad.gent/nl/wonen-bouwen/huren-verhuren/studentenhuisvesting-cijfers.

[2] Atelier Romain and Endeavour, *Woonstudie Gent* (Stad Gent, 2021), 254.

[3] Atelier Romain and Endeavour, *Woonstudie Gent*, 186.

[4] Amanda Huron, *Carving out the Commons: Tenant Organizing and Housing Cooperatives in Washington, D.C*, Diverse Economies and Livable Worlds (University of Minnesota Press, 2018); Anke Schwittay, 'Prefigurative Pedagogies: Learning to Build Alternative Futures in Student Housing Co-Operatives', *Futures* 166 (February 2025): 103534, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2024.103534; Nestor Agustin Guity-Zapata et al., 'Rethinking Value: Insights from a Scoping Literature Review of the Principles and Benefits of Housing Co-Operatives', *Housing Studies*, 16 February 2026, 1–29, https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2026.2622929.

management: how students use, maintain and appropriate communal spaces, and how these practices shape the organisation of living.

The research employs a comparative analysis of student housing in Ghent and Heidelberg. In Ghent, the thesis focuses on the university model, with Home Vermeylen as a case study, where field observations, interviews with residents and staff, and an analysis of policy documents provide insight into the day-to-day organisation of the accommodation and the limited scope for self-management. In Heidelberg, the student cooperative Collegium Academicum (CA) forms the central case study. During a two-week stay on site, participatory observation took place, supplemented by semi-structured interviews, ethnographic drawings and a study of archival material and relevant literature.

The results show that ownership models have a profound influence on the possibilities for collective maintenance, continuity between student generations and the extent to which residents take responsibility. In university accommodation in Ghent, an externalised management largely determines the rules and routines, leaving students with few opportunities to shape communal spaces or build sustainable forms of engagement. A different dynamic emerges at the Collegium Academicum: students take responsibility for maintenance, resolve conflicts and develop working structures that support the project across generations, although this process remains fragile and depends on sustained commitment. These practices also take on a spatial form: they determine how communal spaces function, how undefined zones evolve into meeting places, and how the relationship between private and shared spaces develops over time.

A central insight of this thesis concerns the concept of "design" as a process that evolves through use: students give meaning to the design by using it on a daily basis and by maintaining it. This approach aligns with the analysis that habitation continually reinterprets and completes architecture.[1] The spatial configuration of the Collegium Academicum supports this process through scalable structures, visibility and shared spaces that enable collaboration and mutual care, yet simultaneously create new tensions, such as emotional pressure to participate and a constant need for mutual coordination.

The thesis concludes with an overview of the institutional, organisational and spatial conditions for establishing a student cooperative in Ghent. These include access to non-speculative land, structures that support intergenerational knowledge transfer, and spatial configurations that encourage collective maintenance and daily interaction. By documenting a functioning cooperative and translating the practices learned to the Ghent context, this study contributes to a realistic vision of a future student cooperative. The analysis demonstrates that socially embedded, student-led and financially stable housing can be achievable when institutional frameworks actively support these forms of collective living. More generally, the research demonstrates that student cooperatives can make a meaningful contribution to tackling the urgent housing crisis in Ghent, whilst simultaneously opening up new opportunities for democratic engagement and social cohesion.

[1] Philippe Boudon, *Lived-in Architecture: Le Corbusier's Pessac Revisited*, 1st paperback ed (MIT Press, 1979).

Translated extended abstract

In de eerste decennia van de 21ste eeuw ontwikkelde Gent zich tot een uitgesproken studentenstad. Meer dan 41.000 studenten wonen er permanent, terwijl dagelijks nog eens 50.000 pendelaars de stad binnenstromen. Deze groei ging niet gepaard met een gelijkmatige uitbreiding van het aanbod aan studentenhuisvesting. In twintig jaar tijd kwamen er slechts 3.800 officieel erkende kamers bij, terwijl de studentenpopulatie met 34.000 toenam.[1] De schaarste leidt tot hoge huurprijzen, een verschuiving naar de reguliere huurmarkt en een toenemende druk op meerkamerwoningen.[2] De Stad Gent schat dat er minstens 10.000 bijkomende studentenkamers nodig zijn.[3] Deze structurele spanning roept een bredere vraag op: welke alternatieve woonmodellen bieden relevante oplossingen voor een sociaal verankerde, betaalbare en participatieve uitbreiding van studentenhuisvesting in Gent?

Het theoretisch kader bouwt voort op literatuur die coöperaties benadert als stedelijke *commons*, als plekken voor democratisch leren en als systemen die sociaal en ruimtelijk zijn ingebed.[4] Deze auteurs tonen hoe coöperatief wonen nieuwe vormen van collectieve verantwoordelijkheid en solidariteit mogelijk maakt. Tegelijk blijft onderbelicht hoe eigendomsstructuren het dagelijkse samenleven sturen: hoe bewoners gedeelde ruimtes gebruiken, hoe zij onderhoud organiseren, en hoe kennis en verantwoordelijkheden tussen generaties circuleren. Vanuit die lacune richt deze thesis zich op de manier waarop institutionele en coöperatieve modellen van studentenhuisvesting zelfbeheer vormgeven en hoe deze modellen het alledaagse wonen structureren.

Twee onderzoeksvragen staan centraal:

> *Hoe beïnvloeden eigendomsmodellen de ruimtelijke praktijken van zelfbeheer in studentenhuisvesting, en welke rol spelen ze in betaalbaarheid, sociale duurzaamheid en democratische vormen van collectief wonen?*
>
> *Hoe kunnen inzichten uit deze praktijken het ontstaan van een studentencoöperatie in Gent ondersteunen en aanleiding geven tot een kritische herziening van bestaande ideeën over het ontwerp van studentenhuisvesting?*

Het onderzoek maakt deel uit van een transdisciplinair traject binnen de Stadsacademie. Samen met vijf andere masterstudenten werk ik aan de mogelijkheden van een studentencoöperatie in Gent, in samenwerking met de Stadsbouwmeester, de Dienst Wonen en diverse stedelijke actoren. Twee economiestudenten ontwikkelen een financieel model voor de lange termijn, drie stedenbouwkundigen onderzoeken niet-speculatieve ontwikkelingsstrategieën en mijn bijdrage richt zich op de ruimtelijke dimensie van zelfbeheer: hoe studenten gedeelde ruimtes gebruiken, onderhouden en zich toe-eigenen, en hoe deze praktijken de organisatie van het wonen vormgeven.

Het onderzoek maakt gebruik van een vergelijkende analyse van studentenhuisvesting in Gent en Heidelberg. In Gent richt de thesis zich op het universiteitsmodel via de casestudy Home Vermeylen, waar veldobservaties, gesprekken met bewoners en personeel, en een

[1] Stad Gent, *Studie Studentenhuisvesting in de Gentse Woonstad*.

[2] Atelier Romain and Endeavour, *Woonstudie Gent*, 254.

[3] Atelier Romain and Endeavour, *Woonstudie Gent*, 186.

[4] Huron, *Carving out the Commons*; Schwittay, 'Prefigurative Pedagogies'; Guity-Zapata et al., 'Rethinking Value'.

analyse van beleidsdocumenten inzicht bieden in de dagelijkse organisatie van het wonen en de beperkte ruimte voor zelfbeheer. In Heidelberg vormt de studentencoöperatie Collegium Academicum (CA) de centrale casestudy. Tijdens een twee weken durend verblijf op de site vond participatieve observatie plaats, aangevuld met semigestructureerde interviews, etnografische tekeningen en een studie van archiefmateriaal en relevante literatuur.

De resultaten tonen dat eigendomsmodellen een diepgaande invloed uitoefenen op de mogelijkheden voor gezamenlijk onderhoud, de continuïteit tussen studentengeneraties en de mate waarin bewoners verantwoordelijkheid opnemen. In de universitaire huisvesting in Gent bepalen beheerders grotendeels de regels en routines, waardoor studenten weinig mogelijkheden hebben om gedeelde ruimtes vorm te geven of duurzame vormen van betrokkenheid op te bouwen. In het Collegium Academicum ontstaat een andere dynamiek: studenten nemen verantwoordelijkheid voor onderhoud, lossen conflicten op en bouwen werkstructuren uit die het project generaties lang ondersteunen, al blijft dit proces kwetsbaar en afhankelijk van blijvende inzet. Deze praktijken krijgen ook ruimtelijk vorm: ze sturen hoe gemeenschappelijke ruimtes functioneren, hoe ongedefinieerde zones uitgroeien tot ontmoetingsplekken, en hoe de relatie tussen private en gedeelde ruimtes zich in de tijd ontwikkelt.

Een centraal inzicht van deze thesis betreft de notie van ontwerp als een proces dat zich ontwikkelt door gebruik: studenten geven het ontwerp betekenis via dagelijkse toe-eigening, onderhoud en collectieve routines. Deze benadering sluit aan bij de analyse dat bewoning architectuur voortdurend herinterpreteert en vervolledigt.[1] De ruimtelijke configuratie van het Collegium Academicum ondersteunt dit proces via schaalbare structuren, zichtbaarheid en gedeelde ruimtes die samenwerking en wederzijdse zorg bevorderen, maar creëert tegelijk nieuwe spanningen, zoals emotionele druk om deel te nemen en een voortdurende nood aan onderlinge afstemming.

De thesis sluit af met een overzicht van de institutionele, organisatorische en ruimtelijke voorwaarden voor de oprichting van een studentencoöperatie in Gent. Deze omvatten toegang tot niet-speculatieve grond, structuren die kennisoverdracht tussen generaties ondersteunen en ruimtelijke configuraties die collectief onderhoud en dagelijkse ontmoeting stimuleren. Door een functionerende coöperatie te documenteren en de geleerde praktijken te vertalen naar de Gentse context, draagt deze studie bij aan een realistische verbeelding van een toekomstige studentencoöperatie. De analyse toont dat sociaal verankerde, door studenten gedragen en financieel stabiele huisvesting haalbaar kan zijn wanneer institutionele kaders deze vormen van collectief wonen actief ondersteunen. In bredere zin laat het onderzoek zien dat studentencoöperaties een betekenisvolle bijdrage kunnen leveren aan het aanpakken van de urgente huisvestingscrisis in Gent, terwijl ze tegelijk nieuwe mogelijkheden openen voor democratische betrokkenheid en sociale samenhang.

[1] Boudon, *Lived-in Architecture*.

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1

INTRODUCTION

THEME

RELEVANCE

POSITIONALITY

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Theme and relevance of the thesis

Student housing in Ghent is under increasing pressure: rising rents, a shortage of affordable rooms, and a growing student population reinforce the need for living arrangements that promote both affordability and collective well-being. This structural imbalance also influences how students live together: it affects the use of common areas, the distribution of responsibilities, and the social dynamics within living communities.

In this context, this thesis investigates how two different ownership models – university-managed housing and cooperative living – structure the day-to-day organisation of self-management in student environments. It examines how responsibilities are distributed, how common areas are maintained, and how these arrangements shape collective life. Simultaneously, it analyses how spatial practices reform governance structures, revealing a reciprocal relationship between ownership, self-governance, and living space. Ownership models determine who is allowed to make decisions, how routines are established, and how residents relate to their environment.

The relevance of this research stems from the daily reality of students in Ghent, many of whom experience limited autonomy, weak social ties, and little influence over their living situation. Top-down management structures often leave residents with few opportunities to participate in shaping or maintaining common spaces, while the broader housing crisis reinforces feelings of insecurity and isolation. Cooperative housing models offer a meaningful alternative: they enable social networks, distribute responsibilities more evenly, and create opportunities for democratic participation.

The thesis offers concrete, actionable recommendations for adapting proven cooperative governance models to the local context of student housing. By presenting a successful example, the study counters societal scepticism that undermines students' self-organising capacity and builds essential trust between policymakers, universities, and neighbourhoods, thereby enabling Ghent's first viable student housing cooperative.

Positionality and personal motivation

My interest in cooperative housing and shared spatial practices is closely connected to my own experiences as a student and temporary resident in different living environments. During my Erasmus stay in Trondheim, I lived in a shared house with seven other students from diverse cultural and disciplinary backgrounds. That co-living arrangement became a formative encounter with the social potential of shared housing. Everyday moments – spontaneous conversations in the living room, shared meals, and small acts of generosity – created a sense of community that shaped my understanding of what collective living can offer.

At the same time, this experience made me more aware of the complexities of organising and maintaining shared spaces, which later became central to my research interests. Practical challenges soon emerged: the kitchen could only accommodate two people cooking at once, and our weekly cleaning schedule quickly broke down because everyone interpreted "cleaning" differently (Fig. 1). These recurring discussions about hygiene and expectations showed how fragile self-management can be without a shared framework. In retrospect, listing each task with clear instructions – such as specifying what "cleaning the bathroom" entailed – could have prevented many of these disagreements and created a stronger basis for accountability. Ownership arrangements added another layer of complexity: as tenants of a private developer, we had limited autonomy to address maintenance issues ourselves. When the cooktop broke, for example, repairs had to be requested through the landlord, who then billed us for the intervention.

These experiences highlighted how the design of shared spaces and the underlying ownership structures influence residents' ability to take responsibility for their living environment. They ultimately motivated my research into how more participatory housing models can support collective care in practice.

02/09/2024-08/09/2024	Kitchen + tables	Hall upstairs	Hall downstairs	Toilet upstairs	Bathroom upstairs	Toilet downstairs	Bathroom downstairs
Kian							
Camilla							
Magdalena							
Baptiste							
Lies							
Merdan							
Gizem							
Mikael							

Figure 1 *– Cleaning schedule during Erasmus stay, Trondheim (2024-2025)*

Living and studying in Ghent has strengthened my motivation. Like many students, I have limited options and little influence on the spaces I live in. These experiences fuel my interest in cooperative housing as a promising alternative – one that redistributes responsibility, strengthens social ties, and offers students a more active role in shaping their living environment.

My position as both a researcher and a student allows me to approach this subject with analytical distance, while simultaneously remaining rooted in the lived reality that makes it urgent. This dual perspective guides the questions central to this thesis and motivates my focus on the relationship between ownership, governance, and spatial practice. It also forms the basis for my endeavour to investigate how cooperative models can contribute to more socially sustainable forms of student housing in Ghent.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review: Theoretical framework

1. Housing tenure models and affordability

This section introduces the broader housing context in which this thesis is situated. First, it describes how different tenure models – private rental housing, social housing, and third-sector initiatives – distribute affordability, control, and stability. Subsequently, it examines affordability as a structural consequence of housing systems and discusses how market dynamics and financialization influence access to housing in Ghent. Additionally, the concepts of use value, exchange value, and right to the city are introduced to analyse how ownership structures influence residents' ability to live and appropriate their own space.

After a general outline of the context, the chapter focuses on student housing. It shows how financialization has reformed this sector and argues that student cooperatives offer a fundamentally different, non-speculative form of housing that redistributes decision-making power and guarantees long-term affordability.

1.1 Housing tenure models: Affordability, resident control, and stability

Ownership models determine not only who holds the legal ownership of a home, but also how rights, responsibilities, and decision-making authority are distributed. As Annelies Cousserier argues in her master thesis *More than Housing: Zoning and Regulation Strategies for Sustainable Development in Ghent*, ownership is an institutional arrangement that divides control, stability, and decision-making power between residents, owners, and the state.[1] In most European contexts, this leads to a dual structure: a large **private rental sector** governed by market logic and fragmented ownership, and a **state-funded social housing sector** regulated by welfare state mechanisms.

In addition to this dual structure, the literature on the third sector describes forms of housing that operate outside both profit-driven markets and public services. This sector consists of **cooperatives** and community land trusts, which combine collective ownership with socially oriented management. While this sector is well-established in countries such as Germany and Austria, Cousserier shows that it remains marginal in Flanders due to limited access to capital, weak institutional support, and a policy culture focused on individual home ownership.[2]

In *Who Owns Collaborative Housing? A Conceptual Typology of Property Regimes,* Daniël Bossuyt argues that the effects of an ownership model cannot be understood solely by looking at who owns the home. Instead, they depend on how the underlying **bundle of rights** – access, possession, commissioning, management, exclusion and income – is organised.[3] From this perspective, ownership is a configuration of rights that shapes affordability, resident control, and long-term stability.

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[1] Annelies Cousserier, 'More than Housing: Zoning and Regulation Strategies for Sustainable Development in Ghent' (Master thesis, University of Ghent, 2025).

[2] Cousserier, 'More than Housing: Zoning and Regulation Strategies for Sustainable Development in Ghent', 10.

[3] Daniël Bossuyt, 'Who Owns Collaborative Housing? A Conceptual Typology of Property Regimes', *Housing, Theory and Society* 39, no. 2 (2022): 206–7, https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2021.1888788.

1.2 Affordability as a structural outcome of housing systems

Affordability is a structural consequence of the way housing systems organise value, investments, and property rights. As Dasha Kuletskaya argues in *Concepts of Use-Value and Exchange-Value in Housing Research*, contemporary affordability problems stem from the tension between housing as a fundamental human need and housing as an object of investment.[1] This contradiction becomes visible in rising rents, speculative property development, and the marginalisation of non-market forms of provision.

Financialization reinforces this dynamic. As Manuel Aalbers demonstrates in *The Variegated Financialization of Housing*, real estate has become a favourite instrument for global capital because it offers predictable revenue streams, can be used as collateral, and is embedded in financial circuits that promise stable returns.[2] When housing is primarily assessed by these financial metrics, its production and management are increasingly determined by investor expectations rather than by social or demographic needs. In her book *Carving Out the Commons*, Amanda Huron adds that speculative pressure is particularly high in cities, where high land prices and competition for space make it increasingly difficult for non-market parties to secure locations.[3]

Bossuyt further argues that ownership regimes allowing individual wealth growth inevitably reintroduce market pressure, whereas models that limit value extraction and anchor collective governance are better able to stabilise long-term affordability.[4]

This structural dynamic is clearly visible in Ghent. The *Woonstudie* – commissioned by the City of Ghent and Housing Department, and carried out by Atelier Romain and Endeavour – shows that pressure on affordability in the city is the result of systemic market dynamics.[5] The study demonstrates how rising demand from higher-income households, combined with limited supply, drives up prices and displaces lower-income residents. This "waterfall effect" pushes households with greater purchasing power into lower market segments, where their higher budgets drive up rents and intensify competition. The report also highlights a persistent typological mismatch: while many households are looking for affordable, multi-room homes, the market continues to produce small, individual dwellings that maximise the return on investment. Because suitable housing is scarce, demand for these smaller types of homes is driven, reinforcing the structural tension – which Kuletskaya and Aalbers have already identified – between housing as a basic need and housing as an investment object.[6] The *Woonstudie* concludes that the affordability crisis in Ghent is rooted in structural scarcity, speculative development, and the lack of non-market alternatives.[7]

In summary, private rental housing places residents in market-driven systems where rents follow profit expectations and tenant influence remains limited. Social housing offers more predictable access but concentrates decision-making within bureaucratic structures that

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[1] Dasha Kuletskaya, 'Concepts of *Use-Value* and *Exchange-Value* in Housing Research', *Housing, Theory and Society* 40, no. 5 (2023): 589–606, https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2023.2238740.

[2] Manuel B. Aalbers, 'The Variegated Financialization of Housing', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 41, no. 4 (2017): 542–54, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12522.

[3] Huron, *Carving out the Commons*, 8–9.

[4] Bossuyt, 'Who Owns Collaborative Housing?', 201-212.

[5] Atelier Romain and Endeavour, *Woonstudie Gent*.

[6] Aalbers, 'The Variegated Financialization of Housing'; Kuletskaya, 'Concepts of *Use-Value* and *Exchange-Value* in Housing Research'.

[7] Atelier Romain and Endeavour, *Woonstudie Gent*.

limit resident autonomy. Initiatives from the third sector, although still marginal in Flanders, demonstrate how collective ownership and democratic governance can transfer control to residents and guarantee long-term affordability. Through shared ownership and participatory management – often supported by equity limits that prevent speculation – these models create stable, resident-led living environments.[1]

1.3 Use-value, exchange-value, and the right to the city

The distinction between use value and exchange value forms a central conceptual framework, originally developed by Marx to describe how value is produced and organised in capitalist societies. In Marxist terms, **use value** refers to the practical utility of an object – what it enables people to do – whereas **exchange value** refers to market value, the price it can fetch in exchange. As Kuletskaya emphasises, they are not moral oppositions, but relational categories that show how housing acquires meaning within social and economic systems.[2] She argues that research into housing often views use value as inherently "good", and exchange value as inherently "bad", which obscures the complexity of the emergence of different use values. Instead, she proposes analysing pyramids of use values – from basic needs such as shelter to symbolic or status-oriented forms of value.

Henri Lefebvre – interpreted by Mark Purcell's *Possible Worlds: Henri Lefebvre and the Right to the City* – extends the concepts of use value and exchange value from commodities to the production of urban space.[3] For Lefebvre, the **capitalist city** is organised around exchange value, where ownership, profit, and commercialisation determine how space is used. The **urban**, on the other hand, represents a possible world based on use value: a living environment shaped by encounter, creativity, and meaningful social relationships. **The right to the city** is therefore a political claim to place use value back at the centre by enabling residents to shape urban space according to their own needs rather than market demands. A central mechanism through which this shift takes place is **appropriation**. Purcell shows that for Lefebvre, appropriation means that inhabitants make the space their own through a lived practice: by using the space, living in it, and giving it meaning. Property rights expropriate space by assigning it to owners rather than users. Through appropriation, residents reclaim the city as something rightfully theirs, thereby prioritising use value over exchange value. Purcell further emphasises that appropriation is inextricably linked to participation and autogestion. **Participation**, in Lefebvre's sense, is the collective involvement of residents in creating and managing urban space. This political awakening leads to **autogestion**, or collective self-management, whereby residents learn to collectively gain control over their living conditions. In that sense, the right to the city is simultaneously a claim to use value, appropriation, participation, and autogestion: it demands that those who inhabit the city also govern it.

A crucial dimension underlying this tension is the role of urban land. Over time, land accumulates exchange value through broader urban dynamics such as accessibility, public investment, and neighbourhood attractiveness. As Lefebvre argues, the commercialisation of land reinforces the dominance of exchange value, thereby limiting the ability of non-market actors to inhabit and transform the space.[4] However, land also possesses a

[1] Cousserier, 'More than Housing: Zoning and Regulation Strategies for Sustainable Development in Ghent', 18–20.

[2] Kuletskaya, 'Concepts of *Use-Value* and *Exchange-Value* in Housing Research'.

[3] Mark Purcell, 'Possible Worlds: Henri Lefebvre and the Right to the City', *Journal of Urban Affairs* 36, no. 1 (2014): 141–54, https://doi.org/10.1111/juaf.12034.

[4] Purcell, 'Possible Worlds'.

collective value: it can form a stable basis for socially embedded housing models that prioritise long-term use over profit.

In this thesis, I follow Kuletskaya by treating use value and exchange value as analytical categories rather than moral binary oppositions, while using Purcell's interpretation of Lefebvre to articulate their political significance. Analytically, this framework helps to identify how different housing models generate layered configurations of use and exchange values. It also clarifies how the dominance of exchange value – reinforced by property relations and land commercialisation – shapes the possibilities for residents to inhabit, appropriate, and collectively manage their living environment.

1.4 Student housing: Financialization and student cooperatives as an alternative tenure model

The broader transformation of housing into an investment object forms the structural backdrop against which the financialization of student housing has intensified. As Aalbers demonstrates, financialization has extended to semi-public domains such as education, making student housing an attractive niche for institutional investors.[1] Purpose-built student accommodations and private student flats are increasingly designed as financial products: standardised units and stable occupancy rates make them ideal instruments for private equity funds and real estate investment trusts. Within this logic, students are redefined as sources of income, and their housing needs are interpreted based on return expectations and asset management strategies. This investment-driven approach reshapes the structure of student housing by concentrating supply in high-yielding segments, leaving less profitable or non-market-oriented forms structurally underserved. The result is rising rents, a limited supply, and increasing reliance on parental capital.

Cooperative living offers a fundamentally different ownership model. As Nestor Agustin Guity-Zapata et al. demonstrate in *Rethinking Value: Insights from a Scoping Literature Review of the Principles and Benefits of Housing Co-operatives*, contemporary cooperatives are based on democratic control, active member participation, collective responsibility, and a pursuit of social well-being.[2] These principles distinguish cooperatives from both private rental housing and institutional models by placing residents at the centre of governance. The literature on commons further deepens this perspective. Huron conceptualises limited equity cooperatives as collectively managed urban resources, organised around use rather than profit.[3] Anti-speculation rules limit resale value and prevent individual appropriation of collective profits, ensuring that housing remains permanently affordable and embedded in shared governance.

Understanding these financial mechanisms is essential for the analysis of contemporary student housing systems. It explains why private student residences have increased in Ghent, why students are increasingly dependent on financial support, and why alternative ownership models are necessary. Within this landscape, cooperatives offer a structurally different answer: they remove homes from the speculative market, redistribute decision-making power to residents, and anchor affordability in long-term collective governance.

[1] Aalbers, 'The Variegated Financialization of Housing'.

[2] Guity-Zapata et al., 'Rethinking Value'.

[3] Huron, *Carving out the Commons*, 7–8.

2. Self-management in student cooperatives

2.1 Self-management as a form of governance under student conditions

The student population is characterised by structural features that directly influence conditions in student housing. As Anke Schwittay notes in *Students Take Over: Prefiguring Urban Commons in Student Housing Co-operatives*, short study periods and frequent moves create a highly mobile group with limited financial resources and a strong dependence on parental support.[1] These factors determine the context in which student housing functions and establish the possibilities and limitations of various organisational models. Within this context, self-management has become a defining feature of student cooperatives and other jointly organised housing projects. It functions as a governance model through which students collectively organise and maintain their living environment, including practices such as daily maintenance, shared responsibility for common areas, and resident-led decision-making.

Schwittay's analysis shows that the work performed by students constitutes a form of urban commoning, in which residents collectively manage a shared resource under conditions of limited financial and institutional support.[2] Students become active managers of their environment and take on tasks that would normally be outsourced to professional staff. This involvement ensures that the project can sustain itself in the long term and enables a sense of ownership and collective involvement among the residents.

2.2 Self-management as prefigurative learning

Self-management in student cooperatives is also a form of prefigurative learning. As Schwittay argues in *Prefigurative Pedagogies: Learning to Build Alternative Futures in Student Housing Co-operatives*, these projects function as pedagogical environments where students learn through direct involvement in collective organisation.[3] This learning is concrete and experiential: residents participate in meetings, coordinate shared tasks, and take responsibility for the daily functioning of the community. Through these activities, they develop democratic competencies, organisational skills, and forms of mutual responsibility that stem from the practical reality of community life. Cooperatives also serve as experimental spaces in which residents can try out horizontal decision-making, non-hierarchical coordination, and alternative ways of organising daily life.

Research into cooperative living reinforces this pedagogical dimension. Guity-Zapata et al. demonstrate that participation in cooperative governance enables residents to acquire a wide range of operational, organisational, and socio-political skills.[4] These competencies develop both through formal responsibilities – such as serving on boards and managing finances – and through the daily tasks of the cooperative. Training opportunities, whether led by fellow residents or supported by external experts, also strengthen residents' ability to make informed decisions and contribute effectively to collective governance. The authors describe this process as **capacity building** and characterise cooperatives as a

[1] Anke Schwittay, 'Students Take over: Prefiguring Urban Commons in Student Housing Co-Operatives', *Housing Studies* 40, no. 4 (2025): 966–87, https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2024.2334816.
[2] Schwittay, 'Students Take Over', 967.
[3] Schwittay, 'Prefigurative Pedagogies'.
[4] Guity-Zapata et al., 'Rethinking Value', 13.

school of democracy, where daily interaction and negotiation enable political and management skills. At the same time, they emphasise that skill acquisition does not occur automatically: it is uneven and strongly dependent on individual involvement and willingness to participate.

2.3 Structural challenges of self-management

Self-management also faces a number of structural challenges that determine how student cooperatives function in practice. The literature points to three recurring problems stemming from the specific circumstances of student life and the organisational requirements of collective housing.

A first challenge concerns **resident participation**. Self-governance depends on the willingness and ability of students to invest time, energy, and emotional commitment in the cooperative. As Schwittay argues, participation in cooperative governance is structurally limited by the circumstances of student life: students must combine academic obligations, paid student work, and personal responsibilities.[1] She adds that participation is also a learning process: residents gradually acquire the skills necessary for collective organisation, but this requires continuity and commitment.[2]

High turnover is inherent in student housing, as most residents stay only briefly. This constant rotation poses a structural challenge to maintaining **knowledge continuity**. Each departure leads to a loss of organisational memory, and without effective mechanisms for knowledge transfer between generations – such as handover documents, mentorship programs, or a formalised onboarding process – the cooperative repeatedly loses accumulated experience.[3] As a result, it becomes difficult to maintain organisational cohesion, and the project risks having to rebuild its internal structures.

A third challenge concerns **external credibility**. Schwittay shows that, due to their age, mobility, and lack of financial experience, students are heavily dependent on support from external organisations such as municipalities, housing associations, and universities.[4] These collaborations form what she calls "ambivalent alliances": external institutions are essential for securing funding, legitimacy, and professional guidance, but often regard students as too unstable or inexperienced to manage a housing project independently. Student cooperatives must therefore continuously demonstrate reliability through transparent governance, consistent task execution, and clear communication to build trust and maintain the long-term support upon which their projects rest.

Collectively, these challenges illustrate that self-governance in student housing is also shaped by broader structural conditions. They emphasise the ongoing effort required to maintain collective organisation within a population characterised by mobility and limited resources, and they define the practical boundaries within which student cooperatives must operate.

[1] Schwittay, 'Students Take Over'.
[2] Schwittay, 'Prefigurative Pedagogies'.
[3] Schwittay, 'Students Take Over', 979.
[4] Schwittay, 'Students Take Over', 978–79.

2.4 Self-management as an alternative to institutional and market-oriented governance

The characteristics of self-management become clearest when compared to the governance logic that determines the structure of university-managed and privately rented student housing. In institutional housing, rules and organisational priorities are determined externally and implemented via administrative procedures. This top-down approach limits residents' influence on daily matters such as noise pollution, furnishing, visitors, or the use of common areas. Private rental housing operates according to a similar logic: tenants have limited opportunities to personalise their rooms or shape their environment, and their relationship to the home is largely determined by the terms of the lease agreement.[1]

In summary, self-management is a governance model that enables students to exercise actual autonomy. It functions as a form of collective organisation, a place for prefigurative learning, and a practical alternative to institutional and market-oriented housing. At the same time, its effectiveness depends on continuous participation, knowledge transfer, and external recognition – factors shaped by the mobility and limited resources of the student population.

3. Sustainability in student cooperatives

3.1 Ecological sustainability

Ecological sustainability in cooperative living arises from the interaction between the physical design and the way residents collectively manage shared resources. In *Sustainability Begins at Home? An Ecological Exploration of Sub/urban Australian Community-Focused Housing Initiatives*, Louise Crabtree argues, that ecological resilience depends not only on technical solutions but also on the diversity and flexibility of daily practices within housing systems.[2] Sustainability should be viewed as a continuous process rather than a fixed design outcome.

Living together strengthens ecological objectives by organising the shared use of facilities, allowing residents to pool equipment and spaces and thereby reduce individual resource consumption. Because residents manage their own infrastructure, they can opt for environmentally friendly arrangements such as renewable energy contracts, waste separation systems, or water-saving technologies. Research by Guity-Zapata et al. shows that such participatory arrangements promote environmental awareness within the community and increase residents' capacity to address ecological challenges.[3]

The value of collective environmental management becomes particularly evident in times of disruption. In *Energy Commons During Crisis: Understanding Housing Cooperative Strategies Through Dramaturgical Sociology*, Jan Frankowski et al. describe how Polish housing cooperatives weathered the 2022 energy crisis by jointly coordinating heating systems, applying for subsidies, and implementing low-cost efficiency-enhancing

[1] Schwittay, 'Prefigurative Pedagogies'.

[2] Louise Crabtree, 'Sustainability Begins at Home? An Ecological Exploration of Sub/Urban Australian Community-Focused Housing Initiatives', *Geoforum* 37, no. 4 (2006): 519–35, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2005.04.002.

[3] Guity-Zapata et al., 'Rethinking Value', 14–15.

measures, such as fuel stacking.[1] These practices illustrate how cooperative structures can maintain ecological stability under pressure by mobilising shared capacities rather than relying exclusively on external actors.

3.2 Social Sustainability

Social sustainability concerns the ability of a community to create supportive relationships, including governance and meaningful forms of collective life. Cousserier argues that this dimension extends beyond affordability and also encompasses the integration of residents with diverse backgrounds, equitable access to shared facilities, and the opportunity for all residents to participate in shaping their living environment.[2] From this perspective, the social dimension of sustainability depends on how organisational and spatial arrangements facilitate cooperation, joint decision-making, and regular interaction among residents.

An important mechanism in this process is the development of social infrastructure – the networks and practices that support daily community life. As Darinka Czischke and Carla Huisman demonstrate in *Integration through Collaborative Housing? Dutch Starters and Refugees Forming Self-Managing Communities in Amsterdam,* self-management in itself generates social connections.[3] When residents jointly organise daily routines – coordinating maintenance or solving minor problems – these shared practices create the conditions for three forms of social connectedness. **Social bonds** arise within groups whose members share a similar background or interests. **Social bridges** are formed between residents with different backgrounds who come into contact with one another through shared routines. However, the formation of these bridges depends on certain preconditions, such as a similar age, life stage, or daily rhythm. And **social links** arise when residents gain access to broader institutional networks through the community's organisational structures.

Social sustainability also extends outwards and determines how cooperatives relate to their surrounding neighbourhoods. In *Cooperative Housing and Social Cohesion: The Role of Linking Social Capital*, Richard Lang and Andreas Novy argue that cooperatives generate **linking social capital** by forging bonds with local organisations, institutions, and residents.[4] These relationships strengthen the position of the cooperative within the urban fabric and contribute to broader social cohesion. Schwittay's work on neighbourhood commons reinforces this point: student cooperatives can counter the isolating tendencies of studentification by collaborating with neighbours or organising local activities.[5] Through such involvement, cooperatives become integrated elements of neighbourhood life.

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[1] Jan Frankowski et al., 'Energy Commons During Crisis: Understanding Housing Cooperative Strategies Through Dramaturgical Sociology', *International Journal of the Commons* 19, no. 1 (2025), https://doi.org/10.5334/ijc.1476.

[2] Cousserier, 'More than Housing: Zoning and Regulation Strategies for Sustainable Development in Ghent'.

[3] Darinka Czischke and Carla J. Huisman, 'Integration through Collaborative Housing? Dutch Starters and Refugees Forming Self-Managing Communities in Amsterdam', *Urban Planning* 3, no. 4 (2018): 156–65, https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v3i4.1727.

[4] Richard Lang and Andreas Novy, 'Cooperative Housing and Social Cohesion: The Role of Linking Social Capital', *European Planning Studies* 22, no. 8 (2014): 1744–64, https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2013.800025.

[5] Schwittay, 'Students Take Over', 984.

In summary, these insights demonstrate that social sustainability in student cooperatives is fundamentally relational. Through social infrastructure and neighbourhood involvement, cooperatives cultivate the interpersonal and institutional bonds that enable communities to persist. In this way, they function as socially embedded environments that strengthen both internal cohesion and their connection to the broader urban context.

3.3 Carework and the reproduction of the commons

Care tasks constitute a crucial dimension of sustainability in student cooperatives. Huron conceptualises cooperatives as common goods sustained by the ongoing, often invisible labour of residents.[1] She demonstrates that tasks such as cleaning, repairing, and organising are the work that keeps both the physical environment and the community itself running.

The literature on degrowth reinforces this perspective. In *Carework as Commons: Towards a Feminist Degrowth Agenda*, Bengi Akbulut argues that care is a collectively produced resource that is essential for socio-ecological sustainability.[2] It emphasises that reciprocity and mutual aid strengthen the resilience of the community, but also warns that care tasks can easily become unequally distributed, often along gender lines, if a cooperative does not consciously organise these tasks.

Because cooperatives depend on residents rather than external staff, care becomes a routine part of daily life. Through these practices, residents develop interdependence and a shared sense of responsibility that strengthens the social structure of the community. Care tasks thus support both material conditions and the relationships that sustain the cooperative's survival. It is a fundamental mechanism for sustainability: embedded in daily routines and crucial for the continued reproduction of cooperative life.

3.4 Psychological ownership and stewardship

A final aspect of sustainability in student cooperatives concerns the way residents develop responsibility for the long-term well-being of their community. In *Caring for the Commons: Using Psychological Ownership to Enhance Stewardship Behavior for Public Goods*, Joann Peck et al. argue that residents are more inclined to care for shared facilities when they develop a sense of **psychological ownership** – the feeling that a space belongs to them, even without legal ownership rights.[3] This connectedness arises from concrete experiences such as participating in decision-making, contributing to maintenance, and seeing how their actions visibly shape the environment. Psychological ownership thus forms the emotional basis for responsibility.

This sense of ownership gains meaning when it translates into **stewardship**, a form of responsibility aimed at caring for the cooperative and its physical environment in the long term. Stewardship counters the **diffusion of responsibility** that often undermines shared living arrangements. Instead of assuming that someone else will do it, residents take action themselves to maintain shared spaces, uphold collective standards, and exhibit

[1] Huron, *Carving out the Commons*, 137–40.

[2] Bengi Akbulut, 'Carework as Commons: Towards a Feminist Degrowth Agenda', *Resilience*, 2 February 2017, https://www.resilience.org/stories/2017-02-02/carework-as-commons-towards-a-feminist-degrowth-agenda/.

[3] Joann Peck et al., 'Caring for the Commons: Using Psychological Ownership to Enhance Stewardship Behavior for Public Goods', *Journal of Marketing* 85, no. 2 (2021): 33–49, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242920952084.

environmentally conscious behaviour. In this way, stewardship becomes an important mechanism by which cooperatives sustain themselves in the long term.

Psychological ownership and stewardship together form an important foundation for the long-term resilience of student cooperatives. In this way, sustainability in student cooperatives is also a matter of cultivating the attitudes and relationships that support long-term, ongoing collective care.

4. The design of affordable, sustainable and self-managed student housing

4.1 From user-centred design to co-design

Guity-Zapata et al. describe **user-centred design** as an approach in which the built environment is shaped by the daily needs, routines, and preferences of residents.[1] User-centred design therefore recognises residents as experts of their own experience, whose contextual knowledge is essential for creating spaces that work in practice.

Recent research shows a shift from user-centred design to **co-design**, in which residents are not merely informants but active partners in shaping the project. In *Co-creation and the New Landscapes of Design*, Elizabeth Sanders and Pieter Jan Stappers describe this transition from designing for users to designing with users.[2] Designers and non-designers collaborate throughout the entire process and jointly formulate the needs and priorities that should guide the project. Early resident involvement ensures that the design is based on lived experience rather than expert assumptions, thereby narrowing the gap between intended and actual use and improving the usability of the built environment.

This emphasis on shared meaning-making is further elaborated in the book *The Process of Value Setting Through Co-Design: The Case of La Borda, Barcelona* by Sara Lia Brysch et al.[3] They conceptualise co-design as a process of collective value determination, in which residents negotiate what is important in their shared environment – privacy, openness, tranquillity, sustainability, or opportunities for social interaction – and translate these priorities into spatial decisions. Co-design thus becomes a social process that strengthens the foundations of the project by creating a shared framework of values.

Schwittay adds a pedagogical dimension to this shift.[4] Her research into student cooperatives shows that participation in the design process enables organisational and interpersonal skills that are essential for long-term self-management. By articulating needs, consulting with one another, and taking responsibility for shared results, residents develop competencies that extend beyond the design phase and support the ongoing management of cooperative living.

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[1] Guity-Zapata et al., 'Rethinking Value', 12–13.

[2] Elizabeth B. N. Sanders and Pieter Jan Stappers, 'Co-Creation and the New Landscapes of Design', *CoDesign* 4, no. 1 (2008): 5–18, https://doi.org/10.1080/15710880701875068.

[3] Sara Lia Brysch et al., 'The Process of Value Setting through Co-Design: The Case of La Borda, Barcelona', *CoDesign* 20, no. 3 (2024): 405–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/15710882.2023.2277724.

[4] Schwittay, 'Prefigurative Pedagogies', 4.

4.2 Design completed by use: Appropriation, adaptation and flexibility

In *Lived-in Architecture: Le Corbusier's Pessac Revisited* Philippe Boudon examines Le Corbusier's housing estate and shows how the residents repeatedly reinterpreted the architectural form through everyday adaptations: facades were altered, floor plans modified, and rooms repurposed in response to daily routines rather than the architect's original intentions.[1] These transformations illustrate **unintended use** – moments when residents use spaces in ways not foreseen by the designers – and emphasise the inventive and adaptive nature of daily life. Boudon argues that such practices expose a persistent gap between the planned and the experienced environment, and underscores the importance of **flexibility** and the ability of spatial layouts to adapt to changing needs over time.

The concept of transformation is reflected in interpretations of Lefebvre by several authors. Kuletskaya emphasises Lefebvre's connection between use value and lived experience, arguing that residents give meaning to space through their daily activities, physical presence, and emotional bonds.[2] In this interpretation, **appropriation** is the process by which residents reclaim space for their own purposes and give it social and affective meaning. Purcell expands on this argument by viewing appropriation as a political act: a way for residents to claim their right to shape the spaces they use and to resist the dominance inherent in property relations and abstract planning.[3] Together, these perspectives demonstrate that buildings are dynamic environments that are constantly reinterpreted by those who inhabit them.

Erving Goffman's analysis of **front and back regions** in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* offers an additional perspective on how residents use and interpret space.[4] Goffman shows that physical boundaries – walls, doors, partitions – create distinct zones that structure behaviour and separate formal, outward-facing activities from the informal routines that take place "behind the scenes". These regional distinctions help explain how certain spaces in collective living arrangements function as performative spaces requiring decorum, while adjacent service spaces accommodate the practical, often messy, work of daily life.

In summary, these theoretical perspectives show that design unfolds through collective usage routines. Architecture acquires meaning through the way residents inhabit, adapt, and reinterpret it. This thesis follows this line of thought by investigating how residents of the Collegium Academicum transform their environment through daily practices – how they appropriate shared spaces and collectively maintain the building. In this process, the built form emerges as an evolving representation of community life, constantly shaped by the people who live in it.

[1] Boudon, *Lived-in Architecture*.

[2] Kuletskaya, 'Concepts of *Use-Value* and *Exchange-Value* in Housing Research', 596–99.

[3] Purcell, 'Possible Worlds', 149–50.

[4] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1956), 66–86.

5. Summary

The literature review reveals that student housing is influenced by structural factors – ownership regimes, financialization, and governance models – that determine affordability, stability, and resident empowerment. The various forms of housing distribute rights and responsibilities in diverse ways: private rental housing is driven by profit motives, state-funded housing is regulated by bureaucratic structures, and cooperatives offer an alternative based on collective ownership and democratic management. The research frames these differences within the context of use value and exchange value, emphasising how diverse systems enable or restrict residents to inhabit, appropriate, and shape their environment.

Research into student cooperatives positions self-management as both a governance model and a pedagogical practice. Cooperative living enables democratic competencies, organisational skills, and forms of collective responsibility, while simultaneously facing structural challenges regarding participation, turnover, and external credibility. These insights clarify how student cooperatives function as urban commons maintained through shared labour and ongoing negotiation.

The research further shows that sustainability in cooperatives is multidimensional. Ecological sustainability arises from shared resource management and resident-led environmental practices. Social sustainability is created through social infrastructure and neighbourhood connections. And long-term resilience depends on psychological ownership, stewardship, and the daily care work that maintains the common goods.

Finally, design research shows a shift from user-centred design to co-design, where residents act as partners rather than passive recipients of professional decisions. This perspective aligns with the idea that a building is completed through inhabitation: it evolves as residents make the spaces their own, adapt them to their daily routines, and reinterpret their intended functions. Together, these insights form the conceptual basis for the analysis of how spatial conditions support or hinder self-management, and how collective usage practices shape the living environment.

PROBLEM STATEMENT
RESEARCH QUESTIONS
METHODOLOGY

Problem statement and research questions

The literature shows that self-management in student housing is influenced by structural challenges arising from the specific circumstances of student life. However, what is still insufficiently understood is how these difficulties are influenced by underlying ownership structures and how they manifest in the daily use and organisation of shared spaces. To understand this relationship, it is necessary to examine the concrete difficulties that student communities face daily in organising and maintaining shared spaces.

A primary difficulty concerns encouraging **active participation** in the upkeep of common spaces, both among the students currently living in the project and among those who will move in during the coming years.[1] Students often view themselves more as consumers than as co-users with an active agency and responsibility towards shared infrastructures, which ultimately translates into a lack of care.[2] This dynamic reflects broader concerns regarding declining social engagement among young people and has direct consequences for the daily functioning and long-term stability of collective housing.[3] A second challenge concerns the **continuity of organisational knowledge** between successive generations of students. Because most students stay for only five to six years, the temporary nature of student life makes it difficult to maintain agreements, routines, and shared insights. Every wave of departing and arriving students disrupts the transfer of practical knowledge, from maintenance procedures to decision-making processes. Without targeted mechanisms for passing on this knowledge, institutional memory weakens, and new cohorts must repeatedly rebuild structures. This vulnerability undermines long-term stability and hinders the development of sustainable forms of self-governance.[4] A third challenge concerns the **institutional credibility** of a student cooperative. Such initiatives are often not fully recognised by governments or funding bodies, and students are frequently viewed as a temporary or even problematic group rather than as legitimate stakeholders in housing. This perception leads to management approaches that prioritise external control, thereby limiting opportunities for meaningful student participation.[5]

These challenges do not stand alone: they are shaped by the ownership and governance structures in which student housing is embedded. This thesis therefore examines how different ownership models influence the use, organisation, and maintenance of shared spaces in student housing. By comparing cooperative living in Heidelberg with university-managed student housing in Ghent, the analysis investigates how self-management can be supported, sustained, and spatially embedded. The central research questions of this thesis are:

> *How do ownership models in student housing shape the spatial practices of self-management, and how do these contribute to affordability, (social) sustainability, and democratic forms of collective living? And how can insights from these practices influence the development of a student cooperative in Ghent and stimulate a critical re-evaluation of established ideas regarding the design of student housing?*

[1] Schwittay, 'Students Take Over'.

[2] Peck et al., 'Caring for the Commons'.

[3] Ingrid Schoon et al., 'The COVID-19 Pandemic and Young People's Civic Engagement: A Scoping Review', *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 35, no. 1 (2025): e13039, https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.13039.

[4] Schwittay, 'Students Take Over', 979.

[5] Schwittay, 'Students Take Over', 978–79.

Methodology

1. General characteristics of qualitative research

This thesis is based on **qualitative research**, an approach suitable for understanding housing as a lived, situated, and socially embedded practice. As Linda Groat and David Wang describe in *Architectural Research Methods*, qualitative research investigates phenomena in their natural environment, where social interactions and spatial behaviour can be observed in context.[1] A defining aspect of qualitative research is its interpretive character. Observations, interviews, and spatial documentation are not treated as neutral data points, but as material requiring careful interpretation.[2] This makes the research process inherently iterative: analytical categories and research questions evolve in response to new insights and unexpected dynamics encountered in the field.

Research strategy: Ethnography

My overarching research strategy is ethnographic in nature and based on close involvement with the day-to-day operations of student housing. Through in-depth observation and involvement in the field, I have gained insight into how governance structures, spatial planning, and social relations function in practice.

In developing this ethnographic approach, I draw upon methodological insights from architectural and social science research. Boudon's study of Le Corbusier's Pessac demonstrates the value of combining close observation with conversations that reveal the residents' own interpretations of the space; similarly, my fieldwork investigates how specific design features were based on assumptions about student needs and how these assumptions often contrast with the way students actually use and adapt the spaces.[3] Goffman's dramaturgical perspective further shapes my way of reading space and helps me identify how front and back regions in student housing emerge through patterns of visibility, withdrawal, and informal negotiations.[4] Finally, Brysch's work on value formation in the cooperative project La Borda emphasises how spatial practices and organisational routines actively create shared values.[5] These perspectives function as interpretive orientations that guide how I observe, document, and analyse self-management in both case studies.

Tactics: Interviews and observation

Within this ethnographic framework, I utilise various qualitative methods, each offering a different layer of insight into the spatial and organisational practices of self-management.

- **Semi-structured interviews**: I conducted semi-structured interviews, using a series of leading questions as a loose framework while simultaneously leaving sufficient room for participants to share their own experiences and concerns. I adapted the conversation to emerging themes and asked follow-up questions

[1] Linda N. Groat and David Wang, *Architectural Research Methods* (Wiley, 2013), 215–62.
[2] Groat and Wang, *Architectural Research Methods*, 219.
[3] Boudon, *Lived-in Architecture*.
[4] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 66–86.
[5] Brysch et al., 'The Process of Value Setting through Co-Design'.

based on what the interviewees themselves considered important. This flexible approach made it possible to capture how students experience self-management, shared maintenance, and the use of common spaces in their daily lives.

- **Participatory observation**: During a two-week field stay at the Collegium Academicum in Heidelberg, I participated in daily routines, working group meetings, and joint maintenance activities. This intensive involvement made it possible to observe self-management as a lived and negotiated practice. Participation in everyday tasks brought to light informal norms, tacit agreements, and the subtle negotiations that shape collective life. At Home Vermeylen, I also attended a collective meeting of Home Konvent, the general assembly of all student housing councils, which provided additional insight into how responsibilities and decision-making are organised within the institutional housing context.

- **Non-participatory observation:** In addition to this meeting, I observed the organisation, use, and maintenance of common areas in Ghent without participating in daily activities. This allowed me to document how shared spaces function in a more institutionalised living environment, where responsibilities and routines are determined by external management.

- **Ethnographic drawings:** In Heidelberg, I made drawings of conflicting spaces, spatial tensions, and daily routines. Inspired by Marie Stender's article *Towards an Architectural Anthropology – What Architects Can Learn from Anthropology and Vice Versa,* in which visual representation is viewed as an important methodological bridge between architecture and ethnography, these drawings serve as a tool to capture lived experiences and spatial practices that are difficult to express verbally.[1] Ethnographic drawings offer a nuanced way to depict appropriation, movement, and atmosphere.

- **Photographic documentation**: At both locations, I took photographs to support the analysis of how shared spaces are used and appropriated. These images provide a direct visual representation of the material conditions and daily spatial organisation, and serve as supplementary evidence alongside the other methods.

- **Document and archival analysis**: To place the case studies within a broader institutional, historical, and regulatory framework, I consulted various documents. For Home Vermeylen, this included material from the UGent Memory platform and policy documents describing the rules and organisational structure of the residency. For the Collegium Academicum, I used archival material and publications from the University Library of Heidelberg, which provided historical background information on the development of the cooperative and its governance model.

[1] Marie Stender, 'Towards an Architectural Anthropology—What Architects Can Learn from Anthropology and Vice Versa', *Architectural Theory Review* 21, no. 1 (2017): 27–43, https://doi.org/10.1080/13264826.2016.1256333.

2. Semi-structured interviews and selection of the interviewees

During the semi-structured interviews, I took extensive notes and – where permitted – made audio recordings. For each case study, I selected a number of interviews to transcribe; these are marked with (T) and included in Appendices C and D. The remaining interviews were summarised immediately afterwards based on my handwritten notes, in order to retain as many details as possible while the conversation was still fresh in my memory.

Introduction of the interviewees

For both case studies, I selected interviewees based on their position within the living environment and the specific insights they could offer. Each case involves **protagonists** whose perspectives are central to my analysis, supplemented by **supporting actors** who play a less prominent but still meaningful role in understanding the broader context. I introduce each interviewee in relation to their role and the perspective they bring, and clarify why their voices are relevant to the broader argument.

For Home Vermeylen, all interviewees remain anonymous and are introduced based on their role within the project, as this case is discussed more concisely in the thesis. For the main case study in Heidelberg, I use fictional names for the residents of the CA I interviewed, in accordance with their wish to remain anonymous.

2.1 Home Vermeylen, Ghent

To understand the context of Home Vermeylen, I conducted two semi-structured interviews and had one informal conversation with a highly engaged resident. Each conversation offered a different perspective on how the residence is organised, used, and experienced.

- **Protagonist: Home manager of Home Vermeylen (T)**

I interviewed the home manager on Monday, November 17, 2025. He has worked for the Ghent University Housing Service since 2007 and is responsible for three student residences: Vermeylen, Heymans, and Fabiola. His years of involvement have provided him with detailed knowledge of the building and the practical challenges of daily management. He described his role as a combination of problem-solving and close contact with students, and his position allowed him to compare organisational working methods in different student residences.

- **Protagonist: Long-term student resident with little involvement (T)**

On Monday, November 10, 2025, I interviewed a 22-year-old master student in Civil Engineering and Architecture who has been living on the sixth floor for four years. After a difficult first year on the private rental market – marked by poor maintenance, noise pollution, and rising energy costs – she sought a more stable and affordable alternative. Her studies are already socially intensive, so she does not actively seek out additional social contacts within the home. I followed her daily route through the building, from the entrance to her room and later to the study area. Her perspective mirrors that of many

residents who use the student home primarily as a place to live and study, without engaging in the organisational structures.

- **Supporting actor: Long-term student resident and former member of the home council**

On Saturday, November 15, 2025, I participated in an official tour of Ghent University for prospective students and their parents. The tour guide has lived in Home Vermeylen for six years, four of which as an active member of the home council – a self-chosen group that organises community activities and mediates between residents and staff. The tour showed how the home presents itself to newcomers and which spaces are central to community life. Her experience combines the perspective of a long-term resident with that of someone who has actively contributed to the social structure of the home.

2.2 Collegium Academicum, Heidelberg

- **Protagonists: Stefan Rees and Felix Wohlfart: Urban planner of Heidelberg and IBA architect (T)**

On Wednesday, January 7, 2026, I interviewed Stefan Rees, Head of the Department of Spatial Planning, and Felix Wohlfart, architect at the Internationale Bauausstellung (IBA) Heidelberg. The IBA was a ten-year urban planning program that supported projects connecting knowledge production, urban transformation, and social inclusion. Both Rees and Wohlfart played a central role in the planning and realisation of the Collegium Academicum, making their perspectives essential for understanding the institutional and spatial context of the project.

Stefan Rees was responsible for the masterplan of the former US Hospital site, where the Collegium Academicum is now located. His role placed him at the centre of decisions on land allocation, planning rules, and the political sensitivities surrounding the arrival of a student-led cooperative. He provides insight into how the city evaluated the feasibility and credibility of the project within a strict planning framework. Felix Wohlfart joined the IBA in 2018 and guided the CA during the design and construction phases. He coordinated the architect selection, supported the students during technical and financial challenges, and acted as mediator between the student initiative, the city, and the design team. His perspective shows how the IBA strengthened the project's legitimacy and helped translate the students' ambitions into a feasible architectural process.

- **Protagonist: Henrik Eckhardt, Co-founder of the Collegium Academicum**

On Monday, January 12, 2026, I interviewed Henrik, one of the co-founders of the new Collegium Academicum. In 2012, he joined the project group and became closely involved in shaping the initial concept, setting up the cooperative structure, and the long search for a suitable location. At the time, he was a physics student and later earned his PhD at the Institute for Environmental Physics. His story offers insight into the pressure and responsibilities the small founding group bore during the planning and financing phases.

Henrik also played a central role in the daily self-governance of the association and personally contributed funds to the project. He consistently advocated three guiding principles: self-governance, ecological sufficiency, and critical education. His motivation stemmed from the desire to counter the increasingly exclusionary and market-driven

dynamics in the housing sector and to breathe new life into the emancipatory spirit of the old Collegium Academicum.

- **Supporting actor: Employee of Studierendenwerk Heidelberg**

On Tuesday, January 13, 2026, I interviewed a staff member of Studierendenwerk Heidelberg, the public student service institution responsible for affordable student housing at the state universities of Heidelberg. He explained how rents are kept well below private market levels through limited staffing and a model where residents clean and maintain the common areas themselves. The employee also outlined the scale of demand, the allocation criteria, and the current expansion strategies in response to the persistent student housing shortage.

- **Supporting actor: Nina, Long-term resident and member of the CA GmbH**

In October 2025, I conducted an online interview with Nina prior to my field visit. She has been involved with the Collegium Academicum since 2018 and is currently one of the student members of CA GmbH, the legal entity responsible for the financial and administrative management of the cooperative. Her long-term involvement gives her in-depth insight into the institutional development of the project, the challenges of ensuring organisational continuity, and the pressure associated with student-led governance. As one of the few residents who experienced both the construction phase and the transition to day-to-day operations, she offers a nuanced perspective on the internal dynamics of the cooperative, the emotional and practical demands placed on highly committed members, and the structural vulnerabilities that arise when complex responsibilities depend on voluntary student labour.

During my stay at CA, I also had several informal conversations with Nina, during which we visited each other's apartments and had tea together. This gave me additional insight into the daily rhythm of cooperative life and the interpersonal dynamics that sustain long-term commitment.

- **Protagonist: Jonas, Engaged student resident and guide during fieldwork**

On Saturday, January 3, 2026, I interviewed a resident who has been living in the CA since its opening in early 2023. He is actively involved in the project, particularly through the public relations working group. Prior to the interview, he showed me around the entire project and explained the building, the common areas, and the organisational structures. During my stay, he remained an important point of contact. He described the value of community life, the learning opportunities offered by self-management, and the role of architecture in promoting social interaction.

- **Protagonist: Mira, Highly engaged resident and organiser of the Orientation Year (T)**

On Monday, January 6, 2026, I interviewed an active resident who has been involved in the project since 2021. She played a central role in the development and implementation of the Orientation Year, a ten-month program for young people taking a gap year after high school. She explained how the program combines trying out academic fields with acquiring practical skills and learning to organise living together. Her perspective is valuable for

understanding the internal dynamics of a resident-led project that combines housing with educational and social goals.

- **Protagonist: Sarah, Minimally involved resident (T)**

On the same day, I interviewed another resident who has been living in the CA for over two years but is only minimally involved in organisational tasks. She spoke about the appeal of community life, but also about the challenges of living in a large and very active environment, including the pressure to participate, limited privacy, and the visibility created by the building's architecture.

- **Protagonist: Klara, Highly engaged resident of WG 1.13 (T)**

On Monday, January 6, 2026, I also interviewed Klara, a long-standing and highly engaged resident of WG 1.13, one of the most visible apartments in the new CA building. She spoke about the daily reality of life in a very transparent and densely populated environment. Her apartment is surrounded by large glass surfaces, making daily life clearly visible to passersby. She described the benefits of this openness – spontaneous encounters, frequent interaction with neighbours, and a strong sense of community – but also highlighted the downsides: limited privacy, constant noise, and the emotional tension.

- **Supporting actor: Lea, Newly arrived resident**

On Saturday, January 11, 2026, I interviewed a resident who had moved into the CA only a few months earlier. She described the difficulty of finding affordable housing in Heidelberg, the openness of the CA's social environment, and the challenges of going through the application process and finding her place within the project.

3. Personal reflection

Looking back on the methods I used, I acknowledge both the richness and the demands of a qualitative, ethnographic approach. On the one hand, a personal strength of this process was the discovery of how valuable it was to look beyond architectural methods. Conducting interviews, participating in maintenance tasks, and creating ethnographic drawings opened up new perspectives that I had not used before. This aligns with the idea that in qualitative research, the researcher becomes the primary 'measuring instrument': my own presence, interactions, and interpretations were essential to the knowledge gained.[1]

On the other hand, I personally experienced one of the key challenges Groat and Wang identify: the enormous amount of unstructured material generated during the fieldwork.[2] During my stay at the Collegium Academicum, I received an overwhelming amount of information – formal explanations, informal conversations, spontaneous encounters, and observations embedded in daily routines. Selecting what was relevant and organising it coherently required continuous reflection and careful consideration. The flexibility of qualitative research, essential for uncovering lived experiences, also meant that my research questions constantly evolved and that I had to adjust my focus as new insights emerged.

[1] Groat and Wang, *Architectural Research Methods*.

[2] Groat and Wang, *Architectural Research Methods*, 257–58.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

USE OF AI

Structure of the thesis: Chapter overview

The preceding paragraphs outlined the thematic focus, the theoretical foundations, and the methodological approach of this research. The remainder of the dissertation is divided into three substantive chapters: first, an analysis of the urban conditions that enable or hinder the development of a student cooperative; second, an in-depth case study of a functioning cooperative; and finally a translation of these insights to the context of Ghent.

- **Chapter 2 - Urban conditions for student housing in Ghent and Heidelberg:** This chapter examines the structural conditions that shape student housing in both cities. It analyses demographic pressure, rental market dynamics, and institutional housing models, and demonstrates how national ownership cultures and local governance frameworks influence the possibilities for self-managed housing. The comparative synthesis outlines the broader context in which cooperative models can emerge.
- **Chapter 3 - Student cooperative Collegium Academicum, Heidelberg**: This chapter presents the Collegium Academicum as the central case study. It reconstructs the ownership and financing model, the founding conditions, and the internal governance structures of the cooperative, and subsequently examines how self-management is spatially shaped through daily practices. Together, these analyses show how cooperative ownership enables forms of collective responsibility and spatial care that differ from hierarchical housing models.
- **Chapter 4 - Comparative insights and practical implications for a student cooperative in Ghent:** The final chapter synthesises the findings and translates them into the context of Ghent. It identifies the institutional, organisational, and spatial conditions necessary for a viable student cooperative and formulates preliminary guidelines for its development.

Note on the use of artificial intelligence

In writing this thesis, I used artificial intelligence as a supporting tool. Its use was limited to clearly defined tasks and never replaced my own analysis, interpretation, or authorship. I worked with two AI systems – Perplexity and Copilot – which I deployed in a complementary manner.

First, I wrote all sections myself and then used AI to improve the clarity, coherence, and academic style of the English text. The content, arguments, and conceptual development are entirely my own. Second, I used AI to explore additional relevant literature and identify sources related to specific themes. All suggestions were critically evaluated and verified. Third, I consulted AI to reflect on chapter organisation, compare alternative structures, and identify potential repetitions in my text. These interactions helped me clarify my reasoning, but all decisions regarding the argumentation were made independently.

AI served as a tool to improve precision and readability, not as a generator of substantive information. Full responsibility for the ideas and the analysis lies entirely with the author.

2

URBAN CONDITIONS FOR STUDENT HOUSING IN GHENT AND HEIDELBERG

CHAPTER 2: Urban conditions for student housing in Ghent and Heidelberg

This chapter examines the urban, institutional, and housing market conditions that shape student housing in Ghent and Heidelberg. Insight into these contexts is essential for interpreting the Collegium Academicum (CA) within the structural environment that enabled its development, and for assessing whether comparable models – adapted to Ghent's local conditions – could be realised. The analysis therefore reconstructs the key factors influencing the feasibility of self-managed student housing, including land availability, governance structures, rental dynamics, and the role of institutional actors.

The chapter begins with Ghent, where a growing student population, a dominant private rental market, and a decentralised institutional sector exert persistent pressure on affordability. Within this context, Home Vermeylen serves as a concrete example of how the current university-managed model operates and why it offers limited opportunities for collective responsibility. Subsequently, the focus shifts to Heidelberg, where post-war redevelopment and a centralised housing organisation have shaped a distinctly different student housing landscape. These circumstances form the background against which the Collegium Academicum was established.

The third part directly compares both cities, using demographic indicators, rental prices, and student living habits to clarify how each city functions as an ecosystem for student housing. This comparison highlights the structural opportunities and constraints relevant to the feasibility of cooperative models. The chapter concludes with a synthesis indicating what these contrasts reveal about the potential for self-managed student housing in Ghent and paves the way for the analysis of the Collegium Academicum in Chapter 3 and the translation of its principles to the Ghent context in Chapter 4.

2.1

GHENT: STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS FOR STUDENT HOUSING

2.1. Ghent: Structural conditions for student housing

2.1.1. Urban and demographic pressures

To understand the student housing situation in Ghent, it is important to determine how various pressure factors have built up over time. This chapter combines data from multiple sources from the period 2020-2026, including the *Woonstudie Gent* by Atelier Romain, three large-scale surveys on student housing (2021, 2023, 2024), and insights from workshops and expert meetings in 2025-2026.[1] Because this material covers a period of six years, the chapter reconstructs the housing situation as a trajectory of developments in demand, affordability, and typology. Where relevant, the year of a statistic or policy measure is explicitly mentioned, but the thematic structure makes it possible to synthesise these diverse data points into a coherent analysis.

From all these sources, three structural problems regarding student housing consistently emerge. First, a persistent imbalance between supply and demand, both numerically and in terms of typology, forces students to enter the regular housing market. Second, this spillover effect places increasing pressure on family homes and reshapes the lower segments of the private rental market. Third, the rapid expansion and financialization of new student housing introduces new governance challenges and increases inequality within the student population.

Problem 1: Structural imbalance between supply and demand

The student housing crisis in Ghent is essentially caused by a long-standing structural imbalance between supply and demand. Over the past twenty years, the number of students has increased by 34.000, while only 3.800 official student rooms have been built during the same period.[2] This gap has led to a chronic shortage and increased competition for living space.[3] Because the supply of student housing lags far behind demand, the municipality estimates a shortage of 10.000 to 11.500 rooms.[4] Student's preferences exacerbate this imbalance. The current housing supply lacks typological diversity, and the *Woonstudie Gent* shows that many students have no preference for a private room or a large complex. A significant proportion of students prefer to live with friends in a shared house or apartment, but this form of small-scale, communal living is structurally underserved.[5] The discrepancy between what students seek and what is available exacerbates the overall shortage.

In this sense, the crisis is both numerical and typological: the supply does not meet the quantity and form of housing that students demand. Consequently, approximately 25% of students seek housing on the regular market.[6]

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[1] Atelier Romain and Endeavour, *Woonstudie Gent*.
[2] Stad Gent, *Studie Studentenhuisvesting in de Gentse Woonstad*.
[3] Atelier Romain and Endeavour, *Woonstudie Gent*, 254.
[4] Atelier Romain and Endeavour, *Woonstudie Gent*, 186.
[5] Atelier Romain and Endeavour, *Woonstudie Gent*, 120.
[6] Atelier Romain and Endeavour, *Woonstudie Gent*, 117.

Problem 2: Pressure on family homes and disruption of the regular housing market

The influx of students into the regular housing market has direct consequences for the housing segments on which low-income families depend most. The *Woonstudie Gent* already showed that students are increasingly renting affordable multi-bedroom homes, precisely the homes local families urgently need.[1] This pattern is caused by the relatively high willingness of students to pay: they can share costs with friends and accept lower quality in exchange for a central location. For landlords, renting to groups of students often yields a higher return than renting to a single household, which accelerates the conversion of family homes into student housing.[2]

This displacement pressure is further amplified by a waterfall effect in which groups with higher incomes or those sharing costs move to cheaper segments, causing rents to rise and accessibility for vulnerable households to decrease. In this way, student demand actively reforms the regular housing market through both spatial redistribution and rising rents.[3]

To counter this pressure, Ghent restricts the use of family homes as student housing and has announced stricter enforcement. However, this regulation exposes a structural tension: collective living is becoming increasingly common among students, but the legal framework offers few options to address this. The *Woonstudie* also notes that new rooms will not automatically vacate these homes, as many students choose the regular market precisely because they can live with friends and share living space there.[4] A typological shift is therefore essential: large-scale student housing must include student apartments and small-scale living units. The future of student housing in Ghent depends not only on building more rooms but also on tackling the structural conditions that continue to cause scarcity.

Problem 3: Financialization of student housing

The financialization of student housing reflects the broader dynamic, in which housing increasingly functions as an investment object rather than a social good.[5] Individual student rooms are increasingly viewed as investment products, with selling prices of €180.000-190.000 per unit.[6] Despite the modest rental yields, investors continue to purchase these properties, encouraged by the expectation of guaranteed occupancy rates and stable returns.[7] Developers therefore focus on locations and typologies that maximise profitability – they target high-yield sites and build on residual plots that have little value for other forms of development.[8] This dynamic illustrates how the logic of exchange value shapes the spatial production of student housing. When housing is primarily viewed as a

[1] Atelier Romain and Endeavour, *Woonstudie Gent*, 254.
[2] Atelier Romain and Endeavour, *Woonstudie Gent*, 33.
[3] Atelier Romain and Endeavour, *Woonstudie Gent*, 32.
[4] Atelier Romain and Endeavour, *Woonstudie Gent*, 254.
[5] Aalbers, 'The Variegated Financialization of Housing'; Kuletskaya, 'Concepts of *Use-Value* and *Exchange-Value* in Housing Research'.
[6] Participant (Dienst Huisvesting, University of Ghent), remarks during meeting at Stadsacademie, Ghent, February 9, 2026.
[7] Participant, remarks during meeting at Stadsacademie, Ghent, February 9, 2026.
[8] Participant (City of Ghent), remarks during meeting at STAM museum, Ghent, October 2, 2025.

commodity, spatial decisions are based on profit expectations rather than on the actual needs of the residents.[1]

This investment-driven logic is reinforced by parental capital. According to the Survey of 2021, approximately 80% of students depend on their parents for rent, which normalises high prices and sustains demand, even as affordability declines.[2] High acquisition costs translate directly into high rents, widening the gap between students with and without financial support. In this way, financialization integrates speculative incentives into student housing production, increasing inequality and deepening the structural tension between use value and exchange value.

2.1.2. Private rental market for student housing: Price growth

Rental prices in the private student housing market have risen sharply in recent years. Because approximately 72% of students depend on this sector, these increases have had a direct and significant impact on the affordability and accessibility of housing.[3] Between 2020 and 2024, the average rent for a private student room with shared common areas rose by 36%. In 2021, the average price was €415; by 2023, it had already risen to €522, and in 2024, it rose further to €544.[4]

Affordability issues are a defining aspect of the private sector. Survey data from 2024 shows that price remains the biggest barrier to finding a room in Ghent: 42% of commuting students indicated they would prefer to live in the city but could not afford it.[5] And limited budgets often force students to compromise on quality, location, or living conditions. According to the 2021 survey, a quarter of students reported problems with their landlord, mostly related to insufficient maintenance, overdue repairs, or unclear rental contracts.[6]

These developments show that the private rental market has become increasingly expensive, competitive, and difficult to access for students without substantial financial support. The next section examines how this contrasts with the more stable price structure of university-managed housing.

[1] Kuletskaya, 'Concepts of *Use-Value* and *Exchange-Value* in Housing Research'; Purcell, 'Possible Worlds'.
[2] Stad Gent, *Studie Studentenhuisvesting in de Gentse Woonstad*.
[3] Stad Gent, *Gentse Kotstudenten: Resultaten van Een Bevraging Bij 8000 Studenten* (2023), https://stad.gent/sites/default/files/media/documents/resultaten%20studentenbevraging%20-%20fin%20met%20werkende%20link%20%28002%29.pdf.
[4] Stad Gent, *Gentse Kotstudenten: Resultaten van Een Bevraging Bij 8000 Studenten*; Stad Gent, 'Studentenhuisvesting in cijfers', 2024, https://stad.gent/nl/wonen-bouwen/huren-verhuren/studentenhuisvesting-cijfers.
[5] Stad Gent, 'Studentenhuisvesting in cijfers'.
[6] Stad Gent, *Studie Studentenhuisvesting in de Gentse Woonstad*.

2.1.3. Institutional student housing: Decentralised, university-managed model

In Flanders, student housing is organised via a decentralised institutional model, in which each university or college manages its own student residences. There is no central coordinating body or shared housing system for all institutions; instead, each institution manages separate housing services with its own allocation procedures and pricing structures.

In Ghent, this decentralised model results in a relatively small institutional housing sector: only about 13% of students live in university-managed student residences, leaving the vast majority dependent on the private market.[1] Ghent University aims to expand its capacity from 2.200 to 6.000 rooms by 2030, but the pace of development remains a major challenge.[2] Contracts for approximately 1.500 additional rooms have already been signed.[3] In contrast to private providers, rents in university-managed student housing have remained relatively stable in recent years.[4]

Home Vermeylen is presented in the following case study as a concrete example of this decentralised, university-managed model, in which the underlying organisational and spatial mechanisms are demonstrated.

[1] Stad Gent, *Gentse Kotstudenten: Resultaten van Een Bevraging Bij 8000 Studenten*.

[2] Participant (Dienst Huisvesting, University of Ghent), remarks during meeting at Stadsacademie, Ghent, February 9, 2026.

[3] Participant (Dienst Huisvesting, University of Ghent), remarks during meeting at Stadsacademie, Ghent, February 9, 2026.

[4] 'Hoeveel kost een wooneenheid?', Studentenportaal, Universiteit Gent, accessed 23 April 2026, https://www.ugent.be/student/nl/studentenleven/huisvesting/kot-ugent/homes/huurfactuur.htm.

CASE STUDY

HOME VERMEYLEN, GHENT

Case study: Home Vermeylen

1. Home Vermeylen as an illustrative case of the institutional model

University-managed residence homes form an important part of Ghent's student housing landscape (Fig. A). These modernist buildings are spatial treasures and will be part of the city's housing stock for decades to come. Insight into how they function today is therefore essential for assessing the possibilities and limitations of institutional living. They offer affordable rooms in a competitive market, but their organisation also reveals the structural limitations of Ghent's decentralised, top-down housing model.

This case study is based on two semi-structured interviews and an informal conversation during a tour for prospective students. The home manager, responsible for Vermeylen, Heymans and Fabiola, provided insight into long-term management practices and structural challenges. A resident who has lived in Vermeylen for four years described how students primarily use the residence for living and studying, while another resident who has lived there for six years and is a former member of the residents' council explained how community life is organised.

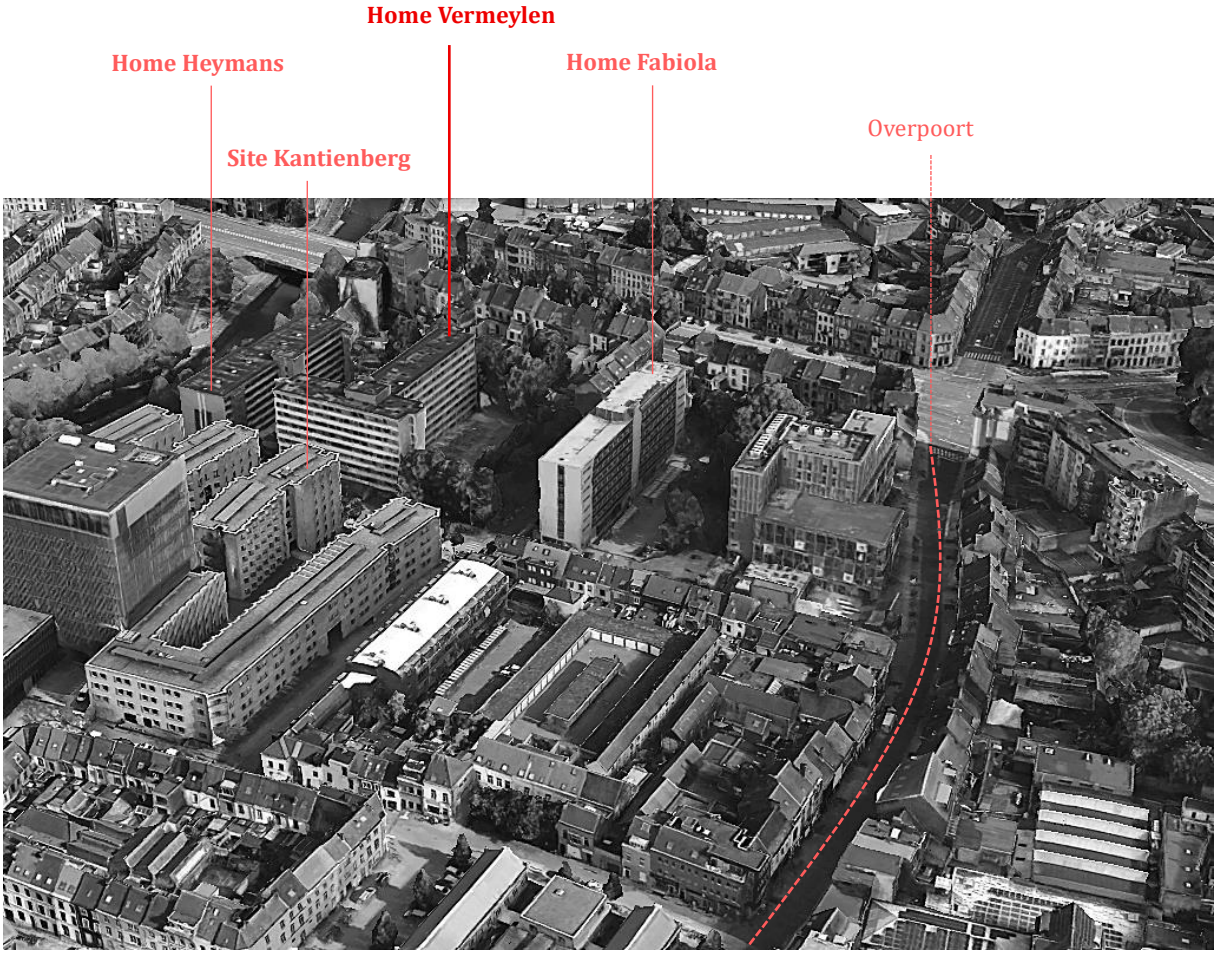


Figure A *– Aerial photograph of the student residences in the Overpoort district*

Figure B *– Photo of the north facade of Home Vermeylen*
Figure C *– Photo of the west facade of Home Vermeylen*





Historical and analytical relevance

Home Vermeylen was chosen as a case study for three interconnected reasons:

- First, it is historically emblematic (Fig. D). Built in 1971 during the democratisation of higher education, Vermeylen reflects the welfare state's ambition to provide mass, affordable housing to a rapidly growing student population.[1] Its construction was also closely linked to the opening of Resto Overpoort, reflecting a model in which cooking and social life were centralised outside the residence (Fig. E-H).[2]
- Secondly, Vermeylen has a rich activist history (Fig. D). Together with Home Fabiola, it became a major centre of student protests in the early 1970s, when residents challenged restrictive house rules and demanded greater autonomy.[3] These actions made the building a symbol of the ongoing tension between institutional control and student self-determination.
- Vermeylen is one of the oldest and most outdated buildings in the university's accommodation portfolio. The 10 m^2 rooms no longer meet current standards, and renovation remains uncertain due to the building's structural limitations.[4] Its unchanged state makes the underlying spatial and organisational mechanisms fully visible, and this thesis can therefore provide insights that can underpin future adaptations – both architectural and administrative – to better support collective care and self-management.

An important point of nuance is that, due to its age and outdated infrastructure, Vermeylen cannot be considered representative of all university-managed student housing. It functions rather as a diagnostic case study that exposes underlying mechanisms and highlights both limitations and strengths such as affordability, stability, and safety.

The following section summarises the empirical analysis and is divided into three parts. First, the outsourced management and maintenance system is examined to show how responsibility is structured and delegated. Second, the spatial design of the building is analysed to understand how physical conditions influence daily practices and social interaction. Third, it is examined how limited institutional investment affects the use and perception of shared spaces. Together, these three components form the basis for the concluding section, in which the structural conditions essential for sustaining collective care in institutional student housing are identified.

[1] 'Homes', UGentMemorie, 16 August 2010, https://www.ugentmemorie.be/artikel/homes.
[2] UGentMemorie, 'Homes'; 'Studentenrestaurant', UGentMemorie, 19 August 2010, https://www.ugentmemorie.be/artikel/studentenrestaurant.
[3] '1974 Sekscontrole', UGentMemorie, 16 September 2016, https://www.ugentmemorie.be/gebeurtenissen/1974-sekscontrole.
[4] Home manager of Home Vermeylen (anonymous), interview by the author, Ghent, November 17, 2025.

Figure D *– Timeline diagram showing the three interconnected layers of analysis*

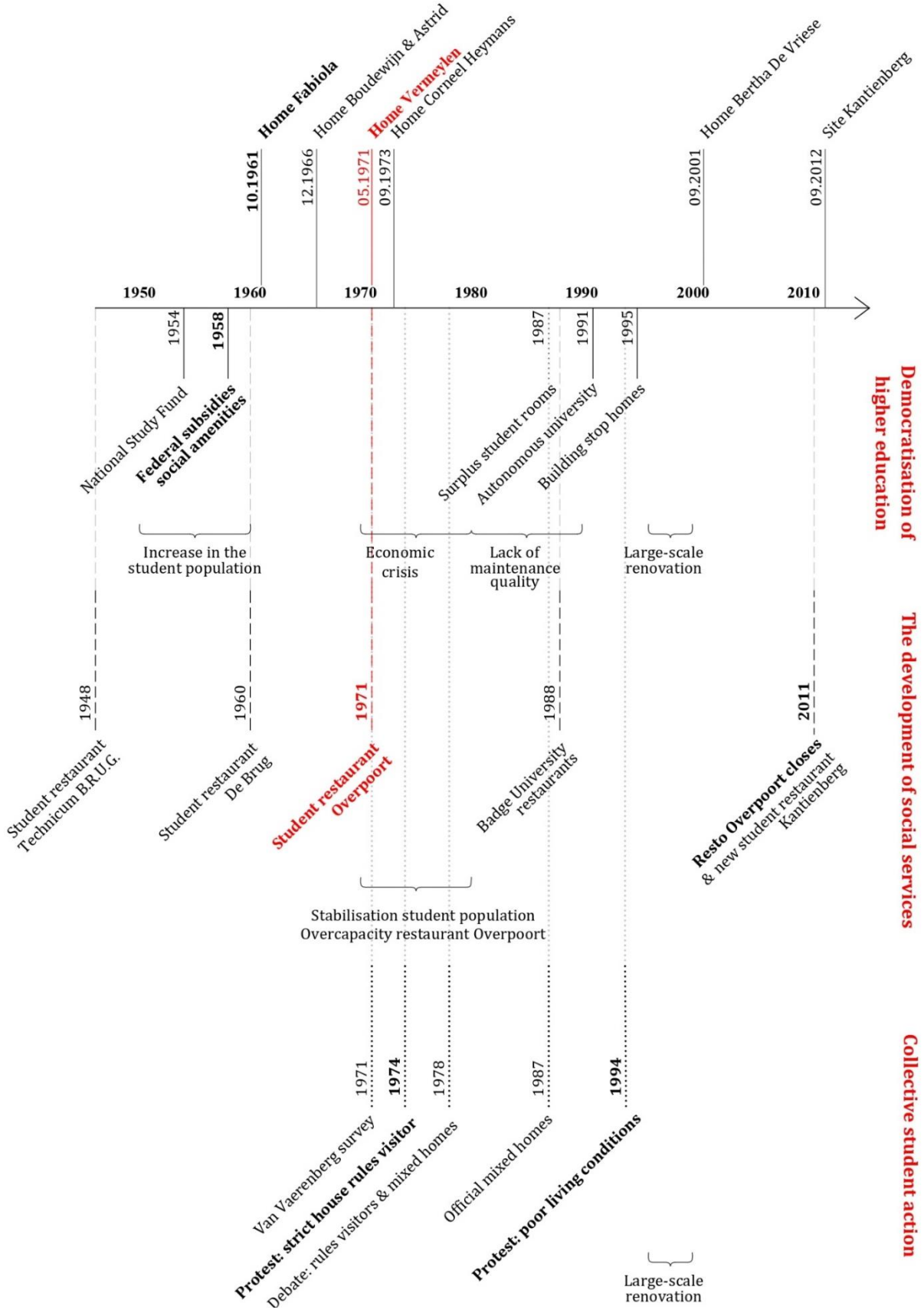


Figure E-F *– Overpoort student restaurant with Home Fabiola in the background, 1972-2025*
Figure G-H *– Overpoort student restaurant, 1972-2025*









2. Summary of the empirical analysis: How institutional arrangements shape daily life

A. Governance structure

Externalised management and delegated responsibility

The organisation of Home Vermeylen is characterised by a fully external management model, in which administration, cleaning, repairs, and conflict resolution are handled entirely by the central housing service of Ghent University (Fig. I). This arrangement ensures stability and predictability, but simultaneously limits the autonomy of the students. Decision-making is vertical: university regulations determine the rules, and when problems arise – whether regarding noise, hygiene, or behaviour – students report them and staff intervene.[1]

Maintenance follows the same logic. Cleaning teams, technical services, and external contractors perform all routine and specialised tasks. Kitchens and sanitary facilities are cleaned according to a fixed schedule, and residents are only expected to keep the spaces somewhat tidy in between.[2] As one resident explains,

> *Student resident: Cleaning is not the students' responsibility. The rule is that if you cook or make a mess, you clean it up afterwards. But people often do not do that, so it is not always clean. You really notice that everyone knows a cleaning crew is coming. And they come regularly, so eventually it is clean here. We do not even have to empty the trash cans. You really do not have to do anything at all here. The only thing you have to do is sort the waste, and even that people do not do.*[3]

This dynamic contributes to a recurring cycle in which kitchens become messy, complaints are filed, and staff intervene again. The resident emphasises that this pattern affects not only the cleanliness of the building but also the development of students. According to her, first-year students do not learn to live independently under these conditions because they are not encouraged to take responsibility for basic household chores. She argues that students should be given more responsibility and notes that the current situation does not correspond to "real life," in which people are expected to clean for themselves and manage their own living environment.[4]

Because this system is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain, the university is investigating a new maintenance plan in which each corridor is assigned a designated student responsible for cleanliness.[5] However, the interviews reveal that such roles only function if they are financially incentivised.

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[1] Ghent University, *Internal Rules and Regulations,* accessed November 16, 2025; Home manager of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 17, 2025.

[2] Home manager of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 17, 2025.

[3] Resident of Home Vermeylen (anonymous), interview by the author, Ghent, November 11, 2025.

[4] Resident of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 11, 2025.

[5] Home manager of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 17, 2025.

The home manager explains this structural dependency,

> *Home manager: At the moment we also have hallway representatives, but that is entirely voluntary. I have 30 corridors in total and I regularly hear two or three representatives, so that is only about 10%. (…).And that brings us back to your question: is it necessary to give them a meaningful incentive? Yes, because otherwise we will remain stuck in this voluntary situation.*[1]

Resident involvement is therefore minimal and largely dependent on financial incentives.

Sustainability limitations of the all-inclusive rental model

Long-term sustainability is primarily limited by the all-inclusive rental structure. Because residents do not directly bear the costs of their energy consumption, they have no financial incentive to monitor or reduce it. The interviewed resident notes that this reduces awareness of and involvement in environmentally friendly practices.[2] Ecological routines that might otherwise develop – such as collectively deciding to turn down the heating – do not emerge under these circumstances. As a result, both the material maintenance of the building and the residents' daily environmental practices remain disconnected from any form of collective responsibility.

[1] Home manager of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 17, 2025.

[2] Resident of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 11, 2025.

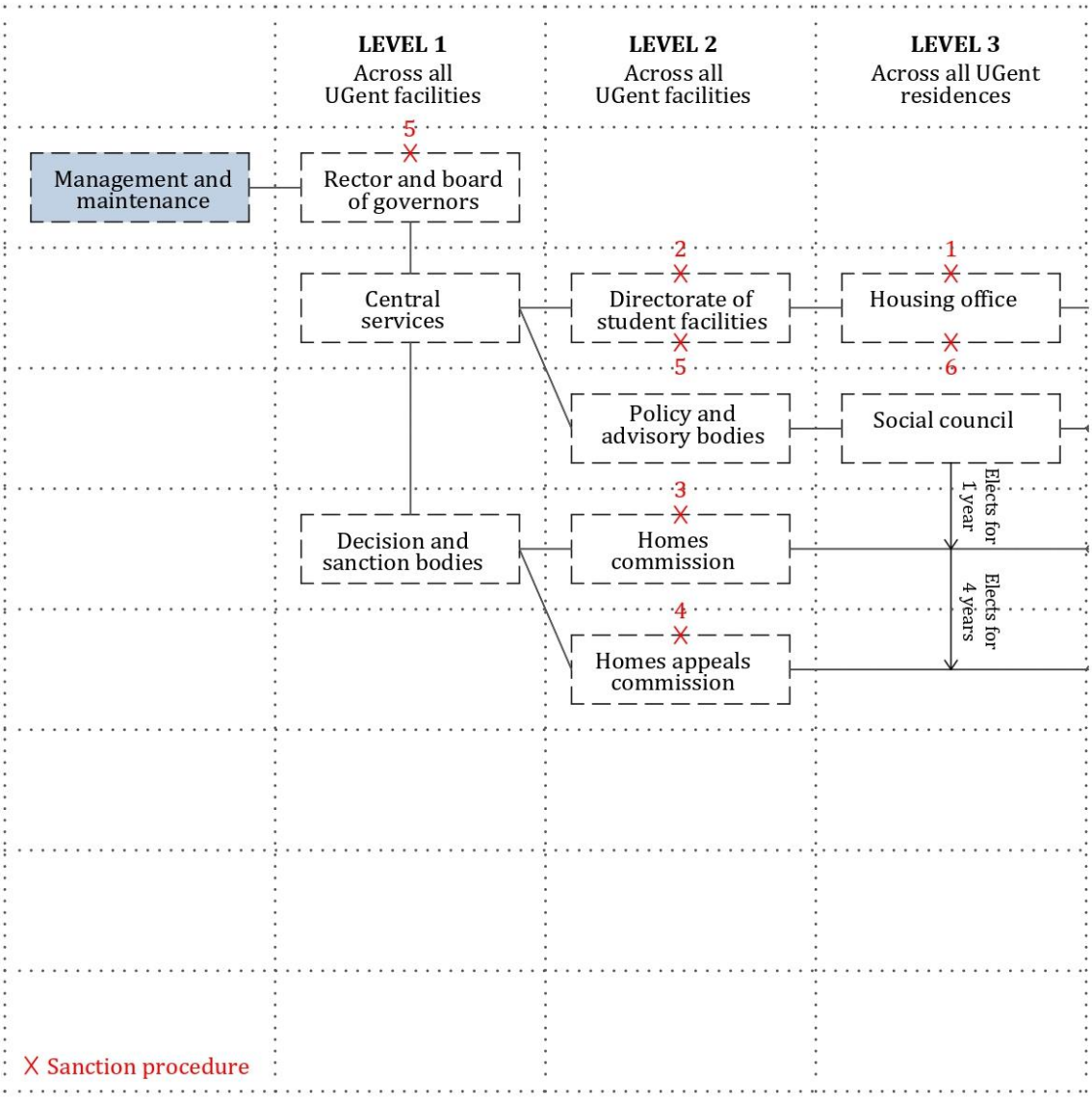
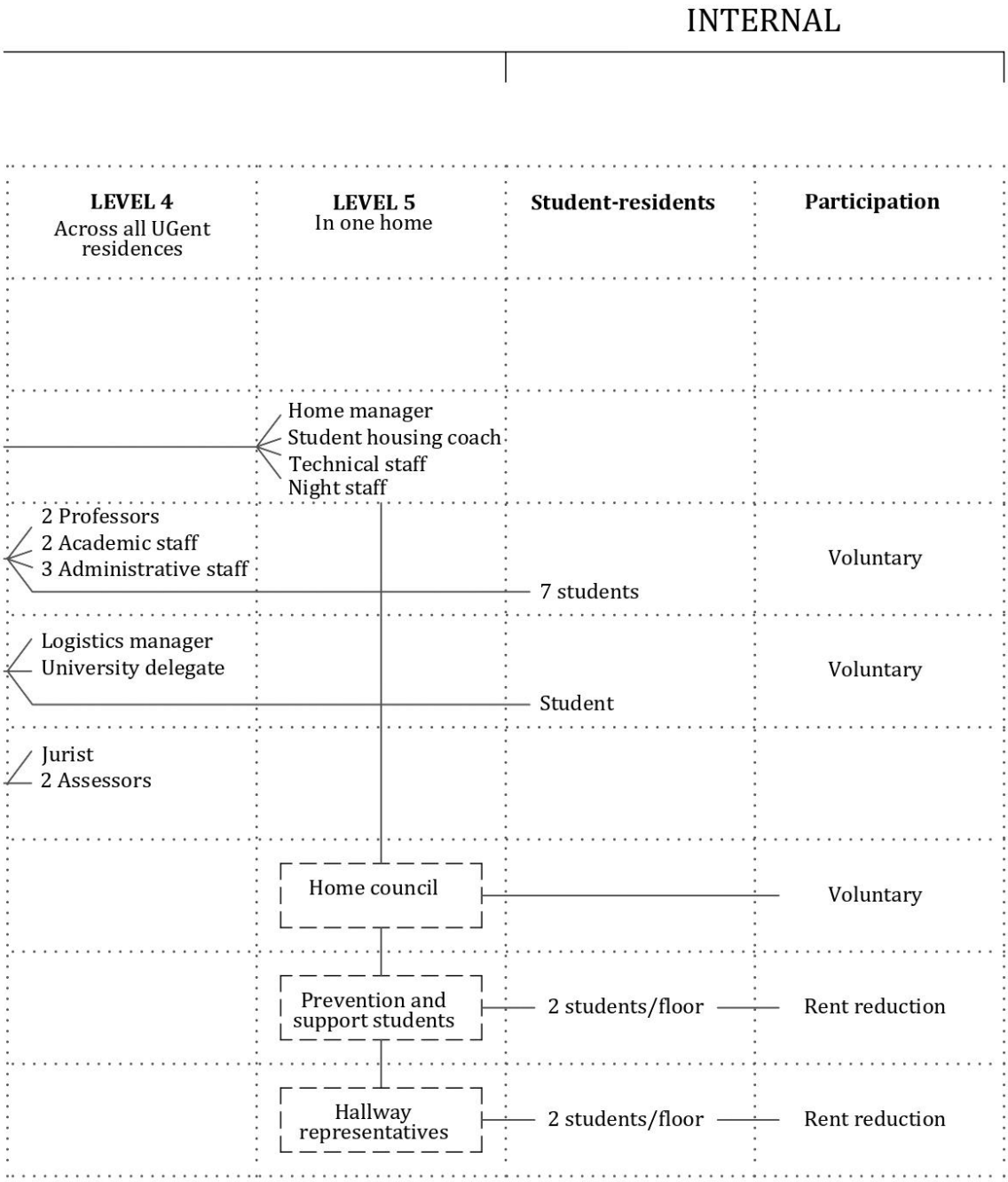

LEVEL 1
Across all UGent facilities
LEVEL 2
Across all UGent facilities
LEVEL 3
Across all UGent residences
5
Management and maintenance
Rector and board of governors
2
1
Central services
Directorate of student facilities
Housing office
5
6
Policy and advisory bodies
Social council
Elects for 1 year
3
Decision and sanction bodies
Homes commission
Elects for 4 years
4
Homes appeals commission
X Sanction procedure

Figure I *–Diagram of the governance structure of Home Vermeylen*



B. Spatial design and its social consequences

Spatial scale and overpopulation

The spatial layout of Home Vermeylen reinforces the institutional logic. The scale of the building – understood here as the number of people who share the same walking routes and common facilities – combined with the highly standardised layout, determines the atmosphere on each floor. Fifty-six students live along a T-shaped corridor featuring two kitchens, two sanitary blocks, and long, narrow hallways (Fig. J). These corridors are purely functional and offer no seating areas or thresholds that could encourage informal encounters. One resident describes them as "hospital-like," and the home manager confirms that with so many people on a single floor, it is difficult for students to establish meaningful connections.[1] The result is an environment where encounters are brief, anonymous, and rarely develop into lasting relationships.

This dynamic is most visible in the kitchens (Fig. K). Each kitchen is shared by twenty-eight residents but contains only ten to twelve chairs and limited cooking facilities. During fieldwork, these spaces were often overcrowded or avoided altogether. With so few seats, the kitchen does not even have room for half of the users, making it difficult to linger, cook together, or develop shared routines. As a result, many students prefer not to eat or spend time there at all.[2] The widespread presence of private refrigerators in individual rooms further illustrates how residents compensate for the lack of shared facilities by moving household routines to their private spaces. As the home manager notes,

> *Home manager: There are two refrigerators for 56 people, so even if only 10 people use them, that is still a lot. But that also shows that the kitchens do not meet the needs of the people. (...) One refrigerator for 28 people? I do not know if they have ever looked into that properly, but I actually do not think so. The residents here really have to make do with the absolute minimum, unless they put extra items in their rooms themselves.*[3]

Archival research clarifies the origin of this discrepancy: Home Vermeylen was designed together with Resto Overpoort as a single entity, with the expectation that students would eat in the restaurant rather than cook in the residence.[4] The kitchens were therefore designed as supplementary spaces rather than as domestic or social gathering places. However, since the closure of Resto Overpoort in 2011, daily cooking has been moved to the residence, without the space being adapted accordingly. This mismatch contributes directly to the limited social interaction, recurring hygiene issues, and the diffusion of responsibility described by residents.[5] When so many people share a space that was not designed for collective use, it becomes unclear who is responsible for what, and mess is quickly attributed to "others".

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[1] Home manager of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 17, 2025; Resident of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 11, 2025.

[2] Home manager of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 17, 2025

[3] Home manager of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 17, 2025

[4] 'Studentenrestaurant', UGentMemorie, 19 August 2010, https://www.ugentmemorie.be/artikel/studentenrestaurant.

[5] Resident of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 11, 2025; Peck et al., 'Caring for the Commons'.

Comparison with Home Fabiola

The contrast with the neighbouring Home Fabiola – similar in age but fundamentally different in layout – emphasises how spatial scale shapes daily social life. Fabiola accommodates 32 residents per floor, with 16 students sharing each kitchen. The kitchens are larger, the rooms measure 12 m^2 instead of 10 m^2, and the overall layout creates smaller, more recognisable living groups. According to the home manager, this difference is immediately visible in how residents interact with their shared spaces: students in Fabiola cook together more often, know each other better, and take better care of the common areas.[1] As he explains,

> *Home manager: I notice that in home Fabiola, where the residents consider the kitchen their own, they furnish it according to their own taste. They want to make it their own space. And I notice that they do their best to keep it tidy. If mess or incidents were to occur, chances are high that they would not be caused by the residents themselves, but by outsiders. If something belongs to you, or if you consider it your property, it is a natural reflex to take good care of it.*[2]

This sense of ownership - recognising a space as "ours" – encourages caring, responsibility, and informal regulation. Smaller living units thereby create the conditions for daily interaction, mutual expectations, and shared routines. In Fabiola, the scale of use supports the formation of a recognisable group, making it easier for residents to build relationships and take responsibility for their shared environment.

[1] Home manager of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 17, 2025.

[2] Home manager of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 17, 2025.

Figure J *– Axonometric drawing of Home Vermeylen on level +6 (representative of all upper floors)*

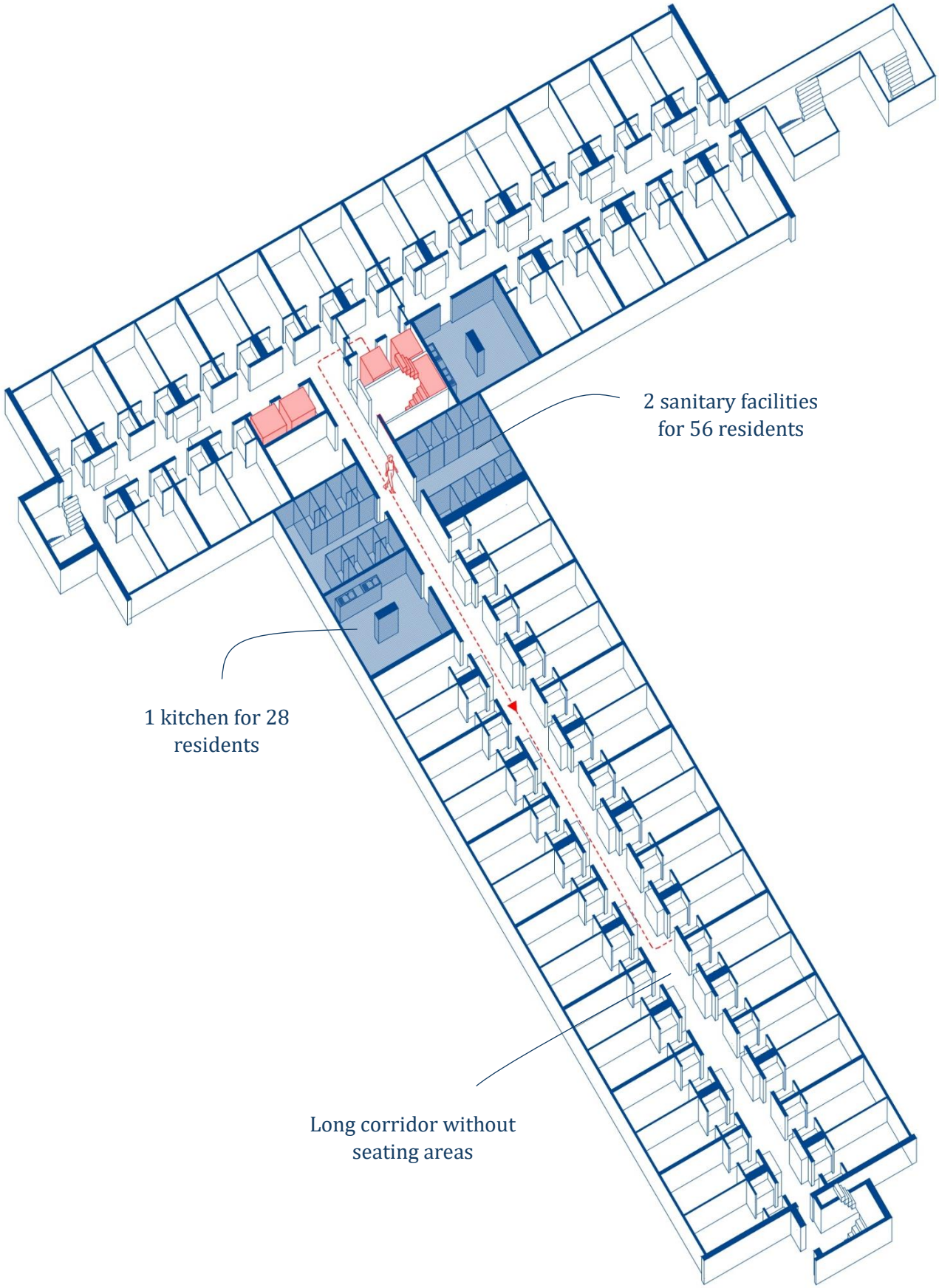
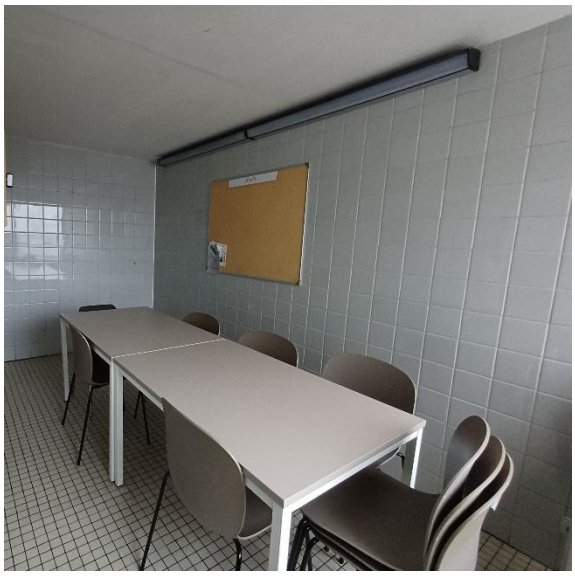


Figure K *– Six photos documenting the hallway and kitchen on the 6th floor (Home Vermeylen)*













C. Institutional investment and the meaning of shared spaces

A third factor influencing daily life at Home Vermeylen is the limited institutional investment in common areas. When kitchens, study areas, or walkways appear outdated, residents interpret this as a sign that these spaces are a low priority. This perception directly influences their behaviour. As one resident puts it: if they receive "the absolute minimum," they give "the absolute minimum" in return.[1] The result is a self-reinforcing cycle in which minimal institutional care is reflected in minimal resident involvement.

This dynamic becomes particularly visible in two everyday spaces essential to student life: the bicycle storage and the study area. In both cases, spatial layouts do not support daily routines, forcing residents to compensate individually or make informal adjustments to the building.

Bicycle parking: Improvised walking routes

The bicycle storage illustrates how design flaws can undermine the usability of shared infrastructure (Fig. L-M). Although there is a secure bicycle storage, the connection to the building is impractical: after parking your bike, you must leave the facility and walk outside to reach the building's only entrance. There is no internal connection between the bicycle storage and the residence. This misalignment makes the official route slow and inconvenient, especially in bad weather or when carrying bags.[2]

Because the walking routes do not align with the residents' daily routines, students create their own shortcuts. Several students use the ground-floor kitchen as an informal passageway to reach the bike parking faster. This improvised route crosses an emergency exit and interrupts a common area intended for residents with mobility impairments, rendering it unsuitable and officially discouraged.[3] The existence of this informal passage reveals a broader problem: the building lacks a direct, functional connection to a space that the residents use daily.

[1] Resident of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 11, 2025.
[2] Resident of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 11, 2025.
[3] Resident of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 11, 2025.

Figure L *- Axonometric drawing of the ground floor with the bicycle storage and the routes leading to it*

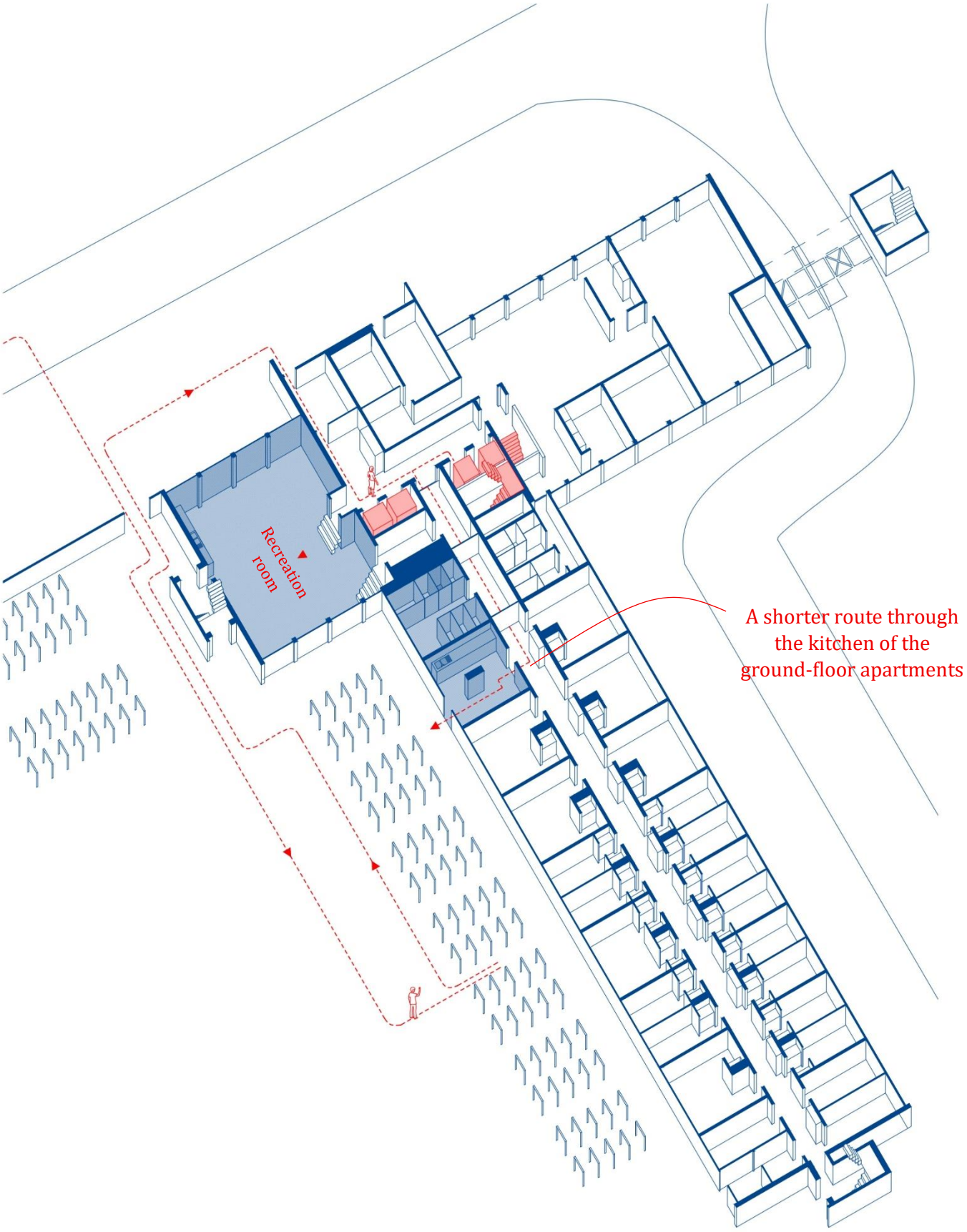


Figure M *– Three photos documenting the bicycle storage and the improvised route through the kitchen on the ground floor*







Study space and circulation: Leftover spaces and fragmented access

The route to the study space illustrates how insufficient investment affects both the use and the perception of shared spaces (N-O). To reach the study area, residents must leave the main route and take a series of detours: an evacuation door, a narrow emergency staircase, a dark basement corridor, and finally an outdoor parking lot shared with parents picking up their children from the nearby daycare. One resident notes that she always has to go outside to reach the study space, even in bad weather, and carry her laptop through this fragmented route because there is no internal connection.[1]

On-site observations confirm this marginal position. After descending via the emergency staircase into a dimly lit basement, the only way forward is through the outdoor parking lot, after which one re-enter the building through a side door. Inside, there was a wide corridor containing toilets, a printer, and various stored materials – further indicating that this zone functions more as a service area than as a central study space. The entire route makes it clear that the study space is situated, both literally and symbolically, outside the building's main circulation routes.

The study area itself reinforces the impression of a leftover space. Residents describe it as a converted basement rather than a purpose-designed study environment: the ceilings are low, there is little daylight, and the furniture consists of a collection of mismatched tables and chairs. Noise from the adjacent daycare centre is often audible, especially in the summer when children are playing outside. As one resident summarises it, the space feels like "the absolute minimum," a room where necessary functions have been placed without a thoughtful design.[2]

Despite these shortcomings, a practical advantage was highlighted during the tour: when the noise in the study room becomes disruptive, residents can call security to intervene. Several prospective students and parents found this reassuring. This points to the benefits of a professional living environment with continuous security.

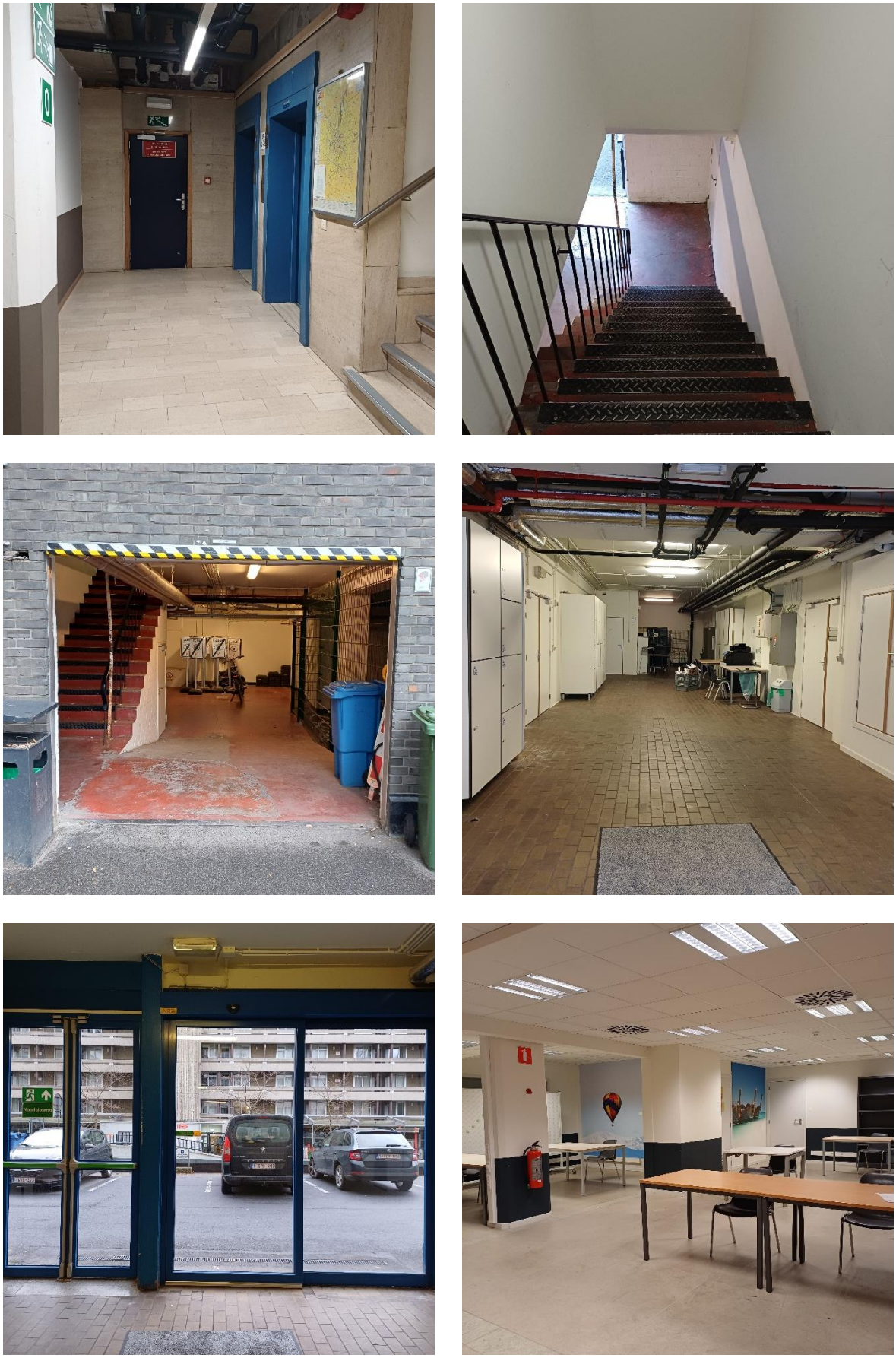
[1] Resident of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 11, 2025.

[2] Resident of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 11, 2025.

Figure N *- Axonometric drawing of the basement floor showing the route to the study room*



Figure 0 *– Six photos documenting the route to the study room and the interior*



3. Theoretical interpretation: Why collective care struggles to emerge

The interpretation of Home Vermeylen's analysis, based on the concepts of psychological ownership, self-management, and appropriation, and architecture complemented by use, clarifies why collective care is difficult to emerge. In all these theoretical perspectives, the same pattern emerges: the organisational model and spatial layout limit residents' ability to exert influence on their environment, appropriate it, or take responsibility for it.

Peck et al. demonstrate that **psychological ownership** develops when individuals can meaningfully shape or participate in the organisation of shared spaces, because such involvement strengthens the sense of responsibility and stimulates active stewardship.[1] In Home Vermeylen, the outsourced management model allows residents to play virtually no role in the organisation or maintenance of their environment. Cleaning, repairs, and conflict resolution are handled entirely by staff, and even small tasks that could enable involvement are outsourced. Without opportunities to invest labour, make decisions, or influence the outcome, communal spaces remain perceived as institutional rather than collective, and the motivation to care for them remains weak. Lefebvre's concept of **autogestion**, as interpreted by Purcell, sheds further light on this dynamic.[2] Self-management presupposes that residents collectively determine the conditions of their daily lives and develop the organisational capacities necessary to regulate shared environments. In Vermeylen, however, authority is centralised within the university's housing department.

The spatial configuration of the building reinforces these organisational constraints. Boudon's reinterpretation of Le Corbusier's Pessac shows that architecture is completed when residents can make it their own – when they can personalise, adapt, or reorganise shared spaces according to their own routines.[3] In Vermeylen, the rigid and standardised layout leaves little room for such appropriation. Kitchens, hallways, and study spaces are fixed in form and function, leaving residents with few opportunities to develop their own habits or create a shared meaning. Purcell's interpretation of Lefebvre deepens this insight by framing **appropriation** as a political and spatial act through which residents claim the space as their own.[4] In Vermeylen, the lack of flexibility and influence on the part of the residents hinders this process, thereby limiting the formation of familiarity, shared norms, and a sense of belonging.

Finally, the condition and placement of shared spaces determine how residents interpret their importance. When facilities appear outdated, marginal, or improvised, they are viewed as low-priority spaces. This perception reduces engagement and reinforces the feeling that these spaces do not deserve care. Limited institutional investment thus becomes both a signal and a mechanism: it communicates low value and leads to low engagement.

These theoretical perspectives demonstrate that the obstacles to collective care in home Vermeylen are structural rather than behavioural.

[1] Peck et al., 'Caring for the Commons'.
[2] Purcell, 'Possible Worlds'.
[3] Boudon, *Lived-in Architecture*.
[4] Purcell, 'Possible Worlds'.

4. Key findings: Three conditions for collective care in institutional student housing

The empirical analysis, together with the theoretical interpretation, demonstrates that maintaining collective care in institutional student housing depends on three interconnected conditions:

1. **Residents' influence on shared spaces:** Collective care arises when residents can organise the maintenance and daily use of common areas. In Vermeylen, however, almost all tasks are outsourced, and the few roles available to residents are linked to financial incentives, thereby reinforcing a consumer relationship rather than shared responsibility.
2. **Small, recognisable living groups:** Informal norms and mutual expectations develop most easily in environments where residents encounter each other regularly. With 56 residents per floor and 28 students sharing a kitchen, the scale of Vermeylen leads to anonymity, weak social cohesion, and limited opportunities for collective routines.
3. **Visible institutional investment in shared spaces:** The condition and design of common areas indicate how important they are. When kitchens, study areas, or outdoor spaces look worn or neglected, residents consider them less important and respond with minimal involvement.

Together, these factors explain why collective care is difficult to realise in Vermeylen and point to the structural elements that need to be addressed to transform institutional student housing into more sustainable, self-managed forms of living.

This summary presents only the key findings of the broader research I conducted in November and December 2025. The full transcripts of the interviews with the student resident (November 11) and the home manager (November 17) are included in Appendix C.

2.1.4. Conclusion of student housing context in Ghent

Ghent's analysis reveals a student housing system shaped by long-term structural pressure. A persistent shortage of rooms forces many students onto the regular rental market, where their presence intensifies competition in segments already under pressure from low-income households. New construction is largely driven by investment considerations, resulting in a supply that prioritises profitable typologies over social necessity. Within this landscape, affordability issues are structurally embedded: rents follow market dynamics, and students' dependence on financial support from their parents has become an increasingly normal feature of the system.

The institutional sector offers a degree of stability, but its decentralised and hierarchical organisation limits its ability to respond to this pressure. University-managed housing remains fragmented across various departments, and governed by procedures that leave little room for resident input. As a result, institutional housing cannot compensate for the shortcomings of the private market, nor can it provide a framework in which students can meaningfully co-decide on their living environment.

This dynamic reveals a system in which scarcity, market-driven development, and limited institutional coordination mutually reinforce each other. It also shows that the problems faced by students in Ghent are structural characteristics of the housing supply. Insight into these circumstances is essential for assessing the possibilities and limitations of alternative cooperative models and forms the basis for a comparison of how Heidelberg has organised student housing under different institutional and spatial conditions.

2.2

HEIDELBERG: STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS FOR STUDENT HOUSING

2.2. Heidelberg: Structural conditions for student housing

2.2.1. Urban structure and post-war development

Heidelberg's spatial structure provides an essential starting point for understanding the city's student housing conditions. The city is organised along the Neckar River, and divided into fifteen districts, each with its own socio-spatial profile (Fig. 2-3). **Neuenheim** (Fig. 2.1), north of the river, houses the main university campus and various large student residences; **Altstadt** (Fig. 2.2) contains the historic centre and renovated student town houses; **Bahnstadt** (Fig. 2.3) represents a recent large-scale urban expansion with more than 5.000 new energy-efficient apartments; and **Rohrbach** (Fig. 2.4), one of the fastest-growing districts, where the Collegium Academicum is located.[1]

A defining feature of Heidelberg's post-war development is that the city emerged from the Second World War largely undamaged.[2] This exceptional situation determined its subsequent course: Heidelberg retained its historic structure and became a strategic administrative centre for the US Army.[3] From 1945 onwards, the American army occupied large parts of the city and converted them into housing, hospitals, and command centres. When American troops withdrew between 2013 and 2015, approximately 180–200 hectares of centrally located land were returned to the city – an unprecedented release of urban space during a period of rapid population growth and an acute housing shortage.[4]

Five large areas are being transformed into mixed-use residential neighbourhoods featuring housing, public amenities, and green space. One of these sites – the former American Hospital in Rohrbach, now home to the Collegium Academicum – is being redeveloped into a neighbourhood with approximately 600 apartments (Fig. 4-5). The municipal housing association GGH employs an affordability model in which 40% of the homes are reserved for low- and middle-income households, who pay a maximum of 30% of their disposable income through state subsidies.[5] The surroundings of the former hospital grounds reflect the socio-spatial diversity of Rohrbach: affluent villa neighbourhoods are located in the north and east, while the south and west are characterised by lower-income households and mid-rise social housing.

[1] Stadt Heidelberg, 'Districts', accessed 17 March 2026, https://www.heidelberg.de/english/Home/Life/Districts.html.

[2] 'Occupation 1 of 3 - Heidelberg University', accessed 17 March 2026, https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/en/1945-end-of-the-war/1945-heidelberg-all-and-everything-lost/occupation-1-of-3.

[3] 'Occupation 1 of 3 - Heidelberg University'.

[4] Stadt Heidelberg, 'Conversion in Heidelberg: Directing the Change', n.d., www.heidelberg.de/konversion; Stadt Heidelberg, 'Zehnjahrekonversion in Heidelberg', n.d., www.heidelberg.de/konversion.

[5] Stadt Heidelberg, 'Conversion in Heidelberg: Directing the Change'.

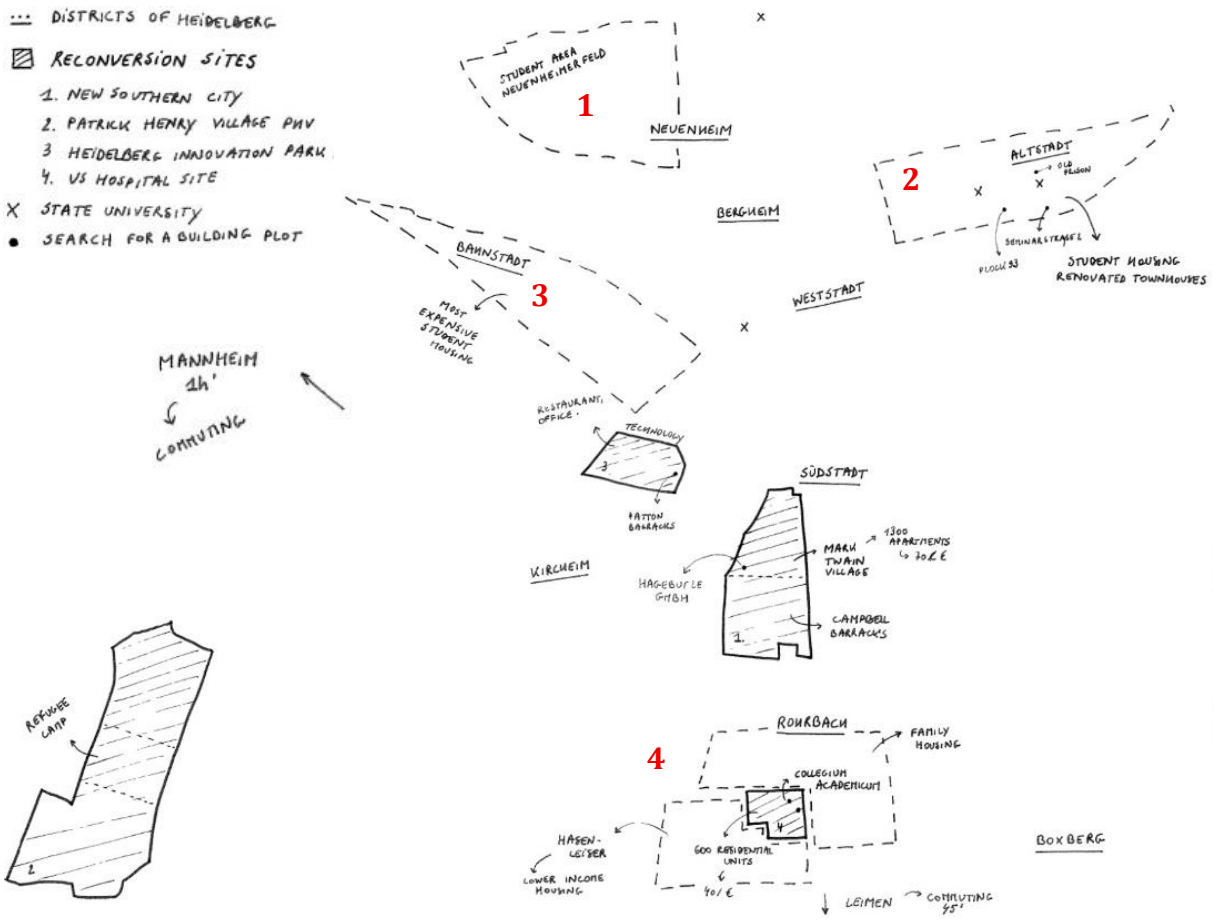


Figure 2 - *Hand-drawn map of Heidelberg (redevelopment areas and districts)*

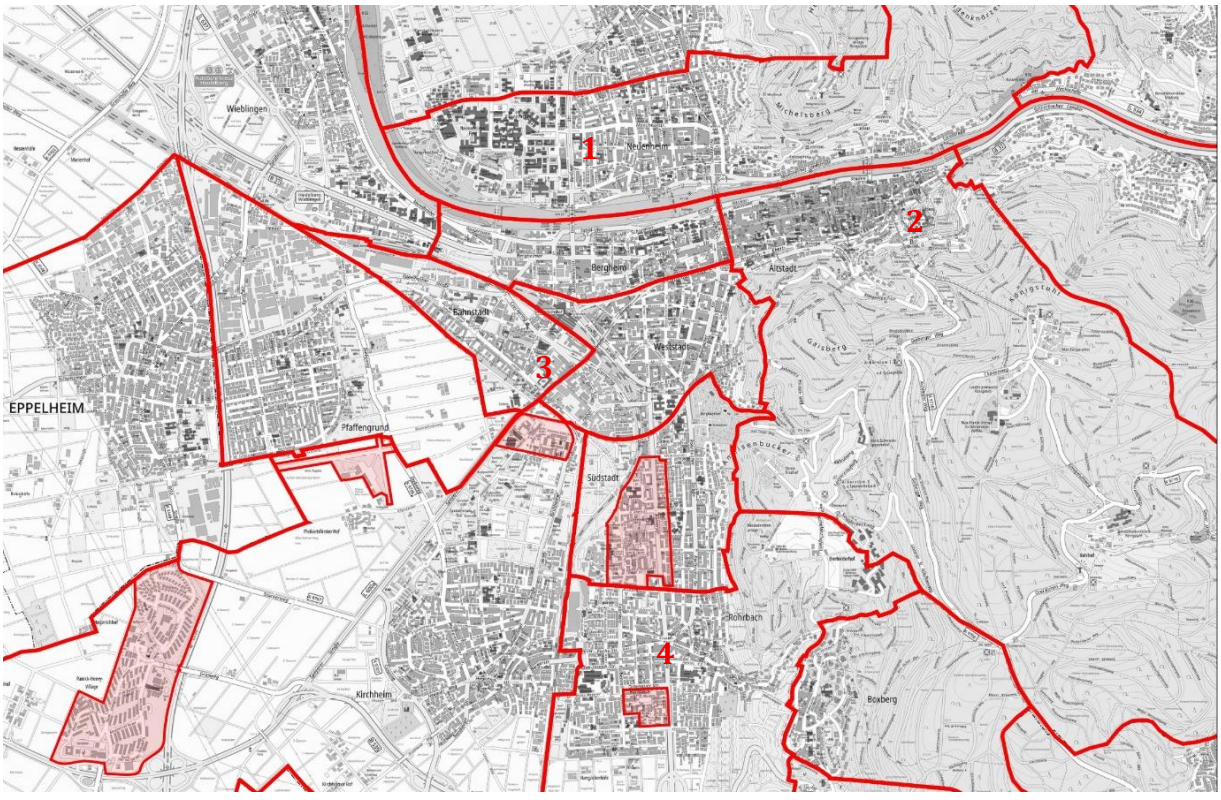


Figure 3 *– Digital map of Heidelberg with the redevelopment areas and districts (1:25000)*

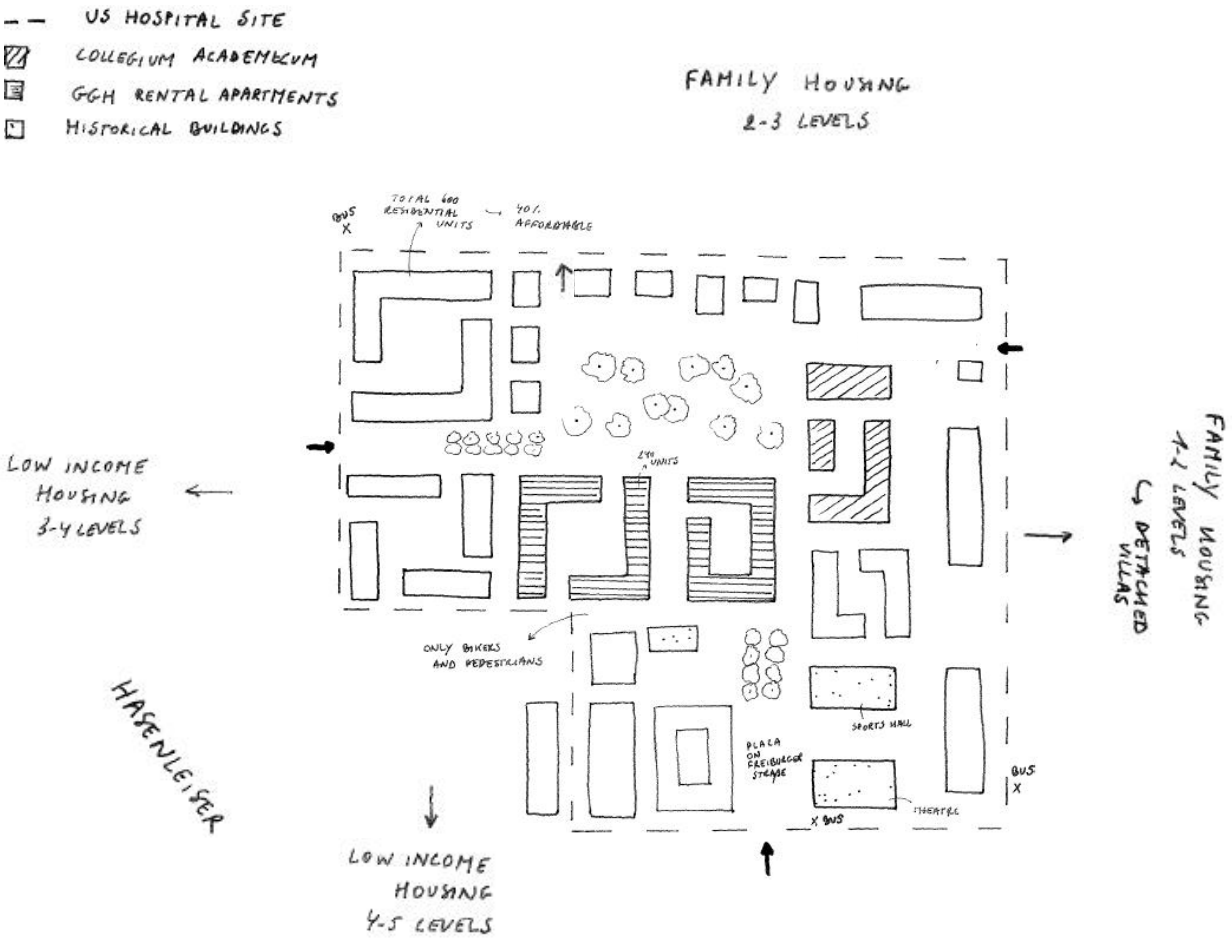


Figure 4 *- Hand-drawn map of US Hospital site*



Figure 5 *– Digital map of US Hospital Site (1:2500)*

2.2.2. Private rental market for student housing: Price growth

Heidelberg is grappling with an increasingly severe crisis regarding student housing. Private rental prices are rising by 5.2% annually, while there is a chronic shortage of student accommodation. Studierendenwerk, the central government agency serving the city's four public universities, is struggling to find a solution to this problem. This part first describes the rental trends fuelling this overload of the private market. Subsequently, Studierendenwerk's role, operational model, and current capacity limits are examined, after which the three expansion strategies are explained.

Rental trends and crisis recognition

2010-2016: Moderate but stable rent growth

A study on the hedonic rent index analyses private student housing in 15 German cities using data from ImmobilienScout24.[1] Adjustments were made for quality differences to isolate pure price trends. In Heidelberg, classified as a "major student city," average rents rose by 13.0% from 2010 to mid-2016 – moderate compared to the 53.0% increase in Berlin.[2] The quality-adjusted hedonic index showed lower growth of 8.0%, the lowest in the comparison group (Jena, Frankfurt, Siegen, Bochum, Bonn) (Appendix A1).[3] For a standard 30 m^2 apartment including all costs: in 2010 this was €445 per month (€9.30 per m^2) and in 2016 €469 per month.[4] Despite this price constraint, Heidelberg was more expensive than Berlin (€407) or Cologne (€462), but cheaper than Frankfurt (€517) and Munich (€615) (Appendix A2).[5]

2022-2025: Acceleration and market pressure

The MLP Studentenwohnreport 2025 tracks the Studentenwohnpreisindex and shows that quality-adjusted rental prices in Heidelberg have risen by 5.2% per year over the past three years.[6] An average 20 m^2 room in a shared apartment (WG) costs €633 gross rent in 2025, including heating costs (median asking price €27/m^2) and a hypothetical 30 m^2 apartment including all costs has risen to €670 per month (Appendix A3).[7] These figures place Heidelberg among the most expensive student cities in Germany outside the major metropolises, further exacerbating the shortage.

2026: Recognition of the student housing crisis

Nowadays, the severity of the student housing crisis in Heidelberg is widely acknowledged. A resident of the Collegium Academicum describes shared rooms in the city centre costing more than €600 per month, renovated apartments that are even more expensive, and

[1] Philipp Deschermeier, *A Hedonic Rent Index for Student Housing in Germany* (Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln, 2016).
[2] Deschermeier, *A Hedonic Rent Index for Student Housing in Germany*, 5.
[3] Deschermeier, *A Hedonic Rent Index for Student Housing in Germany*, 8.
[4] Deschermeier, *A Hedonic Rent Index for Student Housing in Germany*, 5.
[5] Deschermeier, *A Hedonic Rent Index for Student Housing in Germany*, 10.
[6] *MLP Studentenwohnreport 2025* (MLP Finanzberatung SE, 2025), 45, mlp-studentenwohnreport.de.
[7] *MLP Studentenwohnreport 2025*, 45.

institutional student residences that are permanently full – forcing many students to travel long distances.[1] Urban planners Felix Wohlfart and Stefan Rees confirm this situation:

> *Felix (IBA architect): Yeah, indeed. That is a big problem.*
>
> *Stefan (Urban planner): In Bahnstadt there are now student rooms from commercial firms for prices between 600 and 900 euros per month for 12 square metre rooms with collective spaces. The firm also gives the opportunity to buy these flat for 120.000 euros, so this is for rich people. But normally it is about €500/month for one room in a wohngemeinschaft.*
>
> *Interviewer: What are the reasons for the increasing student housing prices?*
>
> *Stefan (Urban planner): We have 30.000 students that are staying in Heidelberg. And there are 150.000 inhabitants. So there is simply not enough space for everyone. The prices for all of our housing are increased in the last 10 years, and it became very expensive. So a project like the Collegium Academicum is a "drop on the hot stone", but it is good and the best solution.[2]*

This escalating crisis exceeds the capacity of the private market and puts the main provider of institutional student housing in Heidelberg, the centralised agency Studierendenwerk, under enormous pressure.

2.2.3. Institutional student housing: Centralised Studierendenwerk model

Origins and operation of the Studierendenwerk model

Studierendenwerk is the central government agency responsible for student services at the four public universities of Heidelberg. Its origins lie in the democratisation of higher education after the First World War, when increasing accessibility created an urgent need for affordable housing, meals, and financial support. Over the past century, the organisation has grown into a consolidated service provider delivering these core functions on a large scale, with student housing being one of its most important responsibilities.[3]

The housing model combines public ownership with a highly efficient operational structure. Rents remain approximately half of private market prices due to a 9% government subsidy, additional revenue generated by the student restaurants, and deliberately lean staffing. Each residence is overseen by a single concierge and operates without daily cleaning staff, which means that much of the day-to-day functioning of the building depends on the students. They are required to follow strict cleaning schedules, maintain their own household appliances, and keep shared spaces in order. These common areas are inspected weekly, and repeated violations can lead to eviction.[4]

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[1] Mira (CA Resident), interview by the author, Heidelberg, January 6, 2026.

[2] Stefan Rees (Head of the Planning Office of Heidelberg), and Felix Wohlfart (IBA Heidelberg architect), interview by author, Heidelberg, January 7, 2026.

[3] Studierendenwerk staff member (anonymous), interview by author, Heidelberg, January 13, 2026.

[4] Studierendenwerk staff member, interview, January 13, 2026.

This system blends centralised institutional control with delegated responsibilities for everyday maintenance. Managers retain authority over rule enforcement – particularly regarding cleanliness and noise – and this authority is strengthened by the acute housing shortage, which makes eviction a credible and effective deterrent. While the arrangement may superficially resemble cooperative maintenance, the underlying governance logic remains fundamentally hierarchical: responsibilities are assigned rather than collectively negotiated, and residents have limited influence over decision-making.

Expansion strategies

Studierendenwerk's capacity covers only 14% of the demand: of the 7.000 students arriving in September, only 1.000 to 1.500 rooms become available; in the summer semester, 2.500 newcomers compete for 500 to 700 places.[1] This means that 86% of students are dependent on the overburdened private market. The agency is now prioritising expansion and is pursuing three complementary strategies to do so.[2]

First, concentrated campus development ensures that Neuenheimer Feld becomes Heidelberg's primary student housing location, centred around the 1.900-room Im Neuenheimer Feld complex on the northern bank of the university campus. Second, careful urban integration ensures the renovation of townhouses in the Altstadt, combining new student housing with the preservation of the historic core. Third, expansion on the outskirts of the city offers affordable options within commuting distance: Leimen (€250 per month, 45 minutes by train and bus); Mannheim (€331-381 per month, 1 hour commute); and the former American barracks in Rohrbach (600 new rooms). Although students are opposed to commuting, high rents and a diminishing supply in the city centre will lead to short travel times becoming increasingly common.[3]

Lessons from the Studierendenwerk model

The Studierendenwerk model demonstrates that a centralised government agency can provide affordable and stable student housing on a large scale. The system of delegated self-management shows that students can take responsibility for shared spaces when expectations are explicit, rules are consistently enforced, and consequences – such as eviction – are credible. This creates a daily sense of responsibility that is largely lacking in the university student residences in Ghent, where outsourced maintenance and weak enforcement undermine any form of shared responsibility. Crucially, the effectiveness of Studierendenwerk also depends on the spatial scale: most student residences are organised into small living units within larger complexes, allowing self-management to function without becoming anonymous or unmanageable. In Neuenheimer Feld, for example, 572 single rooms are grouped into shared apartments for 2 to 4 people, creating manageable social units.[4] The lesson for Ghent is clear: student responsibility is possible, but only when the spatial scale of shared facilities supports it.

At the same time, the Studierendenwerk model highlights structural features that Ghent currently lacks. A central body responsible for all student housing in Heidelberg ensures

[1] Studierendenwerk Heidelberg, *Heidelberg as a Study Location* (2024).
[2] Studierendenwerk staff member, interview, January 13, 2026.
[3] Studierendenwerk staff member, interview, January 13, 2026.
[4] 'INF 686-696', *Studierendenwerk Heidelberg*, n.d., accessed 12 May 2026, https://www.stw.uni-heidelberg.de/wohnen/wohnheime/inf-686-696/.

cohesion, reduces fragmentation, and guarantees that affordability is determined by a city-wide public mandate. This centralisation also provides the city with a clear partner: when Heidelberg's urban planners were asked about the student housing shortage, they acknowledged the problem but immediately pointed to Studierendenwerk as the agency responsible for addressing it. In Ghent, on the other hand, no such coordinating body exists. Student housing is spread across multiple institutions, each with limited capacity, while the private market absorbs the majority of the demand.

In summary, the Studierendenwerk model demonstrates that affordability, stability, and daily responsibility can reinforce each other within a strong, centralised public framework. At the same time, it makes clear that delegated self-management is not the same as democratic governance: students maintain shared spaces, but they do not determine the rules or make the decisions governing them. For Ghent, the lessons are clear: institutional housing can benefit from clearer responsibilities, smaller and more manageable living units, and consistent enforcement, but meaningful self-governance requires structures that give students actual influence.

2.2.4. Conclusion of student housing context in Heidelberg

The Heidelberg case demonstrates how student housing is shaped by the interplay between spatial history, market dynamics, and institutional organisation.

Post-war redevelopment and the release of former military sites created opportunities for large-scale residential projects. Despite this favourable spatial context, the private rental market in Heidelberg remains under persistent pressure. Demand invariably exceeds supply, rents are rising, and students are facing increasing difficulties in finding affordable rooms. Within this environment, Studierendenwerk plays a stabilising role. As a single institution responsible for student housing, it offers a clear organisational structure for planning, rent determination, and long-term management.

Together, these elements demonstrate that Heidelberg’s student housing system is the product of a specific alignment of spatial possibilities, market pressures, and institutional capacity. Insight into this configuration is essential for analysing the development and positioning of the Collegium Academicum within the broader housing landscape.

2.3

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: GHENT AND HEIDELBERG

2.3. Comparative analysis: Ghent and Heidelberg

Following an outline of the specific contexts of Ghent and Heidelberg, this section presents a direct comparison between the two cities. By juxtaposing demographic indicators, housing costs, and student living patterns, it becomes clear how each city accommodates its student population and how students position themselves within the broader housing system. Structural indicators such as population size, student numbers, and affordability – summarised in Table 1 – form the basis of this comparison, followed by behavioural and cultural insights. Together, these comparisons provide a solid basis for assessing the transferability of cooperative housing models in both contexts.

2.3.1. National ownership cultures

An important initial remark when comparing both cities as contexts for student housing cooperatives is that the ownership culture in Germany and Belgium differs significantly. In Germany, renting is most common: in 2025, 52.8% of households rented a home, while 47.2% owned their own home.[1] This long-standing rental tradition aligns more naturally with cooperative housing models, which are based on long-term, secure tenancy rather than individual ownership.

Belgium, on the other hand, has a strong cultural and historical orientation towards home ownership. In 2025, 70.9% of households owned their home and 29.1% rented, only a small percentage higher than the 27.3% in 2003.[2] The housing situation can be divided into four categories: owners with a mortgage, owners who fully own the home, tenants at market rates, and tenants with subsidised/free rent. These patterns vary by group. Among low-income households (less than 60% of median income), the percentage of homeowners fell from 56.4% in 2003 to 36.9% in 2020, meaning that 63% rent (Appendix A4).[3] Younger adults are also renting more and more often, driven by higher prices (Appendix A5).[4]

2.3.2. Structural differences

Demographic profiles

Heidelberg is a compact university city with approximately 150.000 inhabitants, with a relatively young and international profile: 39% of the inhabitants are under 30, 16% are over 65, and 21% have a foreign nationality.[5] Approximately 36.114 students are enrolled at the four state-regulated universities.[6] Almost 20% of these students are international, which underscores Heidelberg's profile as an international university city.

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[1] 'Distribution of Population by Tenure Status, Type of Household and Income Group', Eurostat, Data Browser, accessed 23 April 2026, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho02__custom_12697765/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=ae2c6103-4493-4b72-9f26-006774ae4eb8&c=1757069767000.

[2] Data Brows., 'Distribution of Population by Tenure Status, Type of Household and Income Group'.

[3] Ch. Warisse, *Is Home Ownership Still Affordable in Belgium?* (NBB Economic Review, 2022), 15.

[4] Warisse, *Is Home Ownership Still Affordable in Belgium?*, 10.

[5] Stadt Heidelberg, 'Heidelberg in Figures', Living in Heidelberg, accessed 15 March 2026, https://www.heidelberg.de/english/Home/Life/Heidelberg+in+figures.html.

[6] Studierendenwerk staff member, interview, January 13, 2026.

Ghent is considerably larger, with approximately 272.389 inhabitants.[1] There are a total of 89.000 students, of whom about 40.750 study at Ghent University, including 5.749 international students.[2]

In proportional terms, the presence of students is more strongly embedded in the urban fabric of Heidelberg. With 36.000 students living in the city, they represent approximately 24% of the total population.[3] In contrast, approximately 41.830 students (47% of the total number of students) live in Ghent, which amounts to about 15% of the population.[4]

Current prices of private and institutional student housing

These patterns are also reflected in the prices and supply of private student housing. In Heidelberg, a room in a shared apartment typically costs between 400 and 600 euros per month, whereas a studio apartment costs between 500 and 800 euros.[5] In Ghent, comparable private student housing options such as Upkot are slightly more expensive: rooms with shared spaces range between 668 and 748 euros per month (rent plus fixed costs), while individual studios cost 893 euros.[6] The average rent for student rooms on the private market in Ghent is estimated at 550-600 euros per month. This means that commercial student housing in Ghent is generally above the highest price level observed in Heidelberg.

Both cities are struggling with a shortage of institutional housing. In Heidelberg, Studierendenwerk manages 4.342 rooms in 65 student dorms, of which approximately 40% are reserved for international students.[7] Rent in these student flats ranges from 200 to 360 euros per month, with an average of 309 euros in 2024.[8] In Ghent, spread across the entire city and all institutions, there are approximately 4.600 rooms managed by universities.[9] Ghent University currently offers about 2.200 rooms (2025-2026) and plans to expand this number to 6.000 rooms by 2030.[10] For the academic year 2026-2027, rental prices for student rooms at Ghent University vary as follows: shared rooms cost between 385 and 507 euros respectively, while individual accommodations cost between 593 and 766 euros per month.[11] Both cities are therefore facing a significant shortage of affordable, centrally located student housing.

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[1] Stad Gent, 'Gent blijft groeien: voor het eerst meer dan 270.000 inwoners', 22 April 2025, https://stad.gent/nl/over-gent-stadsbestuur/nieuws-evenementen/gent-blijft-groeien-voor-het-eerst-meer-dan-270000-inwoners.

[2] 'Ghent University', Top Universities, accessed 15 March 2026, https://www.topuniversities.com/universities/ghent-university.

[3] Studierendenwerk Heidelberg, *Heidelberg as a Study Location*.

[4] Participant (Dienst Wonen, City of Ghent), remarks during meeting at STAM museum, Ghent, October 1, 2025.

[5] Studierendenwerk Heidelberg, *Heidelberg as a Study Location*.

[6] UPkot, 'Backstage² Upkot Ghent', 2026, https://upkot.be/en/locations/ghent/backstage2-upkot.

[7] Studierendenwerk staff member, interview, January 13, 2026.

[8] Studierendenwerk Heidelberg, *Heidelberg as a Study Location*.

[9] Participant (Dienst Wonen, City of Ghent), remarks during meeting at STAM museum, Ghent, October 1, 2025.

[10] Home manager of Home Vermeylen, interview, November 17, 2025; Participant (Dienst Huisvesting, University of Ghent), remarks during meeting at Stadsacademie, Ghent, February 9, 2026.

[11] Universiteit Gent, 'Hoeveel kost een wooneenheid?', Universiteit Gent, Studentenportaal, 2026, https://www.ugent.be/student/nl/studentenleven/huisvesting/kot-ugent/homes/huurfactuur.htm.

Figure 6 *– Table with a comparison between Heidelberg and Ghent*

	Heidelberg	**Ghent**
Total number of:		
Inhabitants	150.000 Age of the population: - 39% < 30 - 16% > 65 - 21% foreign	272.389
Students	36.114 Please note: this applies to state universities, not private universities.	89.000 - 40.750 at Ghent University
International students	6430 = 18% of the total number of students	5749 at Ghent University = 14% of the total number of students at Ghent University
Students living in their university city	36.000 = 24% of the total number of inhabitants	41.830 = 15% of the total number of inhabitants
Current prices of student housing (euro/month):		
Privately developed	**In general:** Room with shared spaces: - 1-room in WG: 400-600 Room without shared spaces: - 1-room apartment: 500-800	**Specific case: Upkot** Room with shared spaces: - UpRoom: 549 + 119 = 668 - UpRoom+: 599 + 119 = 718 - UpComfort: 629 + 119 = 748 Room without shared spaces: - UpStudio: 759 + 134 = 893
Institutional student housing	**Studierendenwerk** Number of rooms - a total 4342 rooms in 65 residence halls Room prices - 1 room with shared spaces: 200-360 - average 309	**Specific case: Student housing of Ghent University** Number of rooms - 2200 rooms (in 2025-2026) - 6000 rooms (in 2030) Please note: the various universities together have a total of 4.600 rooms. Room prices (2026-2027) - 1 room with shared spaces: 385-507 - 1 room without shared spaces: 593

2.3.3. Cultural differences in student mentality and housing practices

In addition to structural indicators, interviewees in both cities pointed to more subtle cultural differences that determine how students relate to housing and collective projects.

Student mentality and forms of political engagement

During group discussions at the STAM Museum in Ghent, some external partners questioned whether a strongly self-governing initiative such as the Collegium Academicum would be feasible in the Flemish context, citing the perceived pressure on Belgian students to complete their studies quickly. Testimonies from residents of Heidelberg suggest a different experience. One resident explained that she had interrupted her studies for a year to work for the cooperative – an option considered relatively normal in her community.[1] Another resident noted that German students traditionally experience less pressure to graduate quickly, although she also observed a gradual shift towards a more accelerated study culture. This shift is reflected in the declining interest in the post-secondary Orientation Year, which was cancelled this year due to insufficient enrolment. Residents linked this decline to a broader political climate that emphasises a faster transition to the labour market.[2]

These stories suggest that study rhythms in Heidelberg may have been more flexible than in Ghent during the planning and development phase of the CA. However, this difference is not absolute and depends heavily on individual circumstances and expectations. Further nuance is needed. Students at Ghent University are politically active, but many are unfamiliar with the idea that involvement in housing can in itself be a form of political or collective action. Because cooperative living is not part of the local student repertoire, housing is rarely viewed as a domain in which collective organisation can express political involvement. The problem is therefore not a lack of willingness, but a lack of familiarity with cooperative living as a legitimate arena for student participation.

Living practices and the role of family homes

A second cultural difference concerns daily living habits and the underlying legal frameworks. In Heidelberg, it is common for students to live in ordinary family homes, and several residents of CA were surprised to hear that this is legally prohibited in my university city. Local regulations in Ghent explicitly prohibit students from living in family homes in order to protect the housing stock for families. This policy has a major influence on the public debate regarding student housing.

In Heidelberg, the situation is reversed. Studierendenwerk actively renovates historic townhouses into student housing, and occupancy of family homes is considered normal. These contrasting legal and cultural frameworks determine not only where students can live but also how easily cooperative housing can be integrated into the existing urban fabric. In Ghent, cooperative initiatives must navigate stricter zoning plans and a more contested relationship between student housing and family homes.

[1] Nina (CA Resident and member of the CA GmbH), informal conversation with the author, Heidelberg, January 7, 2026.

[2] Mira, interview, January 6, 2026.

2.4

CHAPTER SYNTHESIS AND IMPLICATIONS

2.4. Chapter synthesis

The comparison between Ghent and Heidelberg shows that the feasibility of self-managed student housing is determined by the structural environment in which it is embedded. In Ghent, persistent scarcity, market-driven development, and fragmented institutional responsibility leave little room for collective organisation. Students are spread across various housing types that do not support shared routines, and there is no coordinating body guaranteeing an affordable, cohesive strategy for student housing. Heidelberg faces similar pressure – rising rents and a tight private market – but the urban structure made a different outcome possible. The Collegium Academicum was made possible by two facilitating factors: the availability of large redevelopment sites and a growing political urgency regarding affordability.

For Ghent, the implication is clear: a cooperative model requires structural support. Access to affordable land, coordinated governance, and housing types that enable collective living are essential conditions. A cooperative in Ghent requires strategic partnerships with Ghent University and the municipality – parties that can provide land, long-term leases, or legal support. At the same time, the model must directly address Ghent's structural challenges: the shortage of forms of communal living, the dominance of the private rental market, and the limited involvement of residents in institutional housing.

This synthesis forms the basis for Chapter 3, in which the internal mechanisms of the Collegium Academicum are examined to determine which elements are transferable to Ghent and how a cooperative model can be adapted to the specific structural context of the city.

Key insights for the development of a student cooperative in Ghent (Chapter 4)

** Structural preconditions: Affordable, non-speculative access to land and political recognition of the housing crisis*

** Strategic partnerships with Ghent University and the City of Ghent: Guaranteeing the availability of land and long-term leases*

** Addressing the current structural shortcomings: Dominance of the private market, limited resident involvement in institutional housing, and shortage of small-scale forms of communal living*

3

STUDENT COOPERATIVE COLLEGIUM ACADEMICUM, HEIDELBERG

CHAPTER 3: Student cooperative Collegium Academicum, Heidelberg

This chapter examines the Collegium Academicum (CA) in Heidelberg as the central case study. It analyses how the cooperative model enables specific forms of self-governance, how organisational practices shape daily spatial use, and how spatial routines, in turn, influence the internal organisation of the cooperative. The chapter is based on two weeks of fieldwork in Heidelberg, combining archival research, policy documents, nine semi-structured interviews, and participatory observation in twelve meetings. The key protagonists are urban planner Stefan Rees and IBA architect Felix Wohlfart, who shaped the CA's planning framework; co-founder Henrik Eckhardt, who played a central role in the conceptual and organisational development of the project; and an employee of Studierendenwerk Heidelberg, who represents the city's institutional student housing infrastructure. Residents' perspectives range from highly engaged members such as Mira, Klara, Jonas, and Nina to less engaged residents such as Sarah. Additional insights were gained from informal conversations with residents of both the new and the renovated buildings. A detailed overview of this material, including transcripts of interviews and a complete list of attended meetings, can be found in Appendix B and D.

The chapter is divided into four interconnected parts:

- First, the ownership and financing model is introduced, demonstrating how the dual shareholder structure of *Hausbesitz-GmbH* (51% CA Club, 49% *Mietshäuser Syndikat*) anchors the project within an anti-speculative framework, spreads financial risk, and safeguards resident control in the long term. This section also describes the mix of grants and direct loans that made the construction of the CA possible.
- Secondly, the chapter reconstructs the development of the CA based on the three historical sites. It analyses the political, organisational, and spatial circumstances that shaped each phase and identifies the challenges and lessons underlying the current structure of the project.
- Thirdly, the chapter analyses the self-governance structure of the CA, showing how responsibilities for coordination, maintenance, administration, and conflict resolution are distributed and how these arrangements shape daily life. The chapter also examines the tensions inherent in resident-led organisations, including unequal participation, knowledge gaps between generations, and the emotional burden required to maintain flat hierarchies.
- Fourthly, the chapter focuses on the spatial practice of self-management. Using ethnographic drawings and on-site observations, it shows how organisational routines manifest in the daily use of semi-public thresholds, common areas, and shared living units, and how spatial configurations both support and challenge collective routines.

Together, these four components offer a layered insight into how the Collegium Academicum organises autonomy, responsibility, and collective life. The chapter concludes with a synthesis that distils the key insights of the CA and lays the foundation for Chapter 4, in which these lessons are translated into principles for the development of a student cooperative in Ghent.

3.1

INTRODUCTION TO THE COLLEGIUM ACADEMICUM

3.1. Introduction to the Collegium Academicum in Heidelberg (Germany)



Figure 7 *– Aerial view of the Collegium Academicum in Heidelberg*

3.1.1. Personal experience and overview of the project

Positioning of the researcher and immersive fieldwork

My impression of the Collegium Academicum was formed by my two-week stay in the community. First, I stayed in a shared student apartment in the new building, and then in a mixed household in the renovated building, allowing me to experience the project from two different living situations. This temporary stay shaped my perspective in ways that go beyond observation. Daily conversations in kitchens, hallways, and common areas, as well as the rhythm of communal meals, plenary meetings, working group activities, and informal gatherings, influenced how I perceived the spaces and the social dynamics within them. My interpretations were therefore constantly adjusted by the perspectives, concerns, and routines of the people who welcomed me into their homes. What I saw, heard, and understood was inextricably linked to the relationships I built during these two weeks.

This positioning is essential for the analysis that follows. The CA presented itself to me as a living environment that actively shaped my understanding of how ownership, governance, and spatial practice intersect in cooperative housing forms. My analysis is therefore based on the dual role I fulfilled: researcher and temporary resident, simultaneously observing the cooperative and participating in its daily life.

Cooperative tenure and core principles

The Collegium Academicum (CA) opened in 2023 on the site of the former American Hospital in Rohrbach and houses approximately 260 residents who jointly own and manage the project. Cooperative ownership removes buildings from speculative market dynamics and anchors decision-making power within the resident community. This ensures that long-term maintenance, use, and development are driven by collective needs rather than profit-seeking. This ownership structure reflects broader debates about how homes acquire value, and aligns with Kuletskaya's argument that homes constantly fluctuate between use value and exchange value.[1] In the private rental sector, decisions regarding rent, design, and management are largely driven by exchange value and the pursuit of financial return. Cooperative living, on the other hand, shifts the focus towards **use value**: spaces are organised around residents' needs, collective routines, and long-term affordability.[2] Economic contributions are therefore directed inward – towards maintaining the shared living environment – rather than outward to generate profit.

The CA is structured around three interconnected principles: **self-governance** is expressed in weekly plenary meetings, working groups, and shared responsibility for common spaces; **ecological sufficiency** is anchored in compact rooms, shared kitchens, and energy-efficient timber structures that encourage a resource-conscious lifestyle; and **critical learning** is supported by seminar rooms and an auditorium used for workshops, lectures, and cultural events. Together, these principles create a living environment that functions simultaneously as a home, a communal space, and a place for continuous learning.

[1] Kuletskaya, 'Concepts of *Use-Value* and *Exchange-Value* in Housing Research'.

[2] Purcell, 'Possible Worlds', 149–50.

Housing tenures and spatial separation

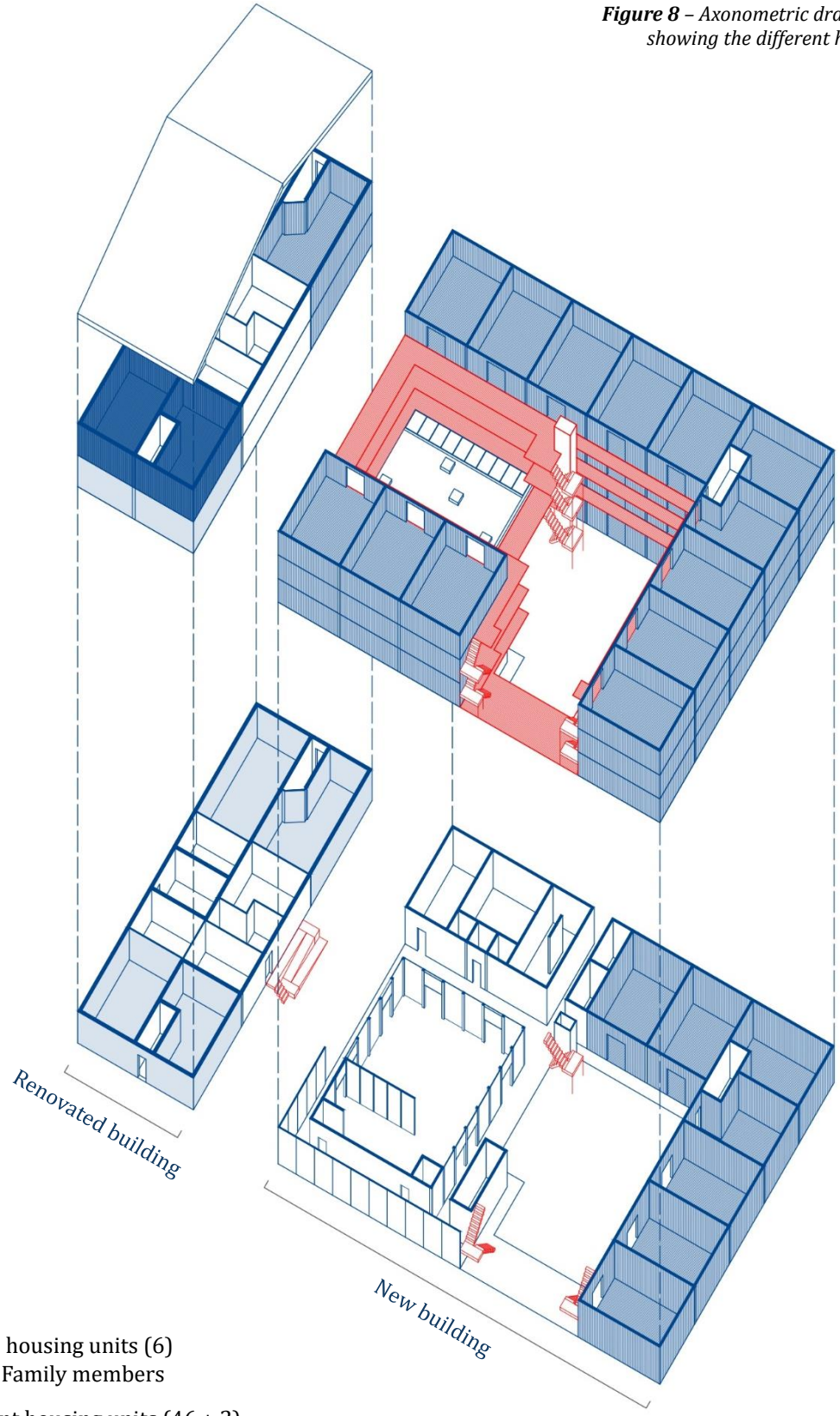
The CA consists of two buildings that house different resident groups, which in turn leads to different spatial and organisational dynamics (Fig. 8).

The **new building** houses 176 students in 46 shared apartments and serves as the social and organisational core of the cooperative. The architectural layout – external access galleries, compact private rooms, and large shared kitchens – creates a socially dense environment. During my stay, communal meals, open doors, and frequent informal gatherings were part of daily life.

The **renovated building** accommodates approximately 80 residents, including families, long-term tenants, and students, distributed across six social housing units, two rental apartments at market prices, and two student flats. This mix differs from the founders' original intention. As co-founder Henrik explained, the building was initially intended for graduates who wanted to remain involved with the cooperative and to ensure continuity between student generations.[1] However, financing conditions required the inclusion of social housing units and imposed specific living rules on certain target groups. This resulted in a more heterogeneous population and a different role within the cooperative. During my second week of fieldwork, I lived with residents aged 28 to 45. The atmosphere was considerably quieter and more individual: shared kitchens were used more functionally, doors remained closed longer, and eating alone was common.

[1] Henrik Eckhardt (Co-founder), interview by author, Heidelberg, January 12, 2026.

Figure 8 *– Axonometric drawing of the CA, showing the different housing tenures*



Social housing units (6)
→ 20 Family members

Student housing units (46 + 2)
→ 176 Students (new) + 50 Students (renovated)

Market-rate rental units (2)
→ Adults between 28 and 45 years old

Circulation zone (external access galleries)

3.1.2. Ownership structure and financial model

Insight into the legal structure of the Collegium Academicum is essential to understanding how the project ensures affordability, prevents speculation, and grants residents decision-making authority.

Ownership structure

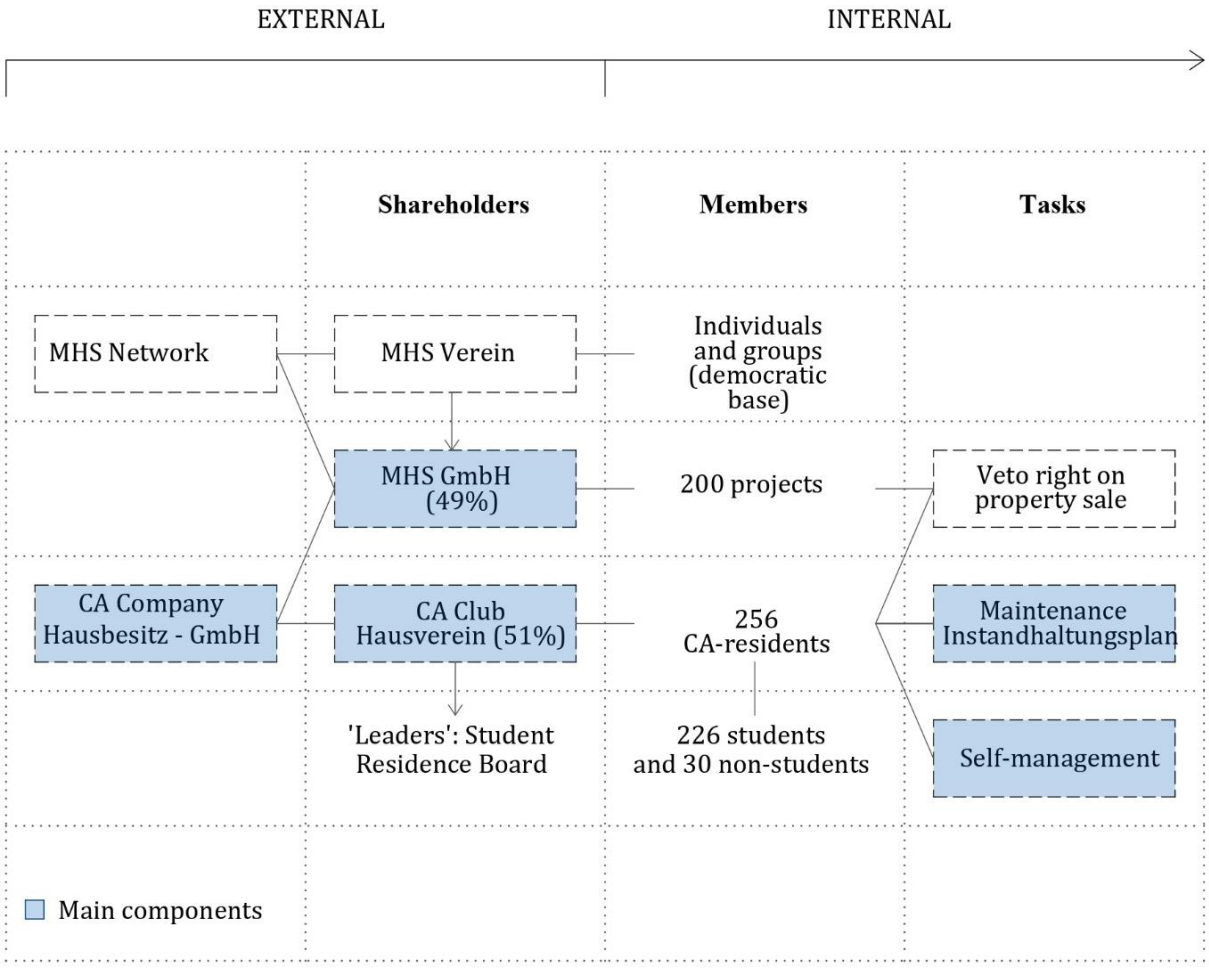


Figure 9 *– Diagram of the ownership structure of the Collegium Academicum and its two shareholders*

The core of the legal structure is formed by *Collegium Academicum Hausbesitz-GmbH*, the private limited company that is the legal owner of the real estate and bears all financial obligations.[1] This GmbH structure, established in 2016 with a starting capital of €25.000, is common in Germany and serves two important purposes: it limits the liability of the entity itself and protects individual residents against personal financial risks.[2] The GmbH consists of five student residents and co-founder Franziska Meier, who participates on an unpaid basis as a non-resident. This group is legally responsible – they sign permits, communicate with banks, and ensure compliance with regulations.

The GmbH has two shareholders, whose relationship forms the backbone of the CA's anti-speculative structure:

1. **Mietshäuser Syndikat GmbH (MHS)** — 49% minority shareholder

   The CA joined the MHS in 2018, thereby adding the most important safeguard to its legal structure: the MHS's veto right on any sale of the property.[3] This means that the CA cannot be privatised, sold, or redeveloped without the approval of the 200 projects in the MHS network. Even the CA Club, as the majority shareholder, cannot overrule this veto. This mechanism ensures that the buildings remain permanently outside the speculative housing market. In addition to this legal protection, the MHS promotes self-organisation, direct democracy, and long-term affordability within its network. A system of solidarity contributions connects all MHS projects: as older projects repay their loans, a growing share of their rental income supports newer initiatives (Fig. 10).[4]

2. **CA Club (*Hausverein*)** — 51% majority shareholder

   The CA Club consists of all 256 residents and is responsible for self-organisation, day-to-day operations, and internal decision-making. As a registered association (*Verein*), it enjoys autonomy over its internal governance. German law requires the association to appoint legally authorised representatives; at the CA, this role is fulfilled by the **Student Residence Board**, which consists of four students elected annually. Their duties include financial oversight, organising general meetings, and managing administrative obligations.

   Residents consistently emphasise that these legally mandated "leaders" hold no more power than anyone else. This point is clearly articulated by Jonas,

   > *Jonas (CA resident): Officially, there should be people responsible for the company. This feels paradoxical, because the focus is on a flat hierarchy, while the law prescribes otherwise. However, they do not have more power than anyone else. The plenary session makes decisions collectively, and the leaders implement those ideas.*[5]

   Informal conversations with other residents confirmed this sentiment. Responsibility is perceived as collective, and formal roles are viewed as administrative necessities rather than positions of authority.

[1] Petar Atanackovic and Projekthaus Potsdam-Babelsberg, *Housing Model of the Mietshäuser Syndikat*, n.d., 9, https://www.projekthaus-potsdam.de/.

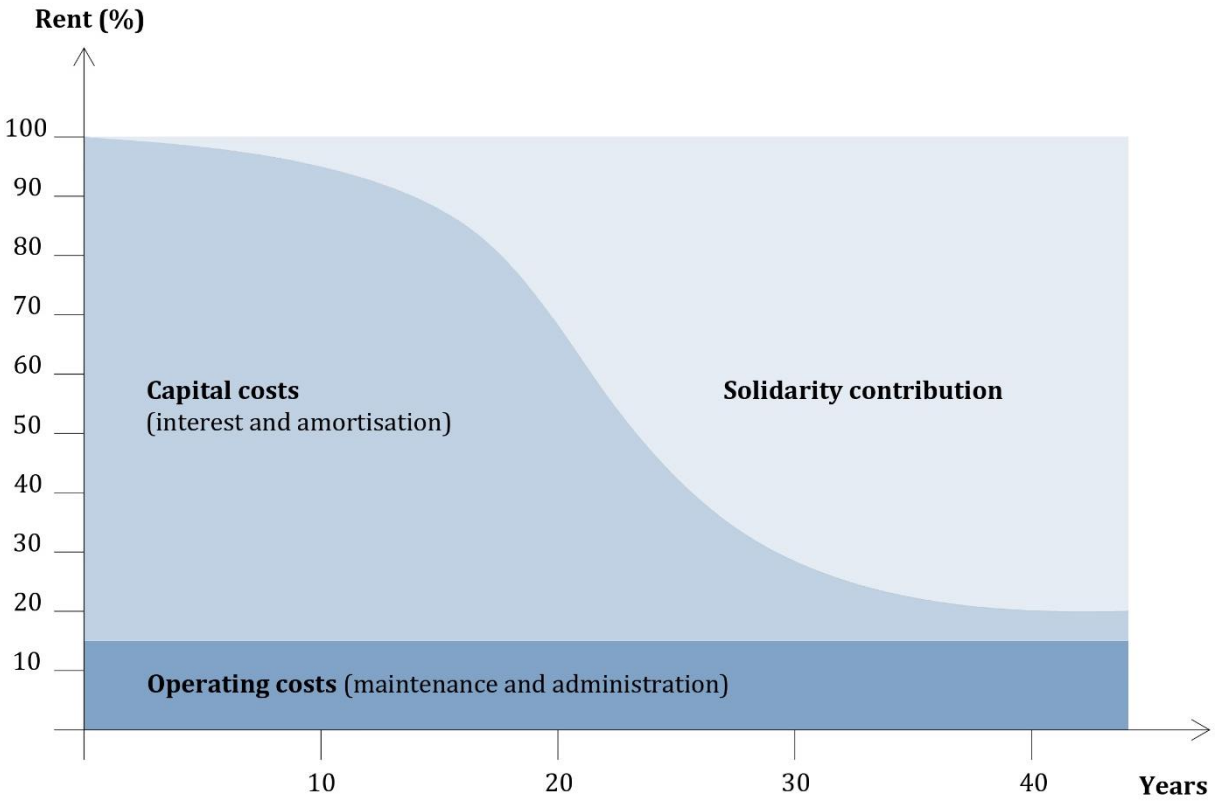
[2] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.

[3] Atanackovic and Potsdam-Babelsberg, *Housing Model of the Mietshäuser Syndikat*, 7.

[4] Atanackovic and Potsdam-Babelsberg, *Housing Model of the Mietshäuser Syndikat*, 10.

[5] Jonas (CA Resident), interview by author, Heidelberg, January 3, 2026.

Figure 10 *– Diagram of the solidarity contribution system*



Financial model

The realisation of the Collegium Academicum required an investment of approximately €31 million: €21 million for the new wooden building and €9 million for the renovation of the former administration building (Fig. 11-12).[1] With an average monthly rent of €375 per resident, the project covers operating costs.[2]

The financing is a combination of federal and state subsidies, low-interest development loans (KfW bank), regular bank loans, direct loans from private individuals, equity, donations, and rental income from the auditorium. Government support was crucial: approximately €8 million in subsidies funded innovative building concepts and socially inclusive housing. These subsidies, combined with long-term loans at low interest rates, significantly reduced the investment costs and made the project financially feasible.[3]

The most distinctive element of the financial model is the extensive system of **direct loans** from private individuals. More than seven hundred lenders have contributed approximately €4.6 million, with individual loans ranging from €500 to €100.000. These loans typically carry a modest interest rate (0.2-1.9%) and require a minimum investment period of two years.[4] Compared to conventional bank loans, they reduce repayment costs and function as equity, thereby strengthening the project's negotiating position with banks. Because direct loans are subordinated to bank loans, lenders accept a higher risk. To comply with the German Investment Act, which governs private investments and prospectus requirements, the CA limits each investment to a maximum of €100.000 per person or twenty individual loans within twelve months.[5]

Mobilising these direct loans required sustained public involvement. In 2018, students built a full-scale prototype room and exhibited it in Heidelberg (Fig. 13).[6] This generated significant media attention and introduced the project to a wider audience. This prototype still stands on the CA grounds as a reminder of the first fundraising attempts. Obtaining direct loans remains a central part of the cooperative's financial strategy. During my fieldwork, residents described this ongoing fundraising as one of their most urgent tasks. Twice a month, they set up an information tent at the central market to present the project, answer questions, and encourage new contributions.

[1] 'Funding - Collegium Academicum', accessed 20 December 2025, https://collegiumacademicum.de/en/funding/.
[2] 'Dorm - Collegium Academicum', accessed 20 December 2025, https://collegiumacademicum.de/en/dorm/.
[3] 'Funding - Collegium Academicum'.
[4] 'Direct Loans - Collegium Academicum', accessed 21 December 2025, https://collegiumacademicum.de/en/direct-loans/.
[5] 'Direct Loans - Collegium Academicum'.
[6] 'Room Model - Collegium Academicum', accessed 21 December 2025, https://collegiumacademicum.de/zimmermodell/.

Figure 11 *– Financing of the new building*
Figure 12 *– Financing of the renovated building*

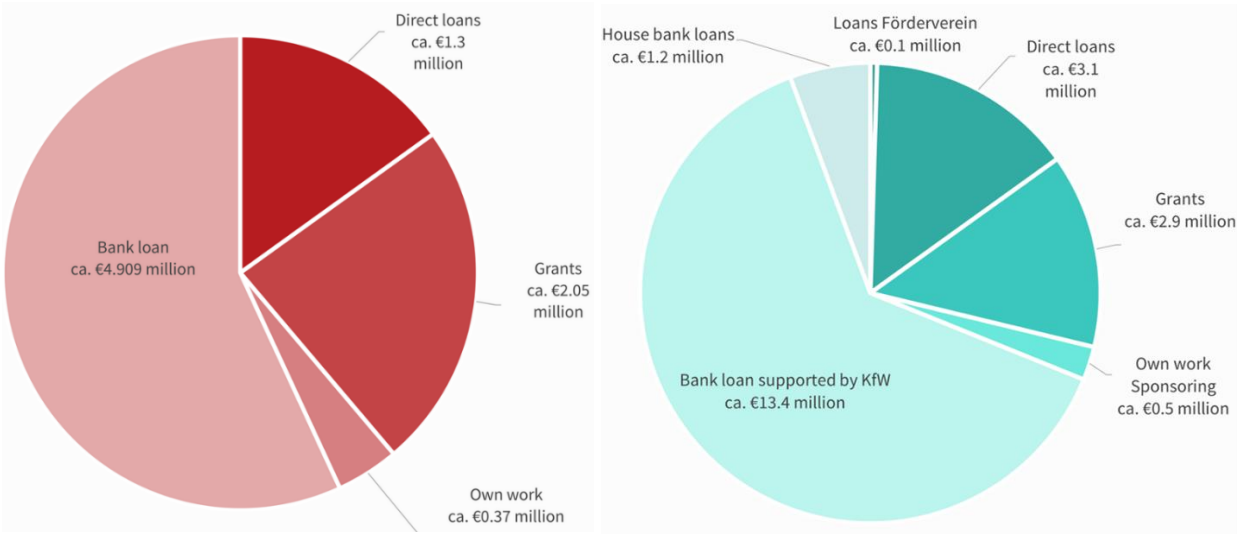


Figure 13 *- Room model to generate press attention and direct loans (2018)*



3.1.3. Concluding synthesis: Key strengths of the legal framework

The legal structure of the CA ensures a sustainable balance between affordability, democratic control, and long-term protection. Affordability is guaranteed because the financing model and the cooperative's non-profit status prevent rent evasion and keep operational costs linked to actual needs rather than profit. Democratic control is ensured by the CA Club, whose majority share ensures that residents themselves have a say in governance and day-to-day decision-making. At the same time, the minority share and veto power of the *Mietshäuser Syndikat* offer structural protection against speculation: the buildings cannot be sold, privatised, or repurposed without the consent of the wider network. This combination of internal control and external protection strengthens the cooperative's credibility with the municipality and lenders, while also ensuring continuity despite the rapid turnover of residents characteristic of student housing. In this way, the CA's legal framework anchors the project in long-term collective ownership and protects it against the market pressure that often destabilises student housing.

Key insights for the development of a student cooperative in Ghent (Chapter 4)

** Protection against speculative ownership: A non-speculative legal structure to guarantee long-term affordability*

** Resident majority control: Democratic ownership that ensures decision-making power remains with the community*

** External safeguarding partner: An independent supervisory body (such as the Mietshäuser Syndikat) to prevent privatisation*

** Mixed financing model: A combination of public grants, development loans, bank loans, and solidarity-based direct loans*

** Continuous community fundraising: Continuous mobilisation of supporters to strengthen financial stability and autonomy*

3.2

HISTORICAL FOUNDING CONDITIONS AND COLLECTIVE FORMATION

3.2. Historical founding conditions and collective formation

The Collegium Academicum (CA) developed at three locations in Heidelberg, where the idea of a self-governing student community was continually adapted to new political and organisational circumstances (Fig. 14). The first CA at Seminarstraße 2 (1945–1978) emerged as a post-war experiment in democratic coexistence. After the eviction in 1978, the project re-established itself in a smaller form at Plöck 93 (1985–2013), a town house in the city centre of Heidelberg (*Altstadt*), where students and alumni maintained their core routines and gradually rebuilt a shared political identity. From 2013 onwards, the idea took root again on the grounds of the former American Hospital, which ultimately led to the construction of the current cooperative project. Throughout these three phases, the principles of the CA were preserved, reinterpreted, and strengthened.

This chapter reconstructs this development in four chronological sections, each analysed through recurring areas of tension: between authority and autonomy, continuity and change, legitimacy and institutional trust, and organisational vulnerability. This thematic approach illuminates the mechanisms that enabled the CA to weather crises and demonstrates how its current governance culture emerged from accumulated experience. These long-term foundations are essential for understanding the cooperative today.

The reconstruction draws on a combination of primary and secondary sources. The history of Seminarstraße 2 is based on Franziska Meier's *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015*.[1] The analysis of Plöck 93 and the founding of the new cooperative is largely based on an in-depth interview with co-founder Henrik Eckhardt.[2] Insights into the municipal negotiations and planning are derived from interviews with urban planner Stefan Rees and IBA architect Felix Wohlfart.[3] Finally, the perspective of Mira, a current resident who helped organise the orientation year and participated in the construction phase from 2021, offers a glimpse into the group dynamics.[4]

Together, these sources allow for a concise reconstruction of how a self-governing student community emerged, asserted itself, and developed – and why mapping these obstacles and reactions helps to clarify which conditions are necessary for setting up a resilient student cooperative in Ghent.

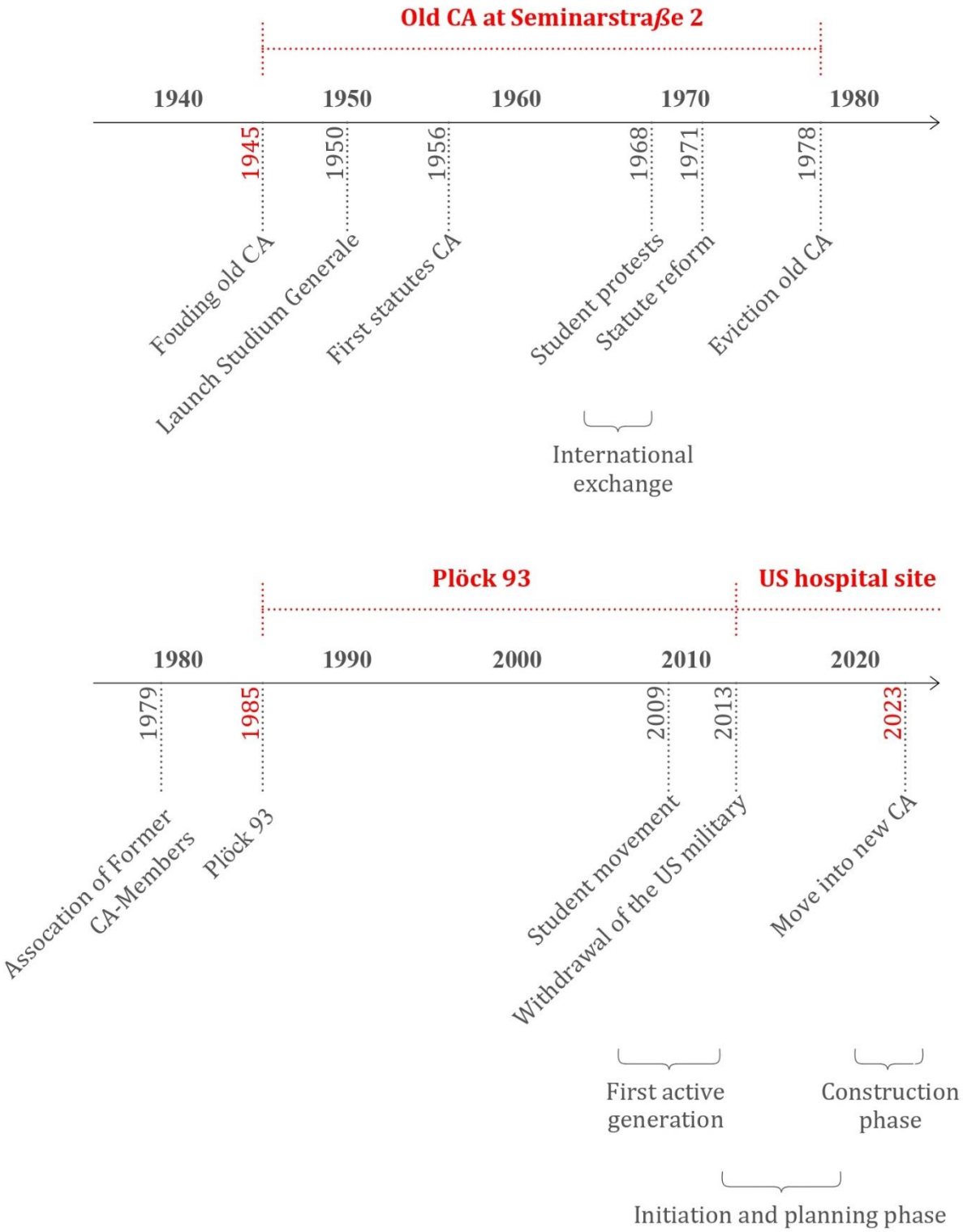
[1] Franziska Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015* (Econotion, 2026).

[2] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.

[3] Stefan Rees and Felix Wohlfart, interview, January 7, 2026.

[4] Mira, interview, January 6, 2026.

Figure 14 *– Timeline from the former to the new Collegium Academicum*



3.2.1. Democratic learning in practice: Early self-governance and conflict

Context: Collegium Academicum at Seminarstraße 2 (1945–1978)

Democratic foundations: Post-war pedagogy and early self-governance

The Collegium Academicum at Seminarstraße 2 was established in 1945 as an American program for democratic re-education (Fig. 15). The university was granted access to the former barracks on the condition that the CA would function as a pedagogical community. This origin shaped a hybrid governance structure: the university appointed a Director and supervised the institution through a Board of Trustees, while the residents organised daily life through the Convention – an elected student assembly responsible for internal decision-making – and through various student committees (Fig. 16).[1] The pedagogical and organisational principles of the CA were laid down in the founding statutes of 1956:

> Article 1: The Collegium Academicum of the University of Heidelberg, founded in 1945 by the Rector and the Senate, aims to be a new form of student community for living, working, and self-education. Its goal is to help students develop into cosmopolitan, independently thinking, and responsibly acting individuals.[2]
>
> Article 2: To achieve this goal, the community of the Collegium Academicum shapes the forms of its communal living and working together through self-governance.[3]

In this early phase, democracy was taught and put into practice in daily routines.



Figure 15 *– Aerial photograph of the former Collegium Academicum at Seminarstraße 2*



Figure 16 *- Elections in the student assembly (Convention) of the former Collegium Academicum (1956)*

[1] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015*, 15–27.

[2] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015*, 15–27.148, author's translation.

[3] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015*, 15–27.148, author's translation.

Challenge of authority: How autonomy, conflict, and politicisation shaped the governance culture

Although residents organised daily life through the Convention, formal authority remained in the hands of the university-appointed Director and the Board. This imbalance soon led to friction. Early directors attempted to impose their own pedagogical agendas, which residents perceived as an intrusion. When stricter rules were introduced in the 1950s, students openly resisted and demanded a limitation of the director's powers.[1]

External pressure added a new dimension. Student-initiated academic exchanges between East and West – which were highly valued by the residents – were viewed with suspicion in the climate of the Cold War. This dynamic created fertile ground for politicisation. By the end of the 1960s, the CA had grown into one of the most active political meeting places in Heidelberg. The broader movement of 1968 – with its critique of hierarchical authority and emphasis on participatory democracy – found a receptive environment in a house shaped by collective organisation and open debate (Fig. 17-18).[2]

This politicised atmosphere intensified the call for internal reforms. Declining engagement, frustration over university oversight, and a growing desire for autonomy drove both residents and the university toward change. In the 1970s, in an attempt to stabilise the situation and retain student support, the university authorised a revision of the statutes that expanded student participation and reduced institutional control.[3]



Figure 17 *– Student demonstration in 1968*

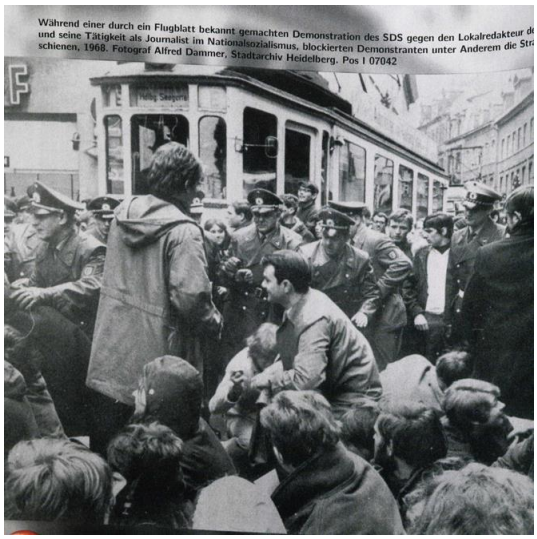


Figure 18 *– Student demonstration in 1968*

[1] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015*, 19–21.

[2] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015*, 27–34.

[3] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015*, 27–34.

The limits of autonomy: Institutional counter-reaction and the eviction of 1978

In the mid-1970s, the increasingly politicised character of the student house and its democratised form of governance became a source of institutional unrest and was increasingly interpreted as political radicalisation. As the house became more visible as a centre of activism, the university gradually withdrew its support and attempted to regain control.[1]

Tensions ran high when the University Senate voted for the dissolution of the CA. Although the decision was officially justified by references to the condition of the building and a lack of space, the political climate made the underlying motive clear: curbing the activist orientation of the student house and restoring institutional authority.[2]

The conflict culminated in the police eviction on March 6, 1978, when 1.500 officers surrounded the building at dawn and forcibly removed the residents (Fig. 19). For many, the scale and violence of the operation symbolised the ultimate denial of student autonomy and exposed the vulnerability of self-governance within a university-controlled framework.[3]



Figure 19 *– Eviction of the Collegium Academicum in 1978*



Figure 20 *– Photograph of the former CA building at Seminarstraße 2, which is now an administrative building of the University of Heidelberg*

[1] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015*, 35–37.

[2] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015*, 35–37.

[3] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015*, 35–37.

3.2.2. Keeping the spirit alive: Knowledge continuity and the formation of a founding group

Context: Collegium Academicum at Plöck 93 (1985–2013)

The will to preserve democratic continuity: Alumni as guardians of the CA's governance culture

The eviction in 1978 did not put an end to the CA's governance culture; it brought it into a more fragile form, in which continuity depended entirely on those committed to preserving it. After the eviction, the alumni association refused to dissolve itself and instead took on the responsibility of preserving the association's memory, networks, and democratic values. Through lectures, reunions, and the reorganisation of the association, alumni ensured that the principles of self-governance, critical learning, and communal living remained active. To maintain a material base, the association rented two apartments in Plöck 93, a townhouse in Heidelberg's old town, close to the former location at Seminarstraße 2. This residence housed eleven students spread across three floors and formed a symbolically important anchor point for collective life outside the control of the university.[1]

From decay to rediscovery: Vulnerability and renewed political identity

The first years in Plöck 93 – particularly in the early 2000s – were marked by structural vulnerability. A small group of students lived together under the informal guidance of former residents, but generational shifts weakened continuity. Some newcomers were unaware that the apartments were owned by the association, and the shared identity of the former student house gradually faded.[2]

A turning point came in 2008, when residents discovered archival material from the original CA. The documents reconnected Plöck 93 with its historical roots and revived a political orientation that had largely faded.[3] This renewed sense of purpose aligned with the student protests of 2009, which reinforced the idea that student housing is a space for critical education, activism, and democratic practices (Fig. 21).[4] From that moment on, the eleven residents increasingly positioned Plöck 93 as the intellectual and political successor to the old CA. As Henrik, one of the residents at the time, explained, the student protests provided both legitimacy and urgency, reinforcing the conviction that students needed a space comparable to the former CA.[5]

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[1] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015*, 37–41.

[2] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015*, 39–41; Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.

[3] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.

[4] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015*, 39–41; Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.

[5] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.

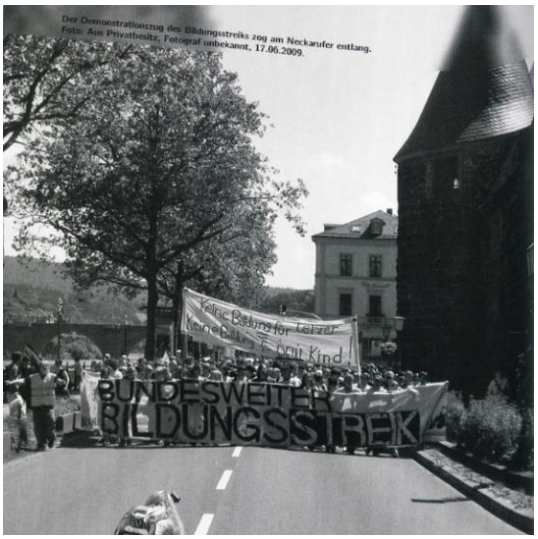


Figure 21 *– Protest march of the 2009 education strike along the River Neckar*

Formation of a close-knit founding group through daily self-governance

From 2012 onwards, the eleven residents of Plöck 93 began to develop democratic routines in a deliberate and sustainable manner. Daily plenary meetings, history workshops, and joint political activities created strong social bonds.[1] During the interview, Henrik described how he became one of the driving forces behind this process. His motivation combined a desire to revive the spirit of the old CA with a critique of right-wing trends in the housing market. Living and working together enabled trust, discipline, and group cohesion, as he emphasised,

> *Henrik (Co-founder): We all lived together. The project would not have been possible if we had not lived together. We did a lot of the project work at the kitchen table.*[2]

Strengthening historical continuity was central to the group's strategy. Residents re-established contact with former CA members, including the last student-elected director. The rediscovery process has given rise to a shared vision based on three interconnected pillars: grassroots self-governance, critical education, and an ecologically sustainable way of life.[3] At the same time, the group identified shortcomings in contemporary student life: the lack of free meeting places, limited opportunities for political education, and the absence of open cultural spaces. Their response to this was to devise a new public space that would benefit both CA residents and the broader student community. As Henrik explained,

> *Henrik (Co-founder): It was always the idea to have again such an open space, because the old CA was really the hotspot of student culture in Heidelberg in the 60s and 70s. (…) The main motivation was to create a cultural space for self-study. It was also about having a space for ourselves, but also for students from outside the CA, to have an open meeting place again.*[4]

Through this combination of daily self-governance, historical reconstruction, and shared political ambition, the eleven residents of Plöck 93 formed the close-knit founding group that would later initiate the new cooperative.

[1] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.
[2] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.
[3] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.
[4] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.

3.2.3. Gaining credibility as a student: Negotiating legitimacy and access to land

Context: Early phase of the new CA (2013-2016)

Overcoming scepticism: The strategic role of the 2013 statutes

The close-knit group that had formed at Plöck 93 constituted the organisational backbone for the next phase, in which the central challenge shifted from internal cohesion to external legitimacy. In 2013, the eleven residents decided to transform their long-standing communal living project into a formal student residence – an ambition for which they had to obtain a plot of land from the City of Heidelberg.[1] Their initial approach to the Urban Planning Department was met with scepticism: many municipal officials still harboured the memory of the old Collegium Academicum – its politicisation in the 1960s and the dramatic eviction in 1978 – which continued to influence their perception. The fear that a new student residence would once again become a politically controversial site underpinned the city's initial reluctance.[2]

To counter this mistrust, the founders drafted an extensive set of statutes in 2013 (Appendix B2). This document served two purposes: it clarified what the new project aimed to be and assured the city that the initiative was based on democratic values. The statutes were structured around two guiding questions: What distinguishes this project from conventional student housing? And how does it relate to the university?[3] The first part of the statutes emphasises the project's innovations. A central passage states that,

> Article 1: Self-governance in the Collegium Academicum (CA) is both its purpose (learning democracy) and its foundation (free, independent sponsorship), and not an external requirement imposed by a large sponsor or institution.[4]

By viewing self-governance as a pedagogical method, the founders positioned the project as an educational initiative that aligns with the academic environment of Heidelberg. The statutes also emphasise the public cultural function of the student residence and present the new residence as an open student centre.[5]

Equally important was the way the statutes addressed the history of the old CA. Instead of denying its politicisation, the founders placed it within the broader social context of the 1970s and emphasised the CA's long-standing openness and diversity of opinions. Crucially, the statutes also underscored the long-term integration of the CA into the university. As one passage notes,

> Article 32: The collaboration between the university and the CA was always characterised by discourse; the relationship was not without tension. However, the structure and self-governance were never questioned by either side.[6]

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[1] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.

[2] Stefan Rees and Felix Wohlfart, interview, January 7, 2026.

[3] *Statutes 2013* (unpublished internal document), provided to the author during an interview with urban planner Stefan Rees and IBA architect Felix Wohlfart, Heidelberg, January 7, 2026, author's translation.

[4] *Statutes 2013*, internal document, January 7, 2026.

[5] *Statutes 2013*, internal document, January 7, 2026.

[6] *Statutes 2013*, internal document, January 7, 2026.

By presenting the old CA as both politically engaged and institutionally anchored, the founders assured the city that the new project aimed for continuity with democratic values rather than a resurgence of confrontation.

The 2013 statutes collectively constituted a crucial instrument for gaining credibility. By combining historical interpretation, an educational vision, and organisational clarity, they presented the new CA as a responsible, open, and academically sound project.

Perseverance as a political strategy: Building trust through public involvement

Drafting the statutes was only the first step. To convince the city, the founders also had to demonstrate that they were reliable partners. Their most effective strategy became a sustained, highly visible presence in local political life. Henrik described how he and another co-founder attended the mayor's monthly office hours in various neighbourhoods. Month after month, they presented their concept, answered questions, and explained why the project was important.

Henrik (Co-founder): I think we had a clear concept. And we did not give up, we kept trying.[1]

This repeated involvement was crucial. It demonstrated seriousness, perseverance, and a long-term commitment – qualities that gradually changed the city's perception of the group from enthusiastic students to credible project initiators. Urban planners later emphasised that the project likely would not have succeeded without this persistence.[2]

Searching for a suitable location: Dealing with limitations and acquiring a plot

After winning the municipality's trust, the founders began the search for a location for the new student residence. Initially, they focused on Heidelberg's old city centre, hoping to continue the student association's tradition of being central to student life. However, high land prices and a shortage of available plots soon made this goal unattainable, forcing the search to expand into the city's redevelopment areas.[3] In 2016, the municipality proposed the former American Hospital site as a possible location. Because the land was still owned by the federal real estate agency (BImA) and the transfer was repeatedly delayed, the cooperative was only able to finalise the purchase in 2019.[4]

The role of the IBA: Institutional recognition and mediation

In 2014, the founders submitted an application to the Internationale Bauausstellung (IBA), Heidelberg's ten-year urban planning program. Their acceptance in 2015 marked a decisive turning point. The IBA did not provide funding, but did offer: institutional recognition, professional guidance, and a formal contact zone with the municipality. As part of the city administration, the IBA streamlined communication, mediated conflicts, and organised a series of workshops with four architectural firms, allowing the students to participate directly in the selection process. Moreover, the public profiling ensured visibility and positioned the CA as an official urban planning initiative.[5]

[1] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.

[2] Stefan Rees and Felix Wohlfart, interview, January 7, 2026.

[3] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.

[4] Stefan Rees and Felix Wohlfart, interview, January 7, 2026.

[5] Stefan Rees and Felix Wohlfart, interview, January 7, 2026; Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.

Urban planner Stefan Rees emphasised how essential this mediating role was. He described the tension between the students' unconventional ideas and the municipality's adherence to established planning routines,

> *Stefan (Urban planner): One of the problems was that the CA consisted of very young, nice, but unexperienced people. (…) Another problem was that a large part of the local government wanted to plan the master plan "their way" and applied many rules. The CA wanted to approach it differently. They wanted to build affordable housing for students and paid no attention to those rules. But together with the IBA, we found good solutions to these problems.*[1]

A concrete example concerned the city's requirement for parking spaces – standard in previous housing projects. The CA opposed this, preferring bicycles and pedestrians. The compromise, as Rees explained, was to include the required parking spaces on the plan but, in practice not to build any.[2]

3.2.4. Surviving the high-risk phase: Financing, group growth, and vulnerability

Context: CA at the US Hospital Site (2016–2023)

Entering the high-risk phase: Financial vulnerability and structural uncertainty

When the city reserved the American Hospital site for the CA in 2016, the initiative became spatially feasible – but this also required the group to formalise as a legal and financial entity. The founders established *Collegium Academicum GmbH* and had to provide €25.000 in seed capital, drawn directly from the personal savings of three core members. This initial equity was essential for securing the first direct loans, but it also exposed the founders to a direct personal financial risk.[3]

This personal exposure took place against the backdrop of broader structural uncertainty that characterised the entire period from 2016 to 2023. In these years, the cooperative entered into long-term financing at a time when almost every financial variable was unstable. Banks were hesitant to grant loans to a student-run organisation without a track record, and fluctuating interest rates made repayment difficult to predict. Direct loans from supporters were slow to materialise, creating constant pressure to secure sufficient liquidity to keep the project running. Members described this period as one in which the threat of losing lenders or being unable to secure sufficient direct loans was ever-present.[4]

The heaviest financial shock occurred when construction costs rose from €14 million to €20 million due to miscalculations and necessary adjustments to the construction program. This increase forced the CA to secure a much larger bank loan and raise far more direct loans than originally planned. The higher financing volume created a long-term burden that continues to impact the cooperative's daily operations.[5] During my fieldwork,

[1] Stefan Rees and Felix Wohlfart, interview, January 7, 2026.
[2] Stefan Rees and Felix Wohlfart, interview, January 7, 2026.
[3] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.
[4] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.
[5] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.

members described the search for direct loans as the most urgent issue, a constant pressure that dominated almost every meeting.

The cooperative survived this high-risk phase because external partners absorbed risks that it could not bear alone. The City of Heidelberg played a crucial role from the outset by reserving the American Hospital site with the Federal Real Estate Agency (BImA). This ensured the site was secured for three years, giving the CA time to build up sufficient direct loans before the site was purchased in 2019. The *Mietshäuser Syndikat* provided a second layer of support through its solidarity financing system. This mechanism gave the CA access to resources and signalled to lenders that the project was embedded in a stable partnership. The IBA also strengthened the project's public and institutional credibility through press coverage, exhibitions, and official support, which proved crucial for attracting direct loans.[1] These forms of support reinforced one another and stabilised the CA during a period when its financial foundation was fragile and constantly under pressure.

Preventing group dissolution: Maintaining cohesion during expansion

A second major challenge concerned the stability of the group itself. As co-founder Henrik emphasised, group cohesion is the most important factor for the survival of any MHS project. For the CA, dissolution would have put an end to the initiative and, moreover, would have had personal financial consequences for the three members who had invested their savings as start-up capital. Maintaining cohesion therefore became a central task.[2]

Having lived together in Plöck 93 for years, the eleven original founders had developed a strong, shared identity. Their routines, trust, and implicit knowledge formed the social basis of the project. But as planning intensified, expanding the group became inevitable, and they rented an additional apartment near HageButze – a long-running MHS project in the south of Heidelberg.[3] This allowed eight newcomers to join, increasing the group from eleven to nineteen residents.[4]

Expanding the group during the planning phase proved to be a challenge. The cooperative could only present preliminary concepts and rough financial outlines. This lack of visible progress made it difficult for newcomers to commit for the long term. Many joined briefly, drawn by the idealism of the project, but the cooperative required lasting commitment. Even those who stayed often struggled to fully grasp the project's deeper vision, as they had missed the formative years of planning.[5]

The expansion of the group also created a new internal vulnerability. Newcomers found themselves in a group whose members had built up shared routines over the years. Mira, who joined the group in 2021 during the construction phase, described how disorienting it felt to be in such a close-knit circle. Interactions that appeared intense from the outside were, to the founders, simply part of a long-standing dynamic.[6] This strong internal bond made it more difficult for newcomers to find their place. Without conscious efforts to

[1] Stefan Rees and Felix Wohlfart, interview, January 7, 2026; Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.
[2] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.
[3] *HageButze – Initiative for Communal Living in Heidelberg*, n.d., accessed 13 February 2026, https://hagebutze.de/.
[4] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.
[5] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.
[6] Mira, interview, January 6, 2026.

integrate them, the cooperative threatened to fall apart into a tightly connected core and loosely connected outsiders.

To address this risk, knowledge transfer was organised, responsibilities were shared, and newcomers were involved in decision-making from the outset.[1] These practices helped newcomers understand the project's long-term vision and narrowed the gap between founders and later participants.

The limits of horizontal governance in a professionalised construction process

The transition from conceptual planning to the technical construction phase brought to light a new organisational vulnerability within the residents' association. The cooperative's horizontal, volunteer-based governance structure proved difficult to maintain in a professional environment that required clear responsibilities and quick, authoritative decisions. Architects, engineers, and municipal authorities expected a single point of contact, whereas knowledge within the residents' association remained dispersed among many members. [2]

Felix Wohlfart described how this fragmentation slowed down coordination: without a central spokesperson, communication with architects and engineers became cumbersome and error-prone. At the same time, he noted that the students were highly professional in their own way and praised their dedication during discussions with construction partners.[3] The challenge therefore lies in the difficulty of translating a culture of collective decision-making into a system based on hierarchy and accountability.

In this context, the role of IBA as an essential intermediary became clear once again. It acted as an interpreter between the students' participatory governance model and the procedural logic of professional planning. The IBA clarified responsibilities, facilitated communication with architects and municipal services, and intervened when disagreements threatened to delay progress.

[1] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.

[2] Stefan Rees and Felix Wohlfart, interview, January 7, 2026.

[3] Stefan Rees and Felix Wohlfart, interview, January 7, 2026.

3.2.5. Concluding synthesis: Important insights from the historical development of the CA

The historical development of the CA shows that its governance structure emerged from repeated confrontations with four structural dynamics.

The experience at **Seminarstraße 2** demonstrated that democratic self-governance remains vulnerable without clearly defined decision-making authority and institutional protection against external interference. The period at **Plöck 93** showed that continuity depends on actively preserving knowledge: intergenerational responsibility and a shared identity are essential in student environments with high turnover. The **establishment of the new CA** illustrated that a strong concept alone is not sufficient; institutional trust must be built through transparent statutes, a credible organisation, and sustainable cooperation with municipal actors. The high-risk phase at **the American Hospital** location demonstrated that resilience requires both strong internal cohesion and supportive external alliances capable of absorbing financial and organisational risks.

Together, these insights demonstrate that the CA's governance structure is the product of accumulated experience with autonomy, continuity, legitimacy, and vulnerability – conditions that are equally crucial for establishing a resilient student cooperative in Ghent.

Key insights for the development of a student cooperative in Ghent (Chapter 4)

** Structural protection of student autonomy: Safeguards against external interference and loss of control*

** Active knowledge transfer: Systems for onboarding, documentation, and intergenerational continuity*

** Building legacy through sustainable engagement: Long-term commitment, transparent organisation, and credible partnerships*

** Resilience through internal cohesion and external alliances: Strong core group supported by institutional partners and solidarity networks*

3.3

SELF-GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

3.3. Self-governance structure

3.3.1. Theoretical framework

To understand the governance model of the CA, it is necessary to outline the theoretical perspectives that explain both the value of self-governance and the structural pressures under which it must function.

Conceptual foundations of self-governance

Lefebvre's concept of **autogestion**, as interpreted by Purcell, forms the political basis: self-governance entails a redistribution of authority to residents, who collectively shape the conditions of their daily lives.[1] Central to this is **participation**, understood as collective self-determination – the idea that those who inhabit a space must also participate in its organisation.[2] This insight explains why the CA relies on direct democracy, consensus-based procedures, and resident-led organisational structures. Schwittay's work on student cooperatives emphasises self-governance as a **pedagogical practice**. By experimenting with non-hierarchical organisation, shared responsibility, and collective care, students learn governance through participation.[3] This perspective positions the CA as a learning environment in which organisational, political, and interpersonal skills are developed through daily routines.

Huron's theory of urban commons emphasises that cooperative living depends on continuous, often invisible, labour.[4] Psychological research into the distribution of responsibility by Peck et al. explains why such work is difficult to sustain in large and temporary communities: when many people share a space, individual responsibility typically decreases.[5] These insights clarify why the student cooperative must design structures that make responsibilities visible, clearly divide tasks, and enable a sense of ownership.

Research into collaborative living by Czischke and Huisman shows that self-management is in itself a source of social connections.[6] When residents organise daily life collectively – coordinating maintenance, sharing responsibilities, and participating in community activities – these shared practices create the conditions for three forms of social connectedness. **Social bonds** arise within groups whose members share a similar background or interests. **Social bridges** develop between residents with different backgrounds who come into contact with one another through shared routines. And **social links** arise when residents gain access to broader institutional networks through the community's organisational structures. At the same time, the research shows that the formation of social bridges depends on certain preconditions. Regular interaction is more likely when residents have a similar age, life stage, and daily rhythms, creating overlapping routines and opportunities for meeting. When these rhythms diverge – such as between students and non-students, or between young adults and families –the potential for

[1] Purcell, 'Possible Worlds', 149–50.
[2] Purcell, 'Possible Worlds', 150.
[3] Schwittay, 'Prefigurative Pedagogies'.
[4] Huron, *Carving out the Commons*, 137–39.
[5] Peck et al., 'Caring for the Commons'.
[6] Czischke and Huisman, 'Integration through Collaborative Housing?'

bridge-building diminishes. Finally, Lang and Novy introduce the concept of **linking social capital** – the ability of residents' groups to build trust with external institutions such as municipalities, funders, and neighbouring organisations.[1] For student cooperatives, credibility is a structural prerequisite for access to land, financing, and organisational autonomy.

Structural vulnerabilities in student housing

As discussed in Chapter 1, student communities face persistent vulnerabilities resulting from high turnover, limited time, and consumer-oriented expectations. The literature clarifies how these vulnerabilities operate in practice and why they pose specific challenges for self-governance.

The first vulnerability concerns **resident participation**.[2] It is difficult to mobilise students to take responsibility for shared spaces in environments where maintenance is typically outsourced and where the distribution of responsibility reduces individual initiative.[3] In large student buildings, this often leads to an unequal division of labour, with a small group performing most maintenance tasks. Cooperative models must therefore counteract this dynamic by clarifying expectations, anchoring collective labour in daily routines, and cultivating a sense of ownership. The second vulnerability concerns the **continuity of knowledge**. High turnover means that practical knowledge regarding routines, procedures, and shared norms is constantly at risk of disappearing. Without structured onboarding, documentation, and intergenerational transfer, every cohort runs the risk of completely rebuilding systems. For student cooperatives – where the residents themselves possess institutional knowledge – this vulnerability is even greater. [4] The third vulnerability concerns the **institutional credibility** of the cooperative, which is shaped by the relationship with external actors. As Lang and Novy argue, resident groups often lack linking social capital: the vertical connections with institutions such as universities, municipalities, and funding bodies necessary to obtain resources, legitimacy, and long-term support.[5] This absence makes external partners more cautious and increases the likelihood of top-down oversight. Schwittay describes these relationships as ambivalent alliances: collaborations that are indispensable for access to land, funding, and expertise, but which are characterised by asymmetrical power relations because students are often viewed as temporary, inexperienced, or unreliable.[6] Within this context, governance structures acquire an important external role. They must also project competence, continuity, and reliability to external partners to compensate for the structural disadvantages inherent in student communities.

These insights form the analytical basis for examining how the CA organises its system of self-governance. In the next section, the democratic and operational bodies through which residents coordinate collective life are analysed, as well as the maintenance structures that anchor responsibility in the material environment. In doing so, the tensions within this model are also discussed – ranging from unequal participation to emotional burden and the vulnerability of organisational memory.

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[1] Lang and Novy, 'Cooperative Housing and Social Cohesion'.

[2] Schwittay, 'Students Take Over'.

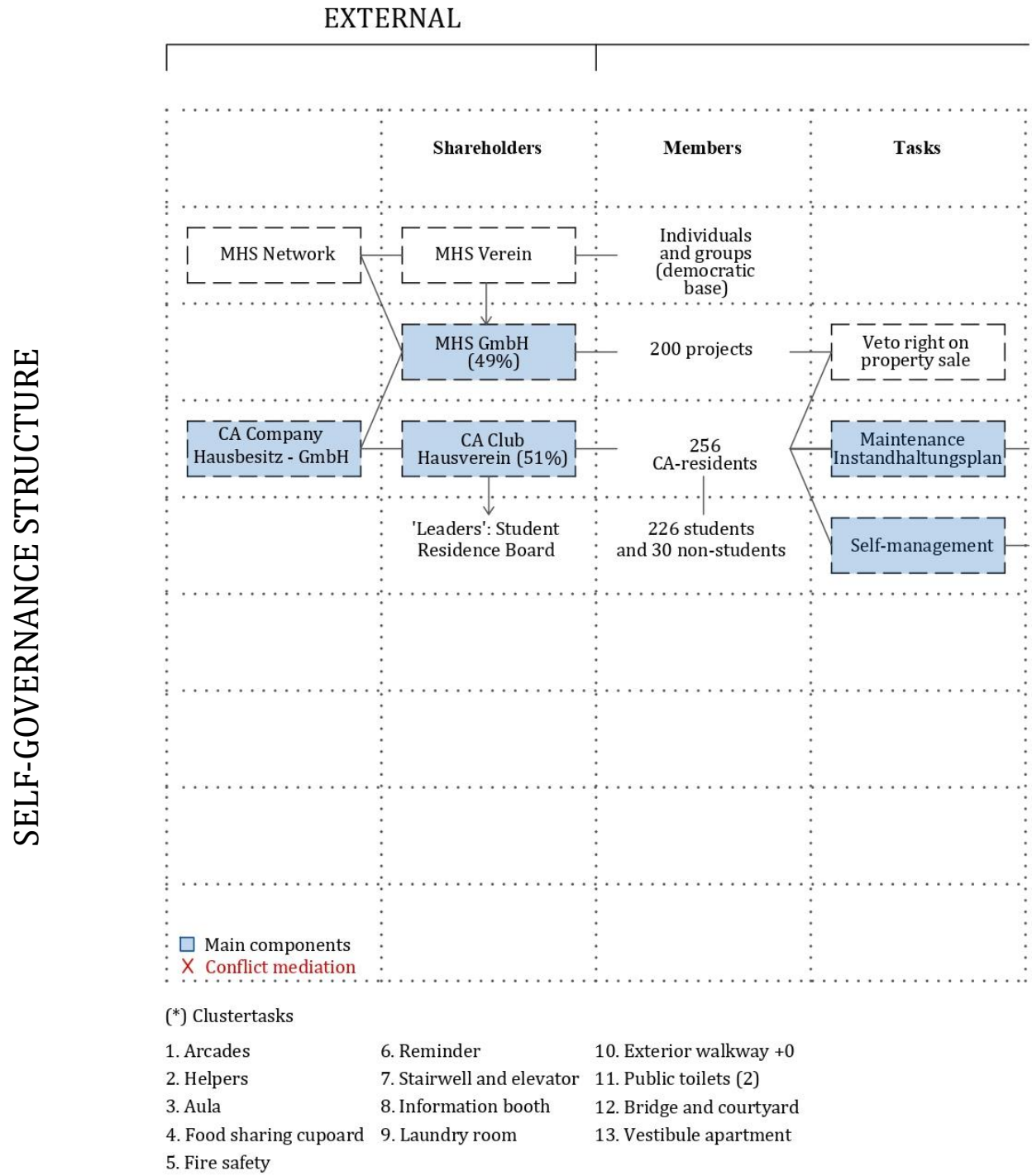
[3] Peck et al., 'Caring for the Commons'.

[4] Schwittay, 'Students Take Over', 979.

[5] Lang and Novy, 'Cooperative Housing and Social Cohesion', 1744–46.

[6] Schwittay, 'Students Take Over', 978–79.

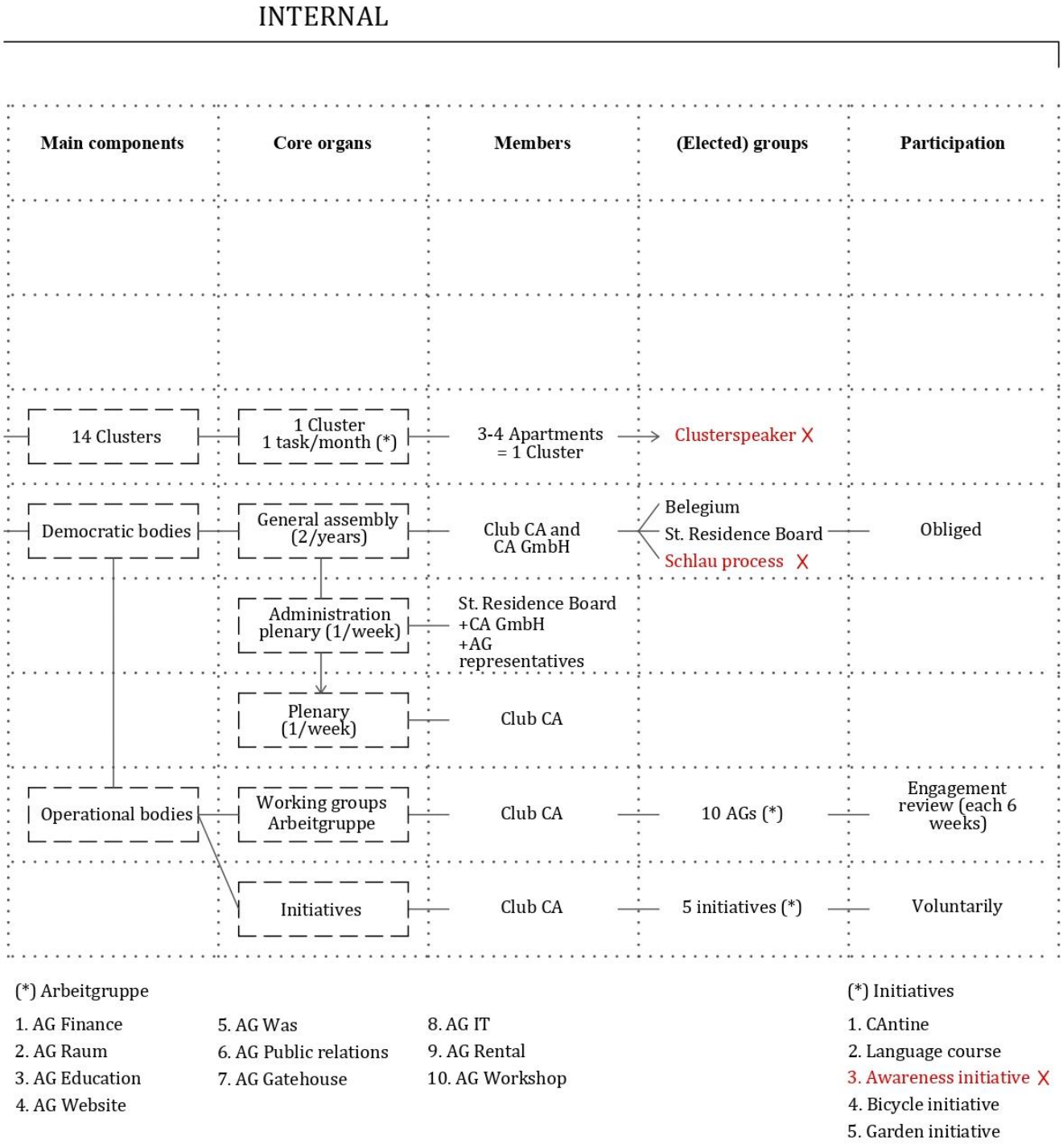
3.3.2. Self-governance at the CA: Organisational and democratic structures



(*) Clustertasks

1. Arcades
2. Helpers
3. Aula
4. Food sharing cupoard
5. Fire safety
6. Reminder
7. Stairwell and elevator
8. Information booth
9. Laundry room
10. Exterior walkway +0
11. Public toilets (2)
12. Bridge and courtyard
13. Vestibule apartment

Figure 22 *– Diagram of the self-governance structure of the Collegium Academicum*



SELF-MANAGEMENT

DEMOCRATIC BODIES

OPERATIONAL BODIES

CONTINUITY (STATUTES)

1. Self-management in the CA

The self-management of the Collegium Academicum is organised through a layered system of democratic and operational bodies. The institutional core consists of three democratic decision-making bodies: the General Assembly, the Administration Plenary, and the Weekly Plenary meeting. These bodies prioritise consensus and embody the cooperative principles of democratic participation, autonomy, and continuous learning. The CA also relies on a broad operational infrastructure consisting of ten working groups and five initiatives, which translate collective decisions into daily practice.

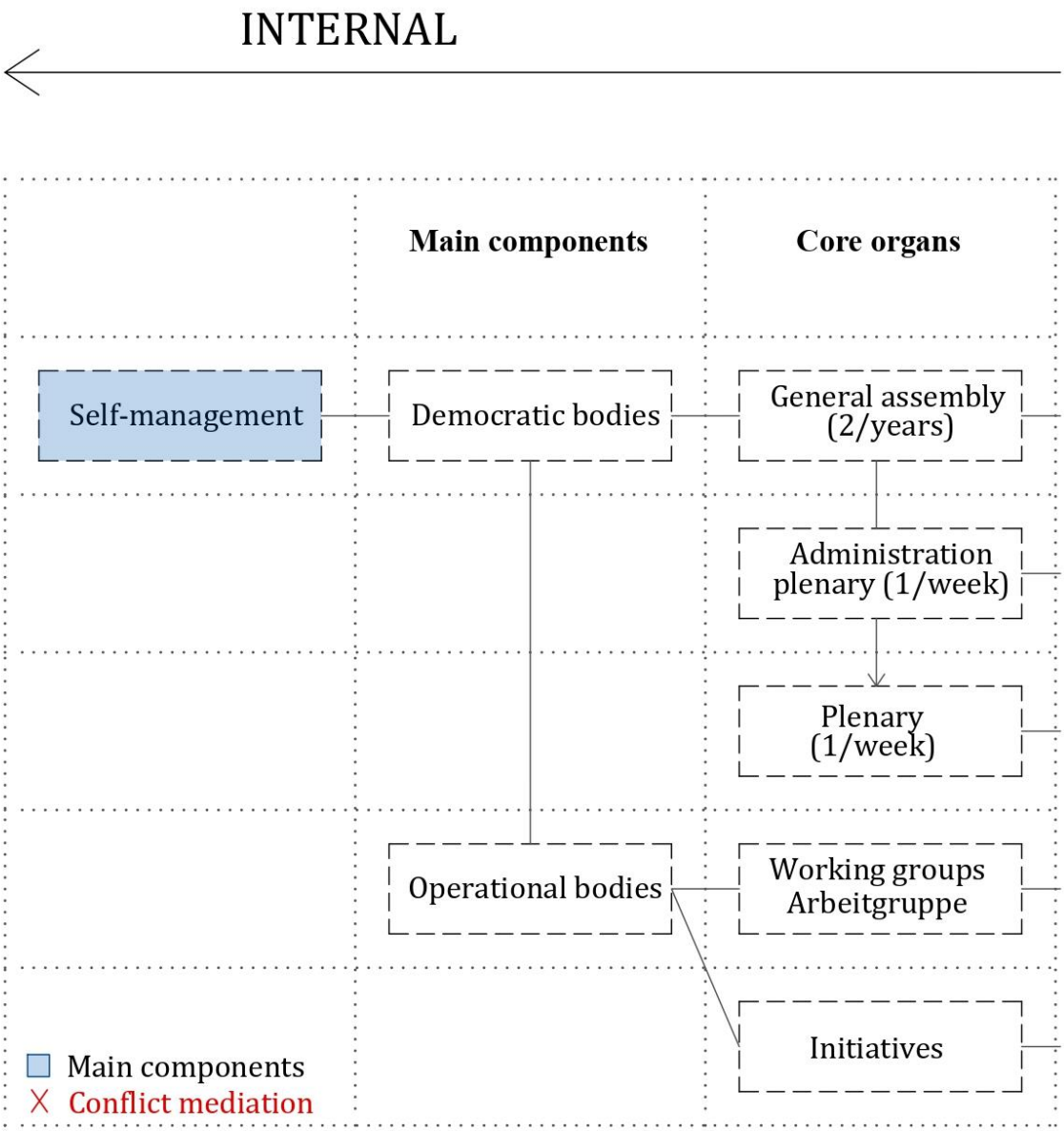
I attended two Plenary sessions, one Administration Plenary meeting, seven working group activities, and two initiative meetings (Fig. 23). These observations provided insight into how residents apply and experience self-governance. I did not attend the semi-annual general meeting, as it fell outside my research period; the description of this body is therefore based on resident reports and internal documentation.

All organisational activities within the residents' association are currently carried out on a voluntary basis. Residents have repeatedly emphasised that this is largely due to limited financial resources. However, during the construction period, some positions, such as that of financial manager, were temporarily paid. [1]

Monday	
6:00 PM	AG Finance (confidential)
8:00 PM	AG Raum
8:00 PM	AG Education
8:00 PM	Initiative: Bicycle workshop
Tuesday	
7:00 PM	AG Was (xx)
Wednesday	
4:00 PM	Administration plenary (x)
7:00 PM	Plenary (xx)
Thursday	
6:00 PM	Initiative: Bicycle workshop
6:30 PM	Initiative: Awareness
7:00 PM	AG Public relations (xx)
8:00 PM	Student residence board (x)
Friday	
9:00 AM	AG Gatehouse
Saturday	
11:00 AM	Clustertask: Information booth
Sunday	
10:00 AM	AG Website
10:00 AM	Initiative: Language course (xx)
12:00 AM	Initiative: CAntine
6:00 PM	Initiative: Garden
6:00 PM	AG Rental management (x)
7:30 PM	AG IT
8:00 PM	AG Workshop (xx)

Figure 23 *– Table with an overview of all meetings of the various bodies, where (x) indicates one attendance and (xx) indicates two*

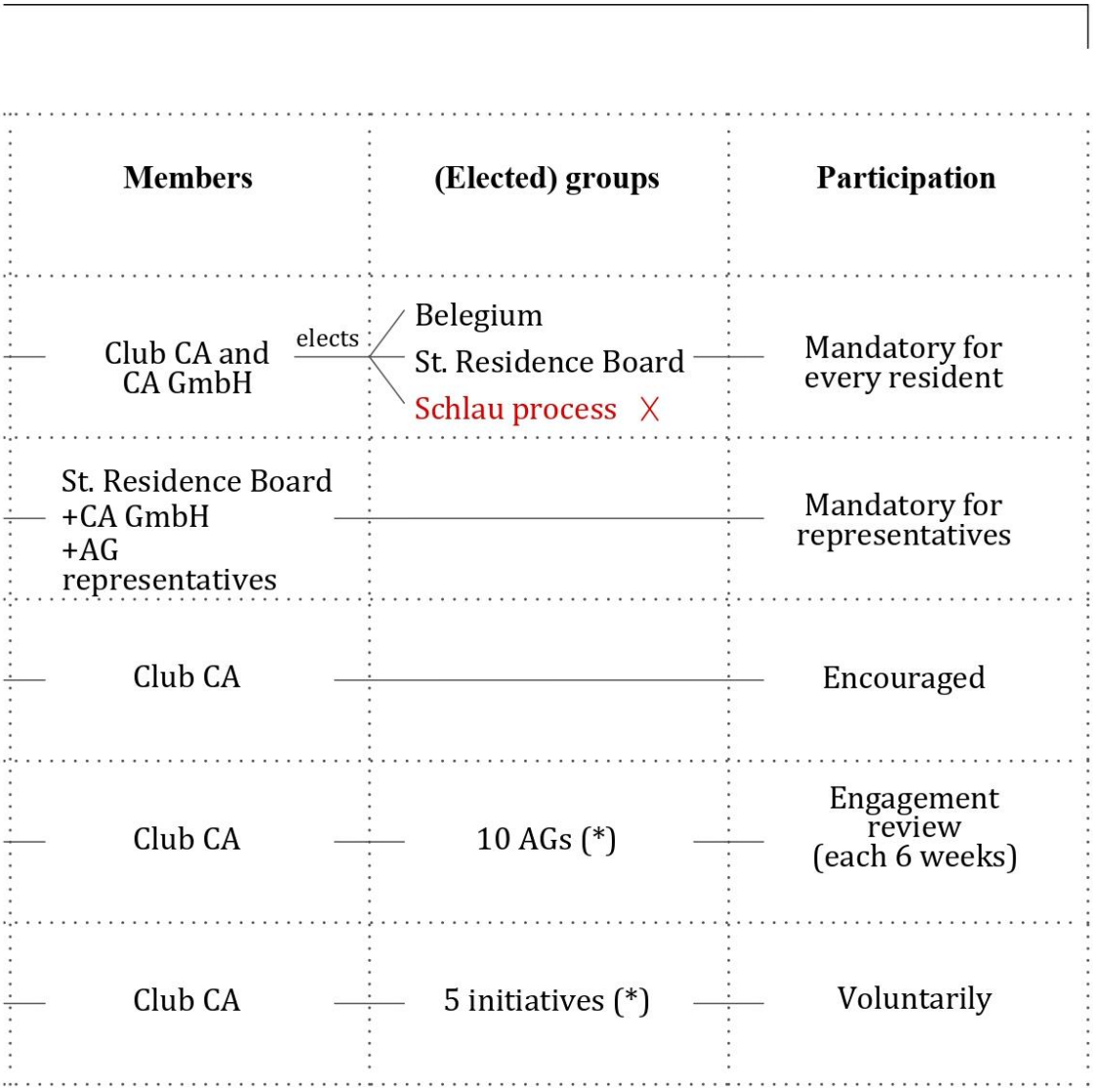
[1] Nina (CA Resident and member of the CA GmbH), interview by author, online interview, October 16, 2025; Jonas, interview, January 3, 2026.



(*) Arbeitgruppe

1. AG Finance
2. AG Raum
3. AG Education
4. AG Website
5. AG Was
6. AG Public relations
7. AG Gatehouse
8. AG IT
9. AG Rental
10. AG Workshop

Figure 24 *– Self-management system within the self-governance structure*



(*) Initiatives

1. CAntine
2. Language course
3. Awareness initiative X
4. Bicycle initiative
5. Garden initiative

A. Democratic decision-making bodies

General Assembly

The General Assembly (GA) is the sovereign democratic institution of the CA. This assembly, which takes place twice a year in October and March, brings all the residents and the CA GmbH together to approve the statutes and to elect the cooperative's key committees. Candidates stand for election with a short letter of motivation, after which the elections proceed in two phases: an initial selection based on the number of votes, followed by individual confirmation requiring a two-thirds majority.[1]

Three committees are elected:

- **The Belegium** (Admissions Committee)

The Belegium casts new residents. To do so, it organises "casting days" every three months to thoroughly screen potential new CA candidates through a multi-step process: candidates complete online forms detailing their background and motivation (mandatory open-ended questions about their suitability for CA), receive an invitation (a lottery is held in case of oversubscription), have a 15-minute individual interview, and then wait for a decision.[2] Selected candidates are subsequently invited to the WG-Finding Day, where they meet potential living groups and indicate their preferences for a future flat. An algorithm developed by the IT working group matches these preferences with those of the current residents, creating combinations that maximise compatibility. This matching process is a rare privilege: both newcomers and existing residents can express their expectations and actively choose the social environment in which they wish to live.[3]

- **The Schlau** (Conflict Mediation Committee)

The Schlau consists of nine student residents who support conflict mediation within the community. The mediators can only be engaged if one of the parties actively asks for their assistance. After contact, they organise a series of in-depth conversations to understand the situation and explore possible solutions. If they conclude that a conflict cannot be resolved internally, they can forward a recommendation to the CA GmbH, the only body authorised to terminate a resident's contract – a measure that has been applied only once.[4]

During a tour, Jonas reflected on his hesitation to join the Schlau. Although he acknowledged its importance, he described the role as emotionally demanding and felt uncomfortable with the idea of advising someone to leave.[5]

- **The Student Residence Board** ("Leaders" of the CA Club)

This is the elected governing body of the CA Club and is responsible for the legal and administrative affairs of the association. The board, consisting of four student-residents, oversees finances, organises the General Assembly, ensures compliance with legal obligations, and manages important administrative documents.[6] When I attended one of their meetings, the agenda ranged from legal compliance to requests for financial support.

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[1] Jonas (CA Resident), interview by author, Heidelberg, January 9, 2026.

[2] Lea, interview, January 11, 2026.

[3] Lea, interview, January 11, 2026; Nina, interview, October 16, 2025.

[4] Mira, interview, January 6, 2026.

[5] Jonas (CA Resident), informal conversation with the author, Heidelberg, January 3, 2026.

[6] Jonas, interview, January 9, 2026.

Administration plenary meeting

Wednesdays form the organisational centre of the CA's internal democracy, with two consecutive plenary sessions. The Administration Plenary Meeting, which takes place at 4:00 PM, brings together the leadership of the CA Club, CA GmbH, and representatives from the working groups. The goal is to prepare and structure the topics that will later be discussed by the broader community. Efficiency is paramount at the meeting: brief updates, prioritisation of issues, and coordination of responsibilities, without making binding decisions. When I attended the meeting on January 14, I gained a clearer picture of both the strengths and weaknesses. Because the agenda systematically runs through all the working groups, several representatives left as soon as their own presentation was finished. This pattern frustrated some long-time residents, as they argued that the cooperative depends on collective attendance. I understood this concern, but the meeting also felt overwhelming at times: the rapid transitions between the groups created a sense of haste, and the setup seemed aimed at ensuring that CA GmbH stayed informed of each group's activities. The session lasted from 4:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., immediately followed by the weekly plenary meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Plenary meeting

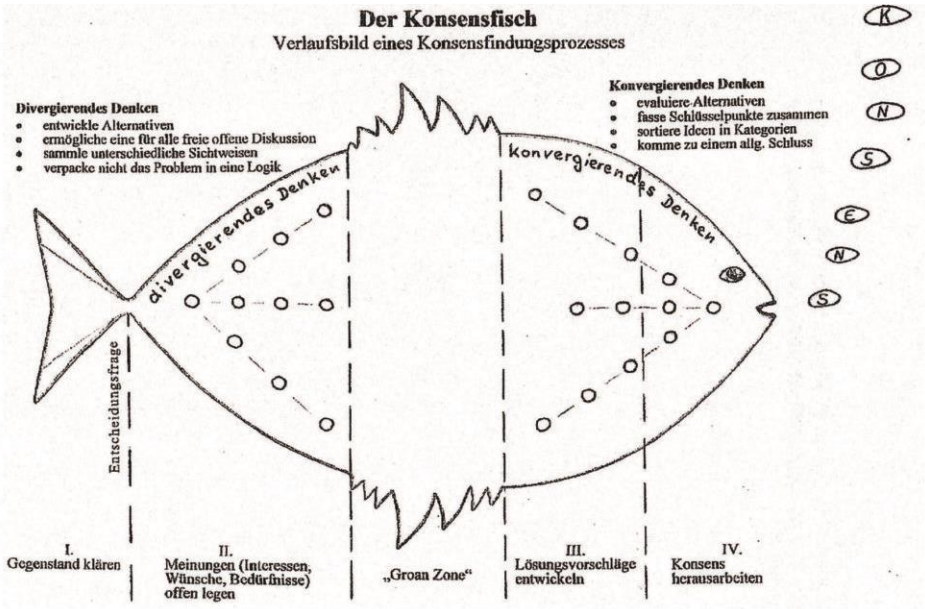
The weekly plenary is open to all residents and combines emotional check-ins, practical updates, and structured consensus building. The meetings begins with a brief round of introductions and a mood check ("Who are you and how are you feeling?"), followed by setting the agenda, celebrating recent successes, and discussing substantive topics. Although German is the working language, the group switched effortlessly to English during my visit, with whispered translation offered to those who needed it.

Decision-making follows the *Konsensfisch method*, a structured process designed to guide divergent perspectives toward convergence (Fig. 25).[1] Participants first divide into groups based on their initial support for a proposal. Within each group, key needs and concerns are discussed and recorded on large sheets of paper. The groups then rotate, allowing each team to review the others' proposals. Through iterative feedback rounds, proposals are adjusted until the main objections are addressed. Finally, participants publicly rate the proposal on a scale of 0 to 5: 0 votes block consensus; 1-2 votes indicate objections; 3 votes indicate neutrality; and 4-5 votes indicate support. This method ensures that decisions are based on broad consensus rather than a simple majority rule.

Although the weekly plenary meeting is formally open to all residents, participation is overwhelmingly dominated by students from the new building. Of the approximately 176 students living there, attendance is consistently high, whereas participation from the renovated building – where about 50 students and 30 non-students live, including several families with children – is very limited. During the two plenary sessions I attended, only one non-student was present. When I later stayed in the renovated building and discussed this with my temporary housemate, she explained that many non-students feel intimidated by the large student majority and that families, in particular, often have different schedules and priorities. The spatial separation between the two buildings reinforces this gap and adds a physical boundary to an already unequal social integration.

[1] 'Arguing in a Grassroots Democratic and Peaceful Manner', DFG-VK, 1 September 2021, https://zivilcourage.dfg-vk.de/basisdemokratisch-und-friedlich-streiten/.

Figure 25 – *Diagram of the Konsensfisch method*



Synthesis of democratic bodies

The democratic bodies demonstrate how collective decision-making is formalised into a stable routine that gives residents actual influence over the organisation of their daily lives - a form of participation that amounts to true collective self-governance.[1] At the same time, the meetings reveal the organisational pressure inherent in maintaining a cooperative: fluctuating attendance, long agendas, and recurring coordination tasks illustrate the continuous labour required to keep a *common* functioning, work that is often invisible but essential for the continuation of the project.[2]

These bodies also fulfil an important external role. Through formalised procedures, transparent documentation, and the institutional presence of CA GmbH, the cooperative cultivates the vertical relationships that connect it with municipalities, funders, and neighbouring institutions. Such practices generate the reliability and professionalism that constitute linking social capital, ensuring that the CA is recognised as a credible and trustworthy partner, despite the structural vulnerabilities inherent in student communities.[3]

However, democratic bodies also expose the limits of formal inclusivity. Patterns of participation are shaped not only by procedural openness but also by the alignment of daily rhythms, life stages, and social proximity. Students from the new building regularly attend meetings, while non-students and families from the renovated building are largely absent. This dynamic reflects a broader insight from research into self-governing residential communities: sustainable engagement depends not only on the presence of shared routines, but also on daily interactions that create social bonds within groups and build social bridges between groups.[4] When these relational conditions are unevenly distributed, formal structures alone cannot guarantee equal participation.

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[1] Purcell, 'Possible Worlds'.

[2] Huron, *Carving out the Commons*, 111–36.

[3] Lang and Novy, 'Cooperative Housing and Social Cohesion', 1744–45.

[4] Czischke and Huisman, 'Integration through Collaborative Housing?', 159–64.

B. Operational bodies

In addition to the formal democratic institutions, the daily functioning of the CA relies on a dense organisational landscape of ten working groups (AGs) and five initiatives.

Working groups

Every resident is contractually obliged to perform approximately two hours of community work per week within a working group. To monitor this work, the cooperative uses a six-week evaluation system in which each resident receives a colour code: green stands for strong and reliable participation, yellow indicates that minimum requirements have been met (two hours), orange indicates insufficient involvement prompting a discussion within the working group, and red points to repeated shortcomings that require mediation and may lead to a termination of the contract. I have chosen to elaborate on AG Workshop and AG Rental Management – both of which I attended – because they illustrate two contrasting dynamics within the cooperative.

- **AG Workshop: Collective practice and enabling social cohesion**

The workshop team is responsible for repairing furniture and damage in common areas – tasks that generate a constant stream of requests from residents. This high demand creates a structural risk of overload. Therefore, the members of this working group have developed two strategies. The primary strategy is the weekly task system known as *Aufwederwoche*. During each meeting, members collectively select one priority task to carry out together over the course of the week. This approach limits the number of concurrent requests, ensures steady progress on essential repairs, and distributes responsibilities evenly among the participants. A second strategy is promoting self-reliance among residents. Because many requests involve small, recurring problems, the group has created detailed manuals for common repairs, such as patching holes or replacing shower curtains (Fig. 26-27). These manuals are designed to be accessible to residents without technical experience. By sharing practical knowledge, the working group reduces the number of small jobs and encourages residents to take responsibility for their own living spaces. This approach reflects a broader cooperative mentality: maintenance is not outsourced, but learned, shared, and carried out collectively.

The social atmosphere of the AG Workshop illustrates how these strategies translate into sustainable engagement. During the meeting I attended, the atmosphere was warm and one of the members – who was in charge of the snacks that week – handed out homemade muffins; inside jokes were shared easily; and a trophy was awarded to the most active member of the past six weeks. These practices are part of a consciously built social infrastructure that supports long-term participation. The openness of the group also extends beyond the student population. A resident of the renovated building, a professional carpenter, regularly participates in the workshop meetings. His presence illustrates how sharing practical skills can form social bridges.[1]

[1] Czischke and Huisman, 'Integration through Collaborative Housing?', 163.

Figure 26 – *AG Workshop manual: "How to repair your shower curtains" (complete manual in Appendix B4)*

How2: Aufbau Duschvorhang

Ich weiß das klingt mühselig, aber bevor ihr loslegt, lest bitte die Anleitung einmal sorgfältig durch. Viele Schritte lassen sich einfacher verstehen, wenn man weiß was danach passieren soll.

Vorbereitung

- **Material**(*Bild1*): 1x Duschvorhang, 12x Plastikhaken für Duschvorhang, 3x 80cm Alu-Stange, 1x Alu-Stange mit Haken, 2x Kurvenstück, 2x Verbindungsstück, 2x Wandbefestigung, 1x Deckenbefestigung, 2x Abdeckung Wandverkleidung, 5x Mutter, 2 1/2x Klebe Sets (bestehend aus: 2x Kleber, 5x Gewindeplatten)



Bild1

- **Werkzeuge:** Metallsäge (alternativ Flex, aber Säge ist besser), passende Nuss für Muttern, Metallfeile, Sekundenkleber

Aufbau

Schritt 1: Alustangen beschriften

- Die 80cm Alu-Stange ohne Loch (*s.h. Bild 2*), einmal 10cm vom linken-, und einmal 10cm vom rechten Ende aus markieren, wie in *Abbildung 1*.

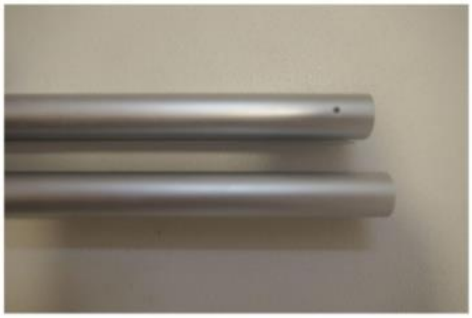


Bild2

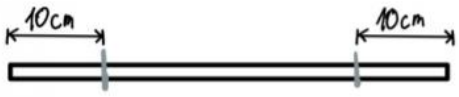


Abb.1

Figure 27 – *AG Workshop manual: "How to repair your shower curtains" (complete manual in Appendix B4)*

- Zuletzt die Steckverbindungen mit Sekundenkleber versehen (siehe Bild 11), die Abdeckungen über die Muttern scheiben und Vorhang an die Plastikhaken hängen.

  Das Endergebnis sollte (hoffentlich) so aussehen wie Bild 12.



Bild 9



Bild 10



Bild 11



Bild 12

Wendet euch bei Fragen gerne an den öffentlichen Werkstatt-Channel!

Bei besonders akuten Problemen, meldet euch per Telefon oder Whatsapp bei:

– **AG Rental Management: Administrative burden and problem of turnover**

This working group conducts room inspections during moves-ins and moves-outs, supervises contract signing, follows up on rent payments, and assesses damage in both private rooms and common areas. The meeting demonstrated how strongly this work is affected by high student turnover. A persistent problem stems from the project's early years: many rooms were occupied without prior inventory. As a result, damage discovered upon departure often cannot be attributed to a specific occupant, leading to disputes and frustration for both tenants and the AG. To resolve this, the group is developing a standardised inventory system featuring checklists, photos, and a catalogue of repair costs – for example: a 10 mm hole equates to a deduction of €5 from the deposit. Importantly, the deduction only takes place after the repairs have been carried out, ensuring transparency regarding how residents' deposits are used. The meeting also highlighted the weight of the administrative workload. One member explicitly stated that she felt overwhelmed, and it was clear that bureaucratic tasks are substantial and not always evenly distributed.

Initiatives: Voluntary involvement and community enrichment

Initiatives operate on a voluntary basis and enrich community life without being essential to the cooperative's core activities.[1] Their flexible structure enables residents to explore interests, organise events, or respond to new needs. I have chosen to elaborate on the language course – which I have participated on January 4 and 11 – and the yearly work camps, about which I have heard a lot from the students.

– **Language course initiative**

The language course illustrates how volunteer initiatives can extend the CA's social mission beyond its own residential community. The classes take place in the auditorium and offer weekly German lessons to refugees from a neighbouring village. The course is taught by a resident of the renovated building who arrived in Heidelberg as a refugee ten years ago. Initially, I was assigned as a teacher, but due to my limited knowledge of German, I switched to supervising the children. The teaching team consisted of two students from the new building and two non-student residents of the renovated building, demonstrating how initiatives can bring together groups that would otherwise remain socially separated within the CA. Every week, the participants collectively decide who cooks and which dish to prepare, with the CA covering the cost of the groceries. This communal meal has become a beloved ritual.

– **Work camps**

The work camps are annual one-week periods during which residents work together on a major project for the community. In previous years, for example, participants have built a swimming pool and a pizza oven in the garden; and helped with the renovation of the former administrative building. These weeks illustrate the community's practical learning philosophy: residents tackle unfamiliar tasks, experiment, and acquire new skills through collective effort. Mira, who joined during the first recruitment round in 2021, became involved in these camps and reflects on how much she learned during that period,

> *Mira (CA Resident): You can learn so much here. I helped out with the building's renovation a few times and did all sorts of odd jobs. At one point, they were looking for someone for the cooking team, but no one was interested. I thought: "I can cook for myself, so how hard can it*

[1] Jonas, interview, January 9, 2026.

be to cook for 40 people?" However, it turned out that cooking for 40 people was much more challenging than I had expected. Still, I was glad I had taken on the challenge. The atmosphere of that time stemmed from a Swedish story about Pippi Longstocking – a girl who lives in a colourful house with a horse and a monkey. She often says: "I have never done this before, but I am sure I can do it." That summed up the spirit of that time perfectly.[1]

These work camps therefore function not only as moments of collective labour, but also as formative learning experiences in which residents build self-confidence, skills, and relationships by experimenting together.

Synthesis of operational bodies

The operational bodies demonstrate how self-management is applied in daily routines and working methods. Through the working groups, the continuous labour required to sustain the cooperative becomes visible. This dynamic reflects again how the reproduction of a collective project depends on continuous, often invisible labour.[2]

Residents experience this work in very diverse ways: for some, working groups feel like an extra burden; for others, they become a weekly routine; and for yet others, they offer a source of friendship, identity, and pride. Administrative tasks show how vulnerable the continuity of knowledge and the distribution of responsibilities can be, while practical cooperation creates shared rhythms and mutual support. The AG Workshop illustrates this particularly well and shows how practical cooperation can also bridge social boundaries within the community.[3]

The operational bodies show that the residential community functions as a learning environment. Through working groups, initiatives, and work camps, residents acquire practical and social skills that are rarely taught in formal curricula. This aligns with the idea of cooperatives as pedagogical spaces where governance is taught in an experiential manner.[4]

[1] Mira, interview, January 6, 2026.

[2] Huron, *Carving out the Commons*, 111–36.

[3] Czischke and Huisman, 'Integration through Collaborative Housing?', 163.

[4] Schwittay, 'Prefigurative Pedagogies'.

C. Self-management continuity: 1956 – 1970 – 2013

The CA's governance model only becomes truly understandable when placed within the broader institutional development from which it emerged. The organisational structures discussed earlier are the most recent version of principles that have been reinterpreted at various stages of the CA's history. A re-reading of the statutes from 1956, 1970, and 2013 shows how core ideas were retained, adapted, or deliberately abandoned as the CA evolved from a university-supervised student association into an independent cooperative (Fig. 28-30).

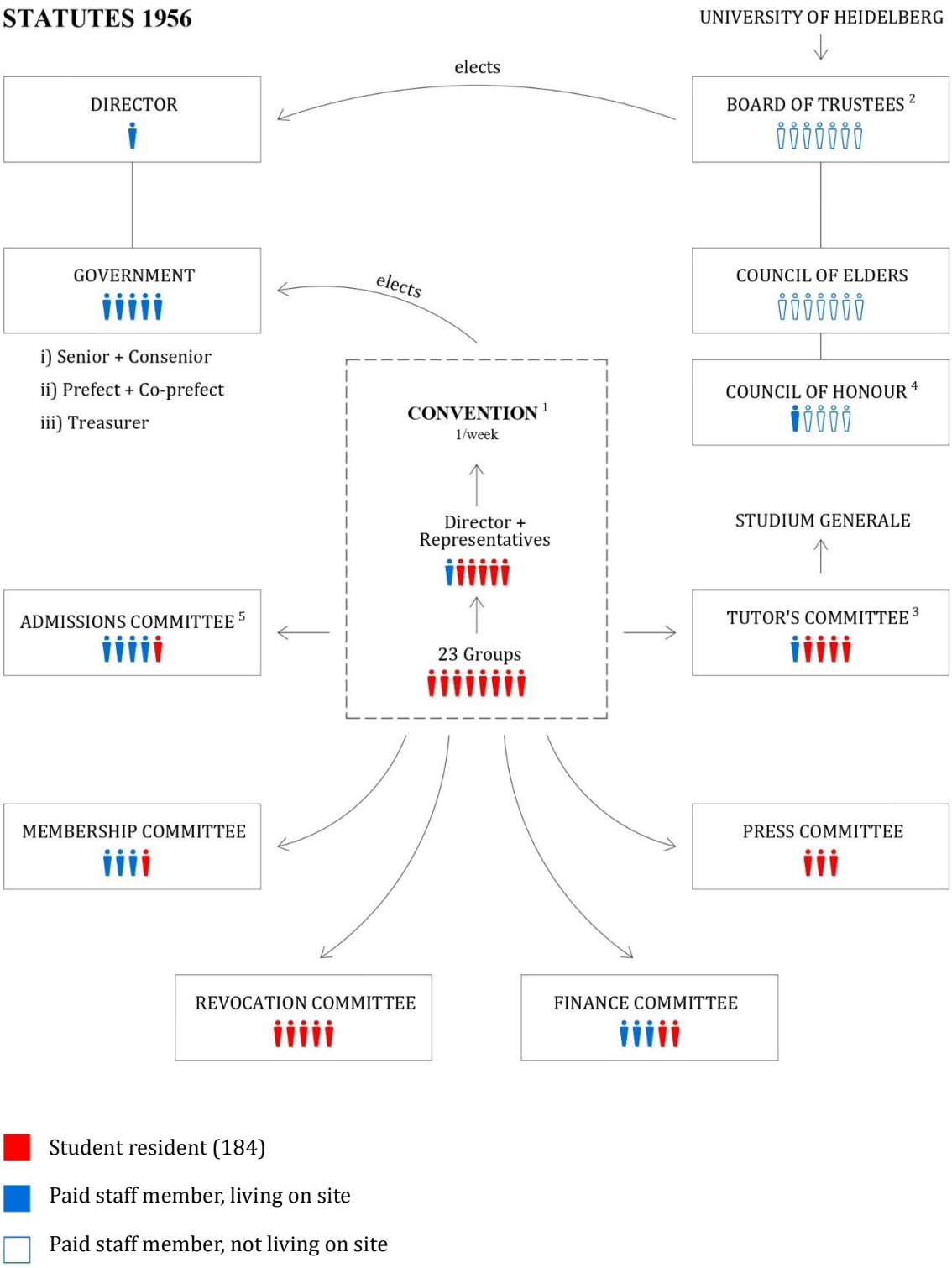
The statutes of 1956 and 1970, reconstructed from the book *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen*, show how the student association at Seminarstraße 2 gradually shifted from a university-supervised model to stronger resident participation (Appendix B2).[1] The 1956 statutes established a hybrid structure in which student self-governance functioned within a clear framework of university oversight. By the 1970s, growing demands for autonomy and democratic participation led to a revision of the statutes, which expanded the decision-making authority of the residents and formalised more direct democratic procedures. The 2013 statutes, drafted by the co-founders for the establishment of the new CA, emerged in a different institutional context but with a similar ambition: to anchor self-governance as both a pedagogical principle and an organisational foundation (Appendix B2).[2]

Together, the three statutes show how the CA continuously reworked its organisational foundations while simultaneously adhering to its core principle of collective self-governance.

[1] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015*, 148–57, 165–67.

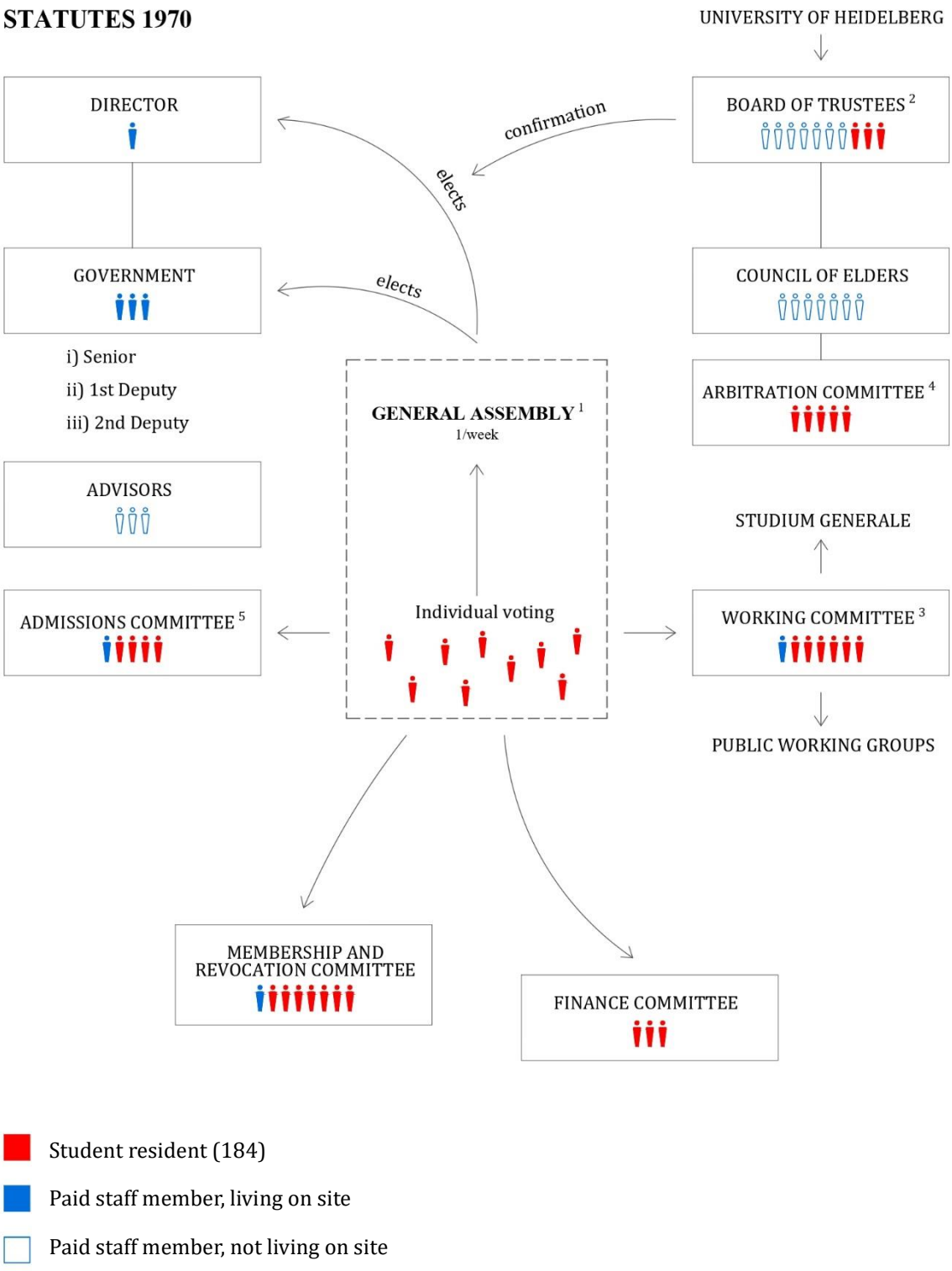
[2] *Statutes 2013*, internal document, January 7, 2026.

Figure 28 *– Governance structure of the former CA (1956), reconstructed based on the statutes of Seminarstraße 2*



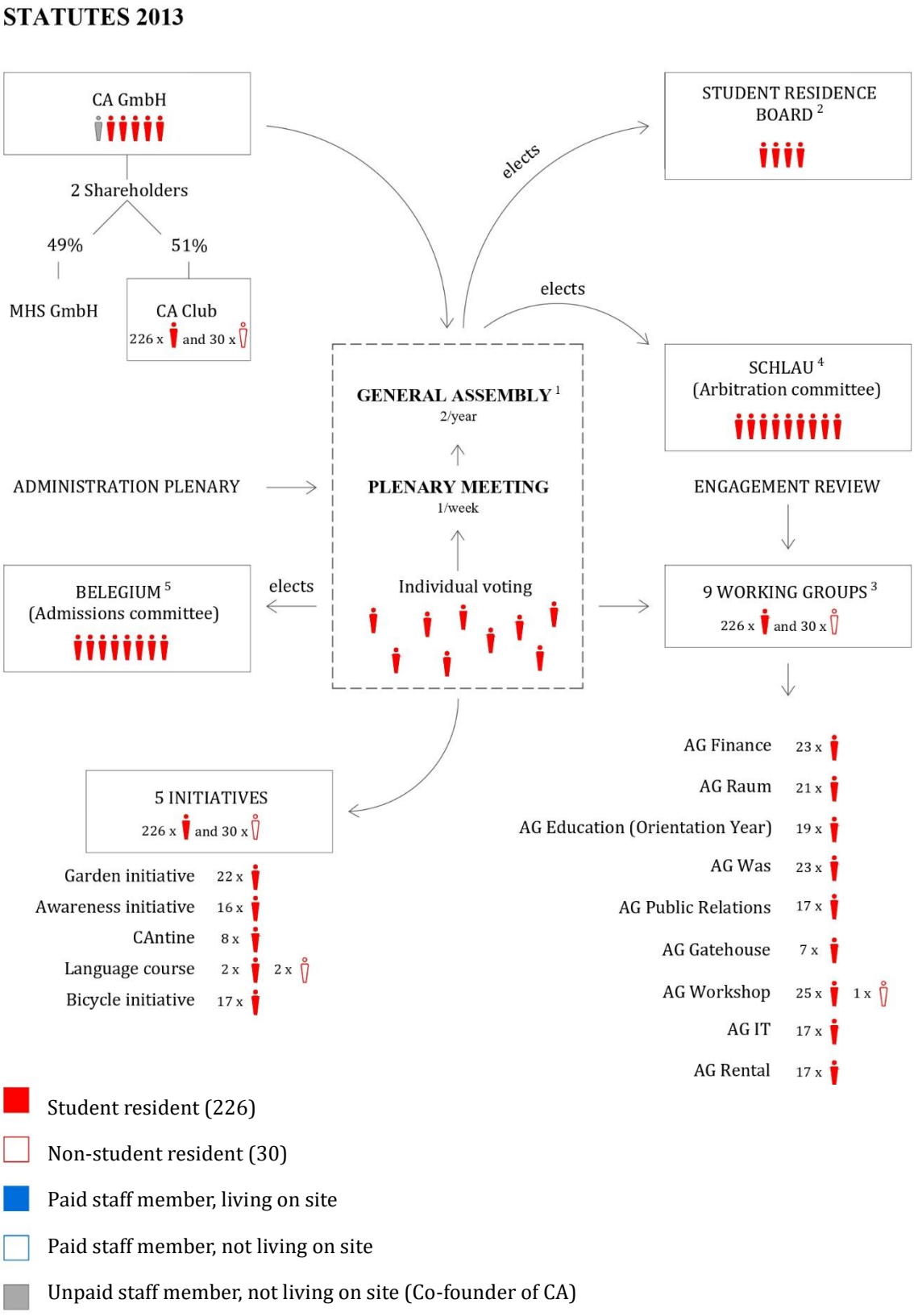
Please note: Numbers 1 to 5 refer to the five key aspects of self-management discussed on the following pages.

Figure 29 *– Governance structure of the former CA (1970), reconstructed based on the statutes of Seminarstraße 2*



Please note: Numbers 1 to 5 refer to the five key aspects of self-management discussed on the following pages.

Figure 30 *– Governance structure of the current CA (2013), reconstructed based on the latest statutes*



Please note: Some people are part of more than one working group or initiative.
Please note: Numbers 1 to 5 refer to the five key aspects of self-management discussed on the following pages.

Key aspects of self-management: Continuity and transformation

1. **Democratic structure: From delegates to individual voting**

   Throughout all three phases, the CA retained a sovereign internal decision-making body, but the form of participation changed significantly. In 1956, decisions were made via a delegate-based **Convention**, where group representatives spoke on behalf of the residents. In 1970, this model was replaced by a **General Assembly** with individual voting rights, marking a clear step towards direct democracy. The 2013 statutes retained this principle and anchored it in daily practice through **weekly Plenary meetings** and semi-annual **General Assembly** meetings, thereby consolidating the shift from representation to direct participation.

2. **Relationship with the university: From supervision to full independence**

   In 1956, the CA operated under the full supervision of the university, with a **Board of Trustees** consisting primarily of professors and a director appointed from above. The 1970 reform relaxed this hierarchy by adding student representatives to the Board and giving the director an advisory, student-elected position. The statutes of 2013 mark a complete break. The new CA was established as an independent GmbH without institutional ties to the university, and the position of director was abolished. Coordinating tasks are now carried out by elected committees, thereby completing the shift from university-controlled governance to student-led autonomy.

3. **Educational mission: From Studium Generale to Orientation Year**

   Throughout all three phases, the CA maintained the principle that communal living had to be accompanied by critical learning. What changed was the form, the audience, and the institutional framing of this mission. In 1956, the **Studium Generale** formalised this idea through lectures and discussions for CA residents. In 1970, the mission was broadened: the Studium Generale was continued, and new student-led **public working groups** opened the CA to broader political and academic debates. In 2013, the educational mission was reinterpreted through **AG Education** and the **Orientation Year**, which translated the earlier ideals into a residential learning program for recent graduates.[1]

4. **Conflict mediation: From staff discipline to mediation by fellow students**

   Throughout all three phases, the CA maintained a formal mechanism for resolving conflicts, but authority shifted significantly from the staff to the students. In 1956, conflicts were handled by a staff-dominated **Council of Honour**, which meant that the resolution took place outside the student community. In 1970, this was replaced by a student-led **Arbitration Committee**, supported by a Council of Elders that ensured legal continuity between generations. In the new CA, conflict mediation has developed in response to the rapid growth of the cooperative – from an original group of 11 founders to a community of more than 250 residents. The principle of student-led mediation is retained and expanded through the **Schlau Process**, an elected body that manages conflicts.

5. **Admissions: From staff control to collective self-selection**

   In all three phases, admission was always handled internally, allowing the student association to shape its own community. What changed was who held the decision-making authority. In 1956, the **Admissions Committee** consisted of four staff members living on-

[1] Mira, interview, January 6, 2026.

site and one student. In 1970, authority shifted to the residents: the committee consisted of the director and four students, and the selection process also considered candidates' willingness to participate in self-governance. In the 2013 statutes, this principle is fully realised: the **Belegium** bears full responsibility for admission and assesses the motivation, expectations, and willingness of applicants to participate in the cooperative's self-governance structures.

Synthesis of self-management continuity

A clear pattern can be seen in the CA's three statutes: the core principles remain stable, while the mechanisms that realise them are constantly being redesigned. The enduring elements are democratic participation and a learning-oriented mission. What changes is how these principles are organised and by whom they are implemented.

Important transformations include the shift from a delegation-based to a direct democracy, from university oversight to full autonomy, and from staff-led to student-led conflict resolution. The educational structures evolve from the Studium Generale to the Orientation Year, adapting the same pedagogical ambition to new institutional contexts. A crucial continuity across all phases is residential selection. Although the responsible bodies changed, the underlying criterion remained constant: new members must be willing to actively participate in self-governance. This long-standing emphasis on motivation and contribution underscores how central admission has always been to maintaining a functioning, self-governing community.

MAINTENANCE

2. Maintenance in the CA

Maintenance is an essential part of the self-governance model. This chapter focuses on the new building, where maintenance is organised collectively via a spatially structured system. Residents of the renovated building clean their common areas independently. The chapter examines how maintenance is embedded in the spatial organisation of the new building, how the current system has evolved, and how it enables residents to collectively manage and maintain their shared living environment.

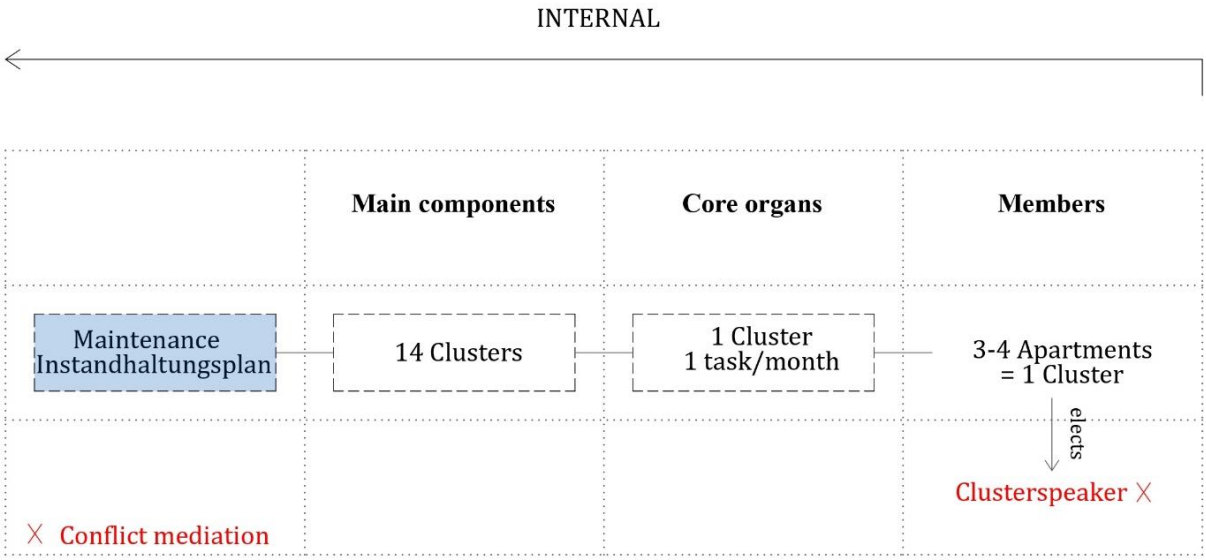


Figure 31 *– Maintenance system within the self-governance structure*

Spatial foundations of the cluster model

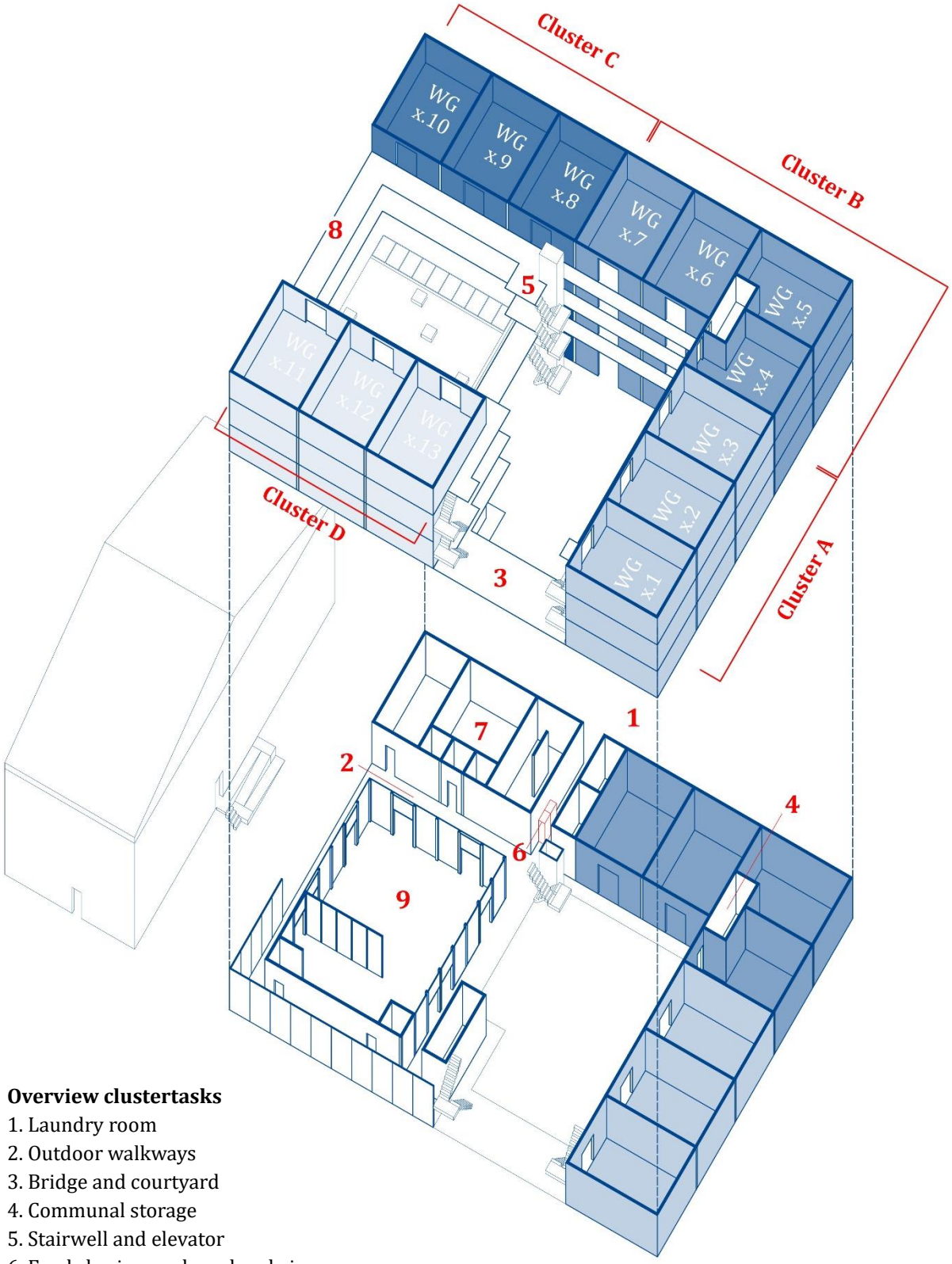
The new building accommodates 176 students in 46 shared apartments (*Wohngemeinschaften*, WGs). Most apartments house four residents, while the corner apartments house three. These apartments are grouped into fourteen clusters, each consisting of three to four adjacent apartments (Fig. 32). Clusters with three apartments have twelve residents; clusters with a corner apartment have fifteen. Each cluster functions as a small neighbourhood within the building, formed by spatial proximity.

Maintenance tasks are organised at the cluster level. Every month, each cluster is assigned one specific task. Within the cluster, the residents decide which apartment bears responsibility for each of the four weeks. This internal rotation distributes the workload fairly, prevents individual apartments from becoming overloaded, and ensures that the assigned common areas remain clean throughout the month.

In addition to spatially defined tasks, there are two non-spatial cluster roles:

- Reminder service: this cluster checks whether visible tasks (e.g., cleaning toilets) have been completed and sends friendly reminders if anything has been skipped.
- Support team: these clusters act as a backup for groups that are temporarily understaffed, for example during vacation or illness, and ensure that essential maintenance tasks continue uninterrupted.

Figure 32 *– Axonometric drawing of the CA, showing the clusters and their maintenance tasks*



Overview clustertasks

1. Laundry room
2. Outdoor walkways
3. Bridge and courtyard
4. Communal storage
5. Stairwell and elevator
6. Food sharing cupboard and giveaway corner
7. Public restrooms
8. External access galleries
9. Aula

From isolated WG tasks to spatially coherent responsibilities

The cluster model replaced an earlier system in which each shared apartment was assigned a weekly cleaning task. In practice, this system soon proved unsustainable. Some spaces, such as the auditorium or public restrooms, had to be cleaned weekly, while others, such as the stairwells, did not. Due to this discrepancy, some apartments skipped tasks when their assigned area did not look dirty, triggering a domino effect: subsequent groups either encountered a significantly dirtier space or felt justified in skipping their task as well. Over time, this led to unequal maintenance standards, resident frustration, and a fragmented sense of responsibility.[1] The cluster model addressed these issues by redistributing tasks across a larger group. Weekly rotation within clusters and monthly rotation between clusters create a predictable work rhythm.

AG WAS and clusterspeakers: Coordination and support of collective maintenance

The AG WAS working group forms the organisational and technical backbone of the maintenance system. As the primary supervisory body, the working group checks whether monthly tasks are completed, monitors clusters that are falling behind, and intervenes when problems arise. An inspection during the holiday period revealed that only six of the fourteen clusters were performing their tasks, illustrating the need for continuous monitoring and communication.

Within each cluster, residents elect a **clusterspeaker** who acts as the head coordinator and the key link with AG WAS. Their responsibilities include ensuring that the assigned area remains clean throughout the month, documenting the cluster's performance in the AG WAS records, and supporting residents who are temporarily unable to participate in maintenance or other aspects of self-management. When participation declines, the clusterspeaker initiates a conversation to ascertain the underlying reasons and may propose a temporary redistribution of tasks within the group.

Synthesis of maintenance at the CA

The maintenance system demonstrates how spatial organisation and collective responsibility reinforce each other in daily management. By dividing the building into clearly defined maintenance zones, the diffusion of responsibility characteristic of large, shared environments is counteracted.[2] The roles of AG WAS and the clusterspeakers illustrate how technical coordination and social support are intertwined, ensuring that maintenance remains a shared, collectively supported practice.

In addition to its organisational function, maintenance also serves as a political-ecological practice. By integrating cleaning and resource management into daily routines, the cooperative redistributes labour that is typically outsourced in traditional student housing. This makes care work visible, shared, and collectively negotiated. Joint decisions regarding repair priorities and communal activities – such as cleaning days or gardening – promote awareness of ecological interdependence. This approach aligns with degrowth-oriented views on care as a common good.[3]

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[1] Nina, interview, October 16, 2025.

[2] Peck et al., 'Caring for the Commons'.

[3] Akbulut, 'Carework as Commons'.

At the same time, the cluster structure enables the small-scale social cohesion necessary for sustainable participation. Regular coordination, informal support, and repeated interactions build trust and reciprocity, reflecting insights regarding the importance of shared routines for collective involvement.[1]

Maintenance thus becomes a form of social glue: by shifting responsibility from individual apartments to clusters, the cooperative creates small communities of twelve to fifteen residents who develop shared expectations and daily contacts. Residents often describe how routine chores become moments of humour, cooperation, and friendship, while cluster representatives reinforce this dynamic by organising small gatherings that maintain social contact.[2]

[1] Czischke and Huisman, 'Integration through Collaborative Housing?'

[2] Lea, interview, January 11, 2026.

WEEKLY WORKLOAD

3. Estimated weekly workload

Formal workload expectations

The following estimate of the weekly workload is based on the contractual requirements and on information gathered during fieldwork. The structure and estimated hours have been verified with Jonas, who confirmed that these figures broadly reflect the actual time spent by most residents.[1]

Residents of the new building are contractually required to participate in both the self-management and maintenance of the CA. Residents of the renovated building are encouraged to participate in working groups or initiatives, but do not participate in the cluster-based maintenance system. For the new building, the basic expectation is that every resident contributes at least two hours per week to a working group. In addition, each cluster is assigned one maintenance task per month, which rotates weekly among the three or four apartments. With an average task duration of approximately two hours, this amounts to about one hour of maintenance work per resident per week.[2]

In addition to these minimum requirements, residents are encouraged to attend the weekly plenary meeting, which typically lasts about two hours. Those in organisational or managerial positions – such as members of CA GmbH, the Student Residence Board, or representatives of working groups – also participate in the administration plenary meeting (approximately 2.5 hours) and additional coordination meetings.[3] These formal structures create a workload that varies significantly depending on the level of resident involvement.

Resident profile	Working group	Plenary	Administration plenary	Clustertask	Extra meeting	Total per week
Low engaged	2 h (minimum)	-	-	1 h	-	**3 h**
Engaged	6 h	2 h	-	1 h	-	**9 h**
Engaged, leadership role	4 h	2 h	2.5 h	1 h	3 h	**12.5 h**

Figure 33 *– Table with the estimated workload for three typical resident profiles in the new building*

These estimates reflect the formal structure of self-management within the student association. However, the daily experience of residents reveals a more complex picture.

[1] WhatsApp conversation with Jonas (CA Resident), April 30, 2026, personal communication.
[2] Jonas, interview, January 9, 2026.
[3] Jonas, interview, January 9, 2026.

Insights from a survey of the CA (2024): The daily experience of workload

In addition to the formal estimate, this section makes use of a *workload survey* from 2024 among the 176 residents of the new building, of whom between 118 and 126 answered the questions.[1] The study offers valuable insights into how students experience and manage their responsibilities within the student association.

The results show that the actual capacity of residents is influenced by structural time constraints, an uneven distribution of tasks, and fluctuating personal circumstances. One of the most striking findings is the consistently high willingness to contribute: nearly 80 percent of respondents would ideally invest between three and ten hours per week in the student association (Fig. 34).[2] In practice, however, the majority indicate contributing fewer hours, usually between zero and five hours per week (Fig. 35).[3] This gap between willingness and actual capacity is primarily explained by a lack of time. Ninety-one respondents indicated that a lack of time due to studies, work, or personal obligations was the main barrier to participation (Fig. 36).[4] Emotional and physical strain also play a role, with many students reporting feelings of being overwhelmed or having limited personal capacity.

Moreover, the research shows that the division of tasks is generally perceived as unequal. More than 88 percent of respondents disagree that the work is fairly distributed, indicating that a small core group bears a disproportionate share of the responsibilities (Fig. 37).[5] This imbalance is reflected in the difficulties students experience in combining their involvement with the CA with other obligations: two-thirds indicate that maintaining this balance is difficult or very difficult (Fig. 38).[6] Importantly, residents also identify the structural causes of this imbalance. They emphasise the need for clearer responsibilities, better communication, and stronger coordination as the most effective measures to increase involvement and distribute the work more evenly (Fig. 39).[7]

Overall, the comparison between formal expectations regarding workload and the research results shows that the actual division of tasks is determined less by intention than by structural limitations. This underscores the need for a more balanced distribution of responsibilities within the community.

[1] Collegium Academicum, *Survey Workload* (Heidelberg, 2024).
[2] Collegium Academicum, *Survey Workload*, 4.
[3] Collegium Academicum, *Survey Workload*, 1.
[4] Collegium Academicum, *Survey Workload*, 26.
[5] Collegium Academicum, *Survey Workload*, 10.
[6] Collegium Academicum, *Survey Workload*, 38.
[7] Collegium Academicum, *Survey Workload*, 33.

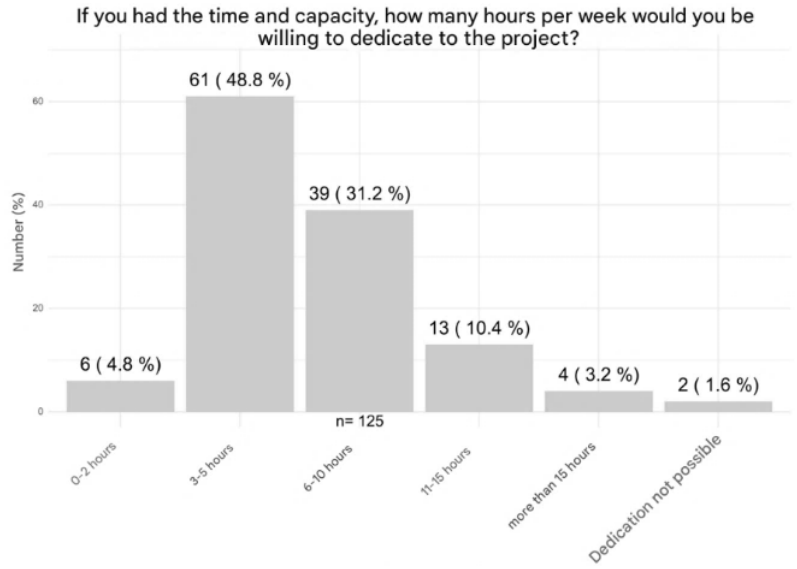


Figure 34 *– Graph 1: showing the desired number of working hours per week*

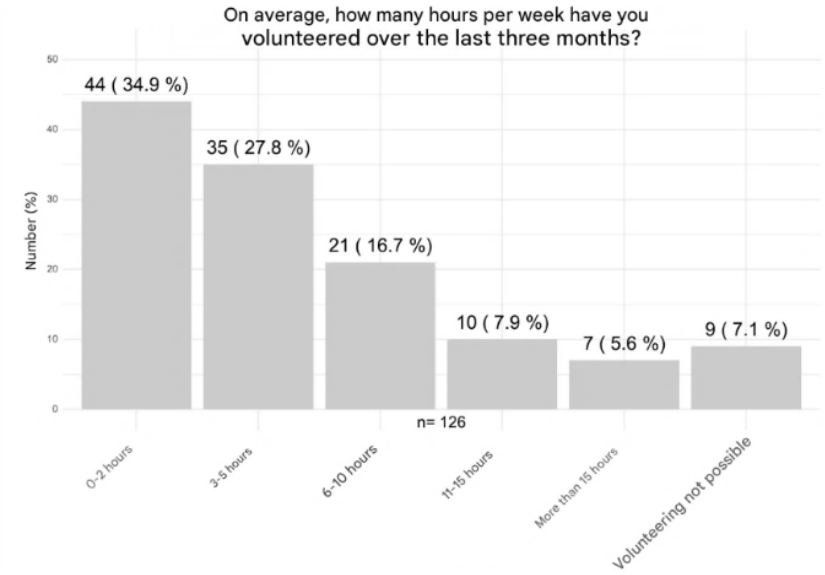


Figure 35 *– Graph 2: showing the actual number of working hours per week*

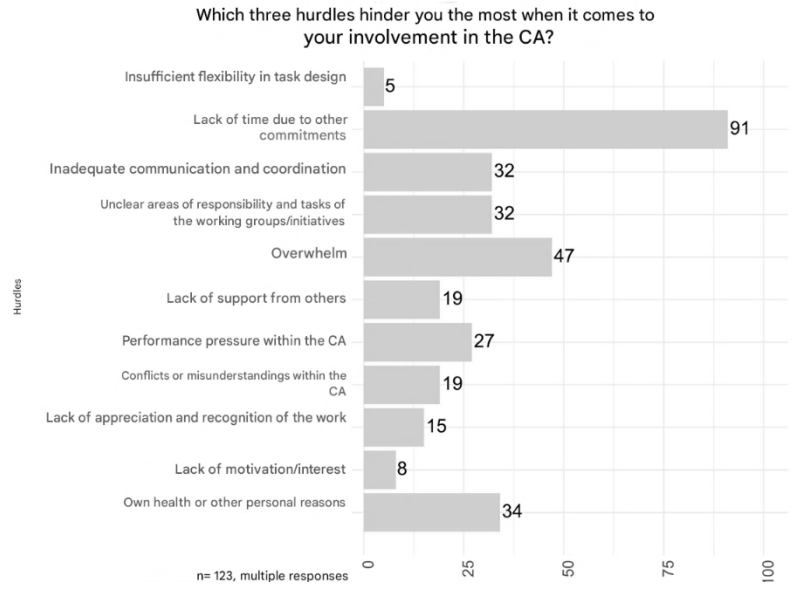


Figure 36 *– Graph 3: showing the main barriers to participation*

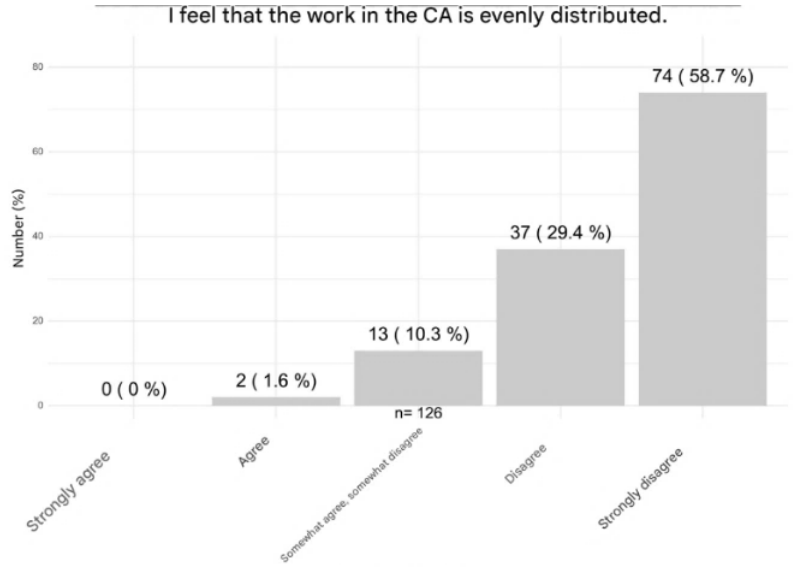


Figure 37 *– Graph 4: showing opinions on the even distribution of workload*

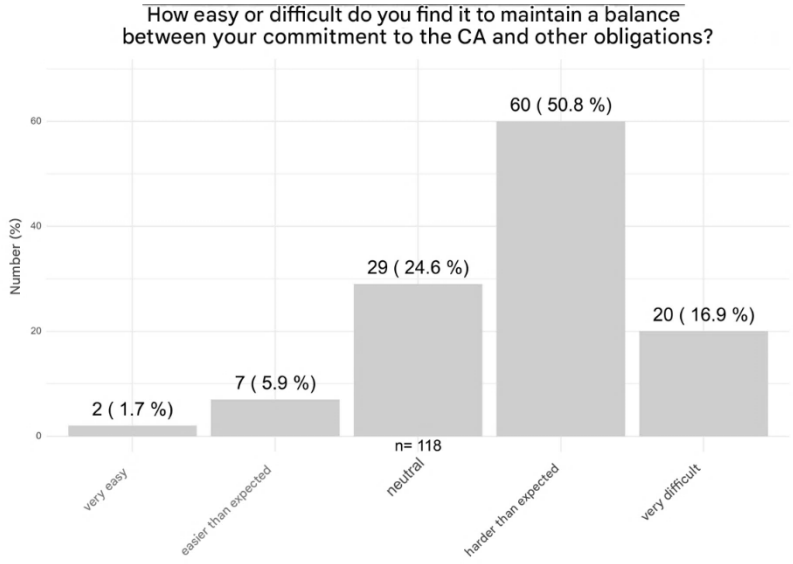


Figure 38 *– Graph 5: showing opinions on maintaining a balance between obligations*

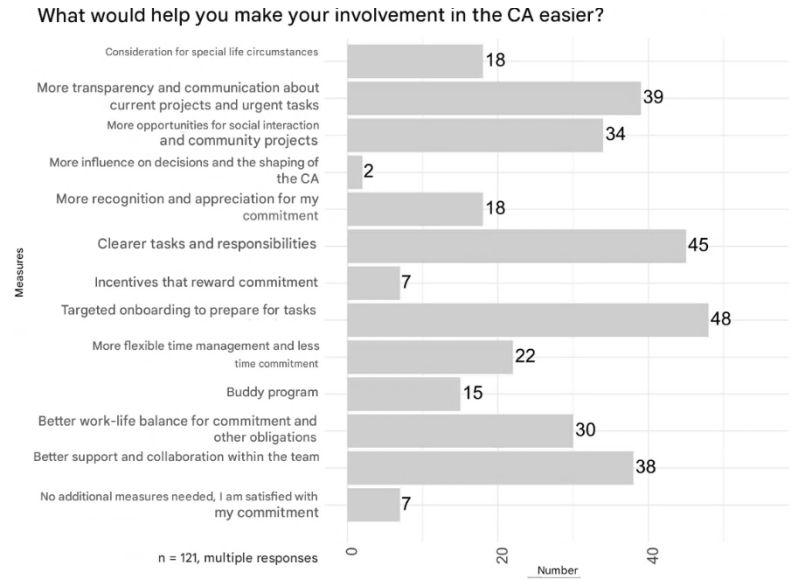


Figure 39 *– Graph 6: showing opinions on what would facilitate participation in the CA*

CHALLENGES

4. Challenges of self-governance

Although self-governance forms the basis of the CA's cooperative model, it also entails a range of structural challenges that influence the residents' daily experiences. These challenges became particularly apparent through in-depth interviews with three key protagonists: Klara, a long-time resident who is active in various working groups; Sarah, who has lived in the CA since 2024 and offers a critical perspective on the internal dynamics; and Nina, a member of CA GmbH, who has been involved since the construction phase and possesses significant institutional knowledge.[1] Their reflections, combined with observations from plenary sessions and fieldwork, reveal four interconnected challenges: knowledge and economic hierarchies, a work-community imbalance, performance pressure, and institutional politics. Together, these dynamics illustrate the complexity of sustaining a large, student-managed housing project and highlight the ongoing effort required to keep self-governance both functionally and socially sustainable.

A. Knowledge and economics hierarchies

Knowledge hierarchy

The ideal of equality versus the reality of expertise

Although the CA formally strives for a culture without hierarchy, residents invariably acknowledge that full equality is impossible in practice. Differences in knowledge inevitably create informal power dynamics. As Klara explains,

> *Klara (CA Resident): I think that we absolutely have informal hierarchies, because there are people who know much more than others. And naturally, they propose many of the decisions we make, because they have the knowledge. (...) However, it remains a proposal that no one will disagree with, because no one else has the knowledge.*[2]

This dynamic is particularly visible in the domain of finance, where only a small group of residents fully understands the issues. Even when experts organise additional rounds of explanation, proposals are often adopted without objection, simply because others do not feel capable of evaluating them. In this way, knowledge becomes a form of influence that quietly undermines the anti-hierarchical ideals of the cooperative.

Sarah voices additional, sharp criticism. For her, the problem is not the existence of hierarchies, but the refusal to acknowledge them. In a large and diverse community, she argues, it is unrealistic to assume that hierarchies can be avoided, since differences in knowledge and experience inevitably create status differences. Ignoring this dynamic only makes it more difficult to address them. The real challenge, according to her, is not to eliminate hierarchies – an impossible task – but to acknowledge them and deal with them openly.[3]

Community strategies to tackle hierarchies

Building on the shared recognition that hierarchies exist, residents are now holding deliberate conversations about the origins of these hierarchies and how they can be mitigated. During the General Assembly on October 8, 2025, participants mapped out the

[1] Klara (CA Resident), interview by author, Heidelberg, January 6, 2026; Sarah (CA Resident), interview by author, Heidelberg, January 6, 2026; Nina, informal conversation, January 7, 2026.

[2] Klara, interview, January 6, 2026.

[3] Sarah, interview, January 6, 2026.

origins of informal hierarchies – knowledge, experience, and social cliques – and proposed measures such as limiting the number of leadership roles a single person can hold, strengthening transparency in communication, and improving knowledge transfer (Appendix B4). These discussions reflect a shared awareness that horizontal governance requires continuous discussion.

- Strategy 1: Strengthening transparent communication

The importance of transparent communication became particularly evident during the plenary board meeting on January 14. An experienced member of CA GmbH openly admitted that she had made a non-confidential decision in a private chat – despite the rule that such matters must be discussed in the public group channels. She explained that she had chosen the private chat because decisions are made faster there: one does not have to wait for the many opinions, questions, and approvals that typically arise in the public chat. The discussion that followed exposed a central tension within the cooperative: transparency protects the community against informal concentration of power, but at the same time slows down decision-making. This incident reveals the friction between democratic ideals and the practical demands of managing a large, complex community.

- Strategy 2: Investing in knowledge transfer

Knowledge transfer is the cooperative's most important instrument for countering hierarchy, but at the same time, it is also the most vulnerable. Residents describe it as a process that begins with a shared awareness that organisational knowledge must be consciously preserved to ensure the stability of the project. This collective understanding is followed by an introductory phase in which newcomers learn how procedures work and why they are important for the long-term functioning of the cooperative.

After establishing this cultural foundation, the cooperative offers material support in the form of written resources and practical guidance. Internal "Wikipedia" pages explain the structure and responsibilities of each working group; AG manuals teach residents how to perform basic repairs (Appendix B4); and written guidelines document administrative procedures. Knowledge is also transferred through practice. Intensive workweeks, practical guidance, and informal mentoring enable residents to learn by doing.

Residents emphasised the benefits of this approach. Knowledge sharing strengthens the community, increases participation, and helps resolve conflicts by making responsibilities and procedures more transparent. It also enables a sense of ownership: when residents understand how things work, they feel more motivated to contribute. However, knowledge transfer also entails efficiency costs. Teaching others something often takes considerably more time than performing a task independently.[1] This extra guidance increases the workload for those with expertise.

Economic hierarchy: Limitation of autonomy by financial obligations

In addition to knowledge hierarchy, a second form of hierarchy emerges within the economic structure of the CA. Although the cooperative's ownership model grants residents significant autonomy, this autonomy is tied to substantial financial obligations. External financing – loans from development banks, public grants, and hundreds of private

[1] Jonas, interview, January 3, 2026.

loans – brings expectations of stability, reliability, and regulatory compliance, creating structural constraints that influence internal decision-making.

To remain credible to lenders and grant providers, the CA must demonstrate financial discipline. This gives residents with financial expertise a disproportionate amount of influence, as they mediate between the community and its financial obligations and ensure that decisions do not jeopardise repayment schedules, liquidity, or compliance requirements. At the same time, reliance on numerous small direct loans makes the project vulnerable to external circumstances and increases the internal pressure to remain "credible" to financiers.[1] These financial constraints also determine who can live in the CA. The terms of loans and subsidies have a direct impact on the composition of the resident population: the new building must be designated exclusively for student housing, which means that residents must move out after graduation, whereas subsidies for the renovated building mandate the inclusion of social housing units.[2] In this way, financial agreements influence resident selection, tenancy structures, and programmatic ambitions.

Financial obligations therefore create an economic hierarchy. Because external financing is linked to strict conditions, the cooperative must constantly weigh its ideals against the expectations of its financiers, making financial expertise particularly influential. Managing these constraints requires well-considered strategies – such as distributing responsibilities – to prevent financial knowledge from becoming a permanent source of informal power.

B. Imbalance between work and community building

Residents regularly describe a fundamental tension within the CA: the volume of organisational responsibilities shifts attention towards operational tasks and pushes community life into the background. As routine maintenance and administrative tasks pile up, collaboration increasingly feels like "just work," gradually undermining motivation.

Nina notes that the strong sense of shared purpose that characterised the construction phase has slowly given way to a daily routine focused on keeping the project running, making long-term cohesion more vulnerable.[3] Klara shares this concern and points to the ongoing struggle to balance the labour required for self-governance with the social activities that make cooperative life meaningful.

> *Klara (CA Resident): We are also trying to find a balance between working together and building our community, but I do not think we have achieved that yet. Sometimes people do not come to these community activities because they say: "Oh, I already have so much work to do for the CA, I can not make time for this." As a result, the community does not get priority, but the work does. And I know that is necessary, but it is also dangerous, because if people associate the CA, their living environment, only with the work they have to do for self-governance, that can become frustrating. But if we only build our community and do not work on the very important, urgent problems, then we are not functioning either. So I think we still need to find a balance, and I hope that we will find it someday, or at least achieve some kind of balance. Because right now, the emphasis is more on the work, and that is very frustrating for some people. And it can be a source of conflict.*[4]

[1] Jonas, interview, January 3, 2026.

[2] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.

[3] Nina, informal conversation, January 7, 2026.

[4] Klara, interview, January 6, 2026.

The cooperative therefore faces a continuous challenge: ensuring that the organisational work required for self-governance does not overshadow the social relationships that make life in a cooperative meaningful.

Addressing the imbalance

This imbalance also became a central theme during the General Assembly on October 8, 2025 (Appendix B4). Residents reflected on how the strong bonds once forged during work camps had weakened after the move to the new building, when the project no longer revolved around a single, tangible common goal.[1] To counteract this decline in group cohesion, residents proposed various measures to revitalise community life: establishing a dedicated working group for community building, organising joint cleaning activities as social events, and improving integration between residents of the renovated and the new building. These proposals illustrate a shared realisation that community does not arise spontaneously through living together but requires deliberate, ongoing investment.

C. Pressure to perform

Several residents point out another concerning dynamic: the self-management model can create expectations and demands that sometimes exceed the realistic capacity of individuals. A small group of highly committed members describe the ongoing maintenance of the project as overwhelming. Nina, a member of CA GmbH, is the clearest example of this. During the moving period, she interrupted her studies for a year to work full-time as a volunteer for the CA – a commitment that ultimately led to burnout.[2] She emphasises that her case is exceptional, but that it exposes the structural vulnerability of a model heavily reliant on volunteering. Looking back on the early years, she notes,

> *Nina (CA Resident): The founders could never have imagined how difficult the maintenance of the building would be and the enormous pressure and workload this would place on the students.[3]*

Residents further describe this pressure as both time-related and social. The time pressure stems from the enormous volume of tasks: depending on their role, some residents spend more than ten hours a week on responsibilities within the living community. Although formally only three hours are mandatory and everything beyond that is voluntary, the social dynamics of living together create an implicit expectation to contribute. Sarah explains that life in a community brings with it a constant sense that you must participate. This expectation shapes her daily life,

> *Sarah (CA Resident): I feel like I have to do something to earn living here. And I struggle with that, because I am not capable of doing so at the moment. And I am afraid that people will judge me for it. At the moment, I am also afraid to go to events, because there is a lot of talk about the CA there and I do not know much about it, because I am not up to date on the developments. (…) And during the general meetings where we make decisions, I feel like I am not allowed to give my opinion, because I do not know much about it. I do not feel like I am part of it, even though I live here.[4]*

[1] Nina, informal conversation, January 7, 2026.
[2] Nina, informal conversation, January 7, 2026.
[3] Nina, informal conversation, January 7, 2026.
[4] Sarah, interview, January 6, 2026.

Sarah explains that this dynamic was reinforced during the move-in phase, when residents pushed themselves to the limit to get the building ready, and that the mentality of always having to do more continued to influence the community long after the move.[1]

Nina, drawing on her own experience with burnout, also reflects on how such pressure could be reduced in future projects. She advises a student cooperative in Ghent to consider a more streamlined model – one that is student-led but with external support for complex or high-risk tasks. She suggests that, if financial resources allow, delegating certain responsibilities (such as financial oversight) to an external professional could significantly lighten the burden on students, provided clear rules safeguard student autonomy.[2]

D. Institutional politics

A recurring theme in interviews and informal conversations is the association's idealistic commitment to meeting everyone's needs. This ambition is particularly evident during plenary meetings, where great effort is made to ensure that everyone's voice is heard and every concern is addressed via the *Konsensfisch method* (page 113). In a large community, however, this makes it difficult to reconcile conflicting preferences or reach decisions efficiently. Sarah wonders whether such an approach is still feasible given the current size of the cooperative. She also reflects on how this ideal can unintentionally undermine personal responsibility: when the community strives to accommodate everyone's individual preference, it becomes more difficult to expect residents to conform to shared norms.[3]

These reflections highlight a structural tension within the institutional culture of the cooperative. The commitment to listening to everyone's voice and responding to individual needs is widely appreciated, but many residents acknowledge that such an approach has practical limitations in a large and diverse community. Living together therefore also requires the recognition that not every individual preference can be fully met.

[1] Sarah, interview, January 6, 2026.

[2] Nina, informal conversation, January 7, 2026.

[3] Sarah, interview, January 6, 2026.

CONCLUDING SYNTHESIS

SELF-GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

3.3.3. Concluding synthesis: Self-governance as response to structural vulnerabilities in student communities

Governance infrastructures

Self-governance within the CA consists of democratic, operational, and maintenance systems. Each layer fulfils a distinct function, but it is precisely their interaction that gives the model the capacity to stabilise a volatile student community.

The **democratic bodies** institutionalise participation by embedding decision-making in predictable rhythms. Weekly and semi-annual meetings create a time structure in which residents learn to articulate their needs, bridge differences, and acknowledge the interdependence of their living situation. However, these bodies also reveal the limitations of formal inclusivity: participation depends not only on open procedures but also on shared rhythms of life and social proximity.[1] The **operational bodies** translate democratic decisions into daily practice. Working groups and initiatives demonstrate the amount of work required to maintain cooperative operation: administrative tasks reveal the vulnerability of organisational memory, while practical collaboration generates shared routines and forms of mutual support. The working groups function as learning environments in which residents acquire organisational and interpersonal competencies.[2] The **maintenance system** anchors responsibility in the material environment. By spatially organising tasks in clusters, the CA distributes labour across socially cohesive units and links maintenance work to the layout of the building. This spatial ordering of responsibility addresses past problems of unclear accountability and shows how design can support collective maintenance rather than relying on individual goodwill.[3]

Countering structural vulnerabilities

The CA's governance structure addresses the structural vulnerabilities characteristic of student communities by transforming them into manageable organisational conditions. The research reveals four concrete mechanisms by which this is achieved:

- First, participation is stabilised through obligation. The CA counters the chronic instability of voluntary student participation by formalising it: weekly plenary meetings, mandatory hours in working groups, and cluster-based maintenance integrate contribution into the daily routine.[4] This reduces dependence on a small group of enthusiasts and prevents participation from collapsing. However, this solution also entails tensions: obligations can turn into pressure, and the expectation to "always be present" threatens to overburden those with limited time or emotional capacity.
- Second, knowledge continuity is actively promoted to counteract rapid turnover. Documentation systems, onboarding processes, mentor structures, and spatially embedded routines compensate for the constant arrival and departure of residents. These tools prevent the loss of organisational memory, which typically

[1] Czischke and Huisman, 'Integration through Collaborative Housing?'
[2] Schwittay, 'Prefigurative Pedagogies'.
[3] Peck et al., 'Caring for the Commons'.
[4] Schwittay, 'Students Take Over'.

destabilises student initiatives.[1] However, the research also shows that knowledge still concentrates among long-standing members, creating informal hierarchies that the cooperative must continuously monitor.

- Thirdly, institutional credibility is built through procedural discipline. To counter the widespread perception of students as unreliable partners, the CA relies on consistent procedures, clearly defined governance roles, and transparent decision-making.[2] These practices make the cooperative understandable to banks and government agencies. However, credibility comes at a price: financial obligations and compliance requirements give residents with specialised expertise a disproportionate amount of influence, and external circumstances can even determine who is allowed to live in the project.
- Fourthly, the CA recognises overload as a structural risk. Research shows that self-governance can easily become exploitative: a small core group often bears the heaviest administrative and emotional burden. The CA counters this by limiting the number of roles per person and distributing administrative tasks.

In summary, these insights show that self-governance at the CA is a practical strategy for managing the vulnerabilities of student life. It stabilises participation, retains knowledge and builds credibility.

Key insights for the development of a student cooperative in Ghent (Chapter 4)

** Participation requires fixed obligations: Clear roles, engagement reviews and predictable rhythms*

** Responsibility is structurally uneven: Unequal engagement also emerges in cooperative settings*

** Organisational memory is fragile: Strong transfer mechanisms are essential for continuity*

** Expertise creates informal hierarchies: Financial and organisational knowledge concentrates power*

** External partnerships come with constraints: Economic dependencies limit autonomy*

** Risk of overburdening: High involvement can lead to exhaustion and burnout*

** Spatial clustering structures responsibility: Maintenance organised in small units strengthens accountability*

[1] Schwittay, 'Students Take Over', 979.

[2] Schwittay, 'Students Take Over', 978–79.

3.4

SPATIAL PRACTICE OF SELF-MANAGEMENT

3.4. Spatial practice of self-management

3.4.1. Conceptual foundations: How space and self-management influence each other

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework in Chapter 1 demonstrated that cooperative living is not only an organisational model but also a spatial condition: residents govern their environment, and the environment, in turn, shapes the self-governance structure. This mutual influence explains why the analysis of spatial practices utilises both governance and spatial concepts.

Lefebvre's distinction between **use value** and **exchange value** emphasises that space acquires meaning through lived experience.[1] Use value refers to what the space enables residents to do in their daily routines, while exchange value reflects market logic. Central to Lefebvre's spatial theory is **appropriation**, which Purcell describes as the right of residents to use, inhabit, and shape the space according to their own needs.[2] Appropriation is a political act that counters the dominance of owner-oriented space. In the CA, this becomes visible when circulation zones, outdoor paths, and informal corners evolve into social meeting places that transcend their original function. Lefebvre shows that appropriation is inextricably linked to **participation** and **autogestion**. Autogestion, or collective self-management, is both a political ideal and a material practice: residents organise maintenance, establish shared norms, and resolve conflicts.[3] Through these practices, residents collectively take control of their living conditions. In this sense, the built environment becomes a medium through which cooperation, negotiation, and responsibility take shape – and through which the right to the city takes form in daily life.

Psychological ownership and stewardship, as described by Peck et al., further clarify why cooperative environments generate strong forms of care.[4] When residents feel that a space belongs to them they are more inclined to maintain it, intervene when problems arise, and hold one another accountable. This sense of ownership arises through repeated interactions, shared labour, and the visibility of collective work.

Schwittay notes that student cooperatives function as **pedagogical environments** in which residents develop skills in conflict resolution, responsibility, and interdependence.[5] This dynamic unfolds spatially: in kitchens where cleaning standards are debated, in hallways where informal conversations relieve tension, and in common areas where decisions visibly take shape. Spatial practices thus become the arena in which cooperative values are applied, tested, and continuously refined. The absence of such spatial practices in institutional or private student housing can be explained from the perspective of **financialization**. Aalbers shows how housing systems aimed at efficiency and profit maximisation tend to prioritise standardisation.[6] In such environments, spaces that invite

[1] Purcell, 'Possible Worlds', 149–50.
[2] Purcell, 'Possible Worlds', 149.
[3] Purcell, 'Possible Worlds', 147–50.
[4] Peck et al., 'Caring for the Commons'.
[5] Schwittay, 'Prefigurative Pedagogies'.
[6] Aalbers, 'The Variegated Financialization of Housing'.

loitering, negotiation, or informal care rarely emerge, because they do not contribute to the financial logic of maximising rental income.

From theory to the CA: Why spatial practice matters here

These theoretical insights form the basis for the analysis of how the architecture of the Collegium Academicum develops through daily use. The project is shaped via a **co-design** process in which future residents participated as co-designers – a participatory approach in which users and designers jointly explore needs, values, and spatial possibilities.[1] As Brysch et al. demonstrate, co-design goes beyond user-centred design by requiring residents to establish a collective set of values and translate these into both architectural and social design.[2] Their framework emphasises that product and process are inextricably linked: the physical building and the developing social practices evolve together. While co-design can articulate shared values, it cannot fully determine how the space will be experienced. Daily routines, appropriations, and informal interactions inevitably expand, reinterpret, or challenge the intentions formulated during the design phase.

Goffman's analysis of front and back spaces sharpens this perspective.[3] Social life is organised by spatial distinctions that separate moments of presentation from moments of withdrawal. **Front regions** are places where individuals present themselves to others and manage impressions; **back regions** enable them to step out of their roles and recover from interaction. In the CA, transparency, circulation patterns, and shared infrastructures determine how these regions emerge in practice. The shifting dynamics between front and back areas show that daily interactions actively determine how residents deal with community, privacy, and autonomy.

These theoretical perspectives demonstrate that self-governance is a spatial practice that is constantly shaped by residents' interpretations of the material environment – and vice versa. Following Boudon, the design of the CA is viewed as something completed through use: through the routines, appropriations, and collective negotiations that residents carry out daily.[4] This chapter therefore poses the following question:

> *How is democratic self-governance spatially organised, and how do residents give it substance, adapt it, and sometimes call into question the cooperative ideals anchored in the design?*

Design process and spatial layout

The design of the CA emerged from a **co-design process** between the founders and the architects, although the degree of resident involvement varied significantly over time; the method shaped the new building much more strongly than the renovation of the existing building.

[1] Sanders and Stappers, 'Co-Creation and the New Landscapes of Design'.

[2] Brysch et al., 'The Process of Value Setting through Co-Design', 405–6.

[3] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

[4] Boudon, *Lived-in Architecture*.

The new building: Translating the founders' values into architecture

The new building, designed by *DGJ Architektur*, is the clearest example of intensive co-design. The collaboration began in 2015 during the workshops of the Internationale Bauausstellung (IBA) Heidelberg, where the founders formulated their priorities, compared architectural approaches, and selected a team that aligned with their vision.[1]

Various spatial features of the new building illustrate how the values of the residents and DGJ's design philosophy coincided. The **auditorium (*aula*)** is the clearest example of this: it was a non-negotiable demand from the students, who insisted on a large, open space for collaborative learning, debate, and cultural exchange. This ambition was rooted in the legacy of the historic Collegium Academicum, which served as a central meeting place for students in Heidelberg.[2] The new CA therefore aimed to restore this open, city-oriented role through a dedicated auditorium. DGJ translated this ambition into a central hall that functions as the symbolic and organisational heart of the cooperative (Fig. 40). The **expandable living units** also stemmed from the residents' priorities.[3] Responding to the founders' emphasis on ecological restraint and modest private spaces, DGJ developed lightweight partitions that allow rooms to be enlarged or reduced over time.

Other elements flowed more directly from DGJ's architectural philosophy. **The external access galleries** were introduced to create open, socially oriented circulation zones (Fig. 40). As IBA architect Felix Wohlfart explained, such open circulation systems would never be applied in conventional housing projects because they are considered too open and too intrusive.[4] Their use in the CA was therefore based on the assumption that students as a group would welcome this degree of transparency and interaction. From my perspective, this assumption is striking. It implicitly treats "students" as a homogeneous category with uniform preferences, and ignores the wide variation in comfort levels, privacy needs, and daily rhythms that emerged clearly during my fieldwork. This tension between the architects' expectations and the lived experiences of the residents is further explored in section *3.4.4. Inhabitation of the private and shared living spaces.*

The design process of the new building thus reveals an interplay between the residents' priorities and the architectural vision. The founders shaped the core values, while DGJ determined how these values took spatial form. The auditorium and the expandable residential units stemmed from the students' priorities, whereas the external access galleries were an initiative of the architects.

The renovated building: Co-production through labour

The renovation of the former administration building proceeded differently. Under the leadership of *Gerstner + Hofmeister*, a local firm specialising in energy-efficient modernisation, the process was more constrained by technical requirements and financing conditions. As a result, the residents had less influence on the spatial concept. Their contribution consisted instead of manual labour: installing straw bale walls, assisting with insulation, and participating in construction workshops. This created a different form of co-production – one in which the residents' care and labour were materially anchored in the building.[5]

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[1] Stefan Rees and Felix Wohlfart, interview, January 7, 2026; Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.

[2] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026; *Statutes 2013*, internal document, January 7, 2026.

[3] Henrik Eckhardt, interview, January 12, 2026.

[4] Stefan Rees and Felix Wohlfart, interview, January 7, 2026.

[5] Stefan Rees and Felix Wohlfart, interview, January 7, 2026.

Figure 40 *– Axonometric drawing of the CA, showing the key architectural decisions*

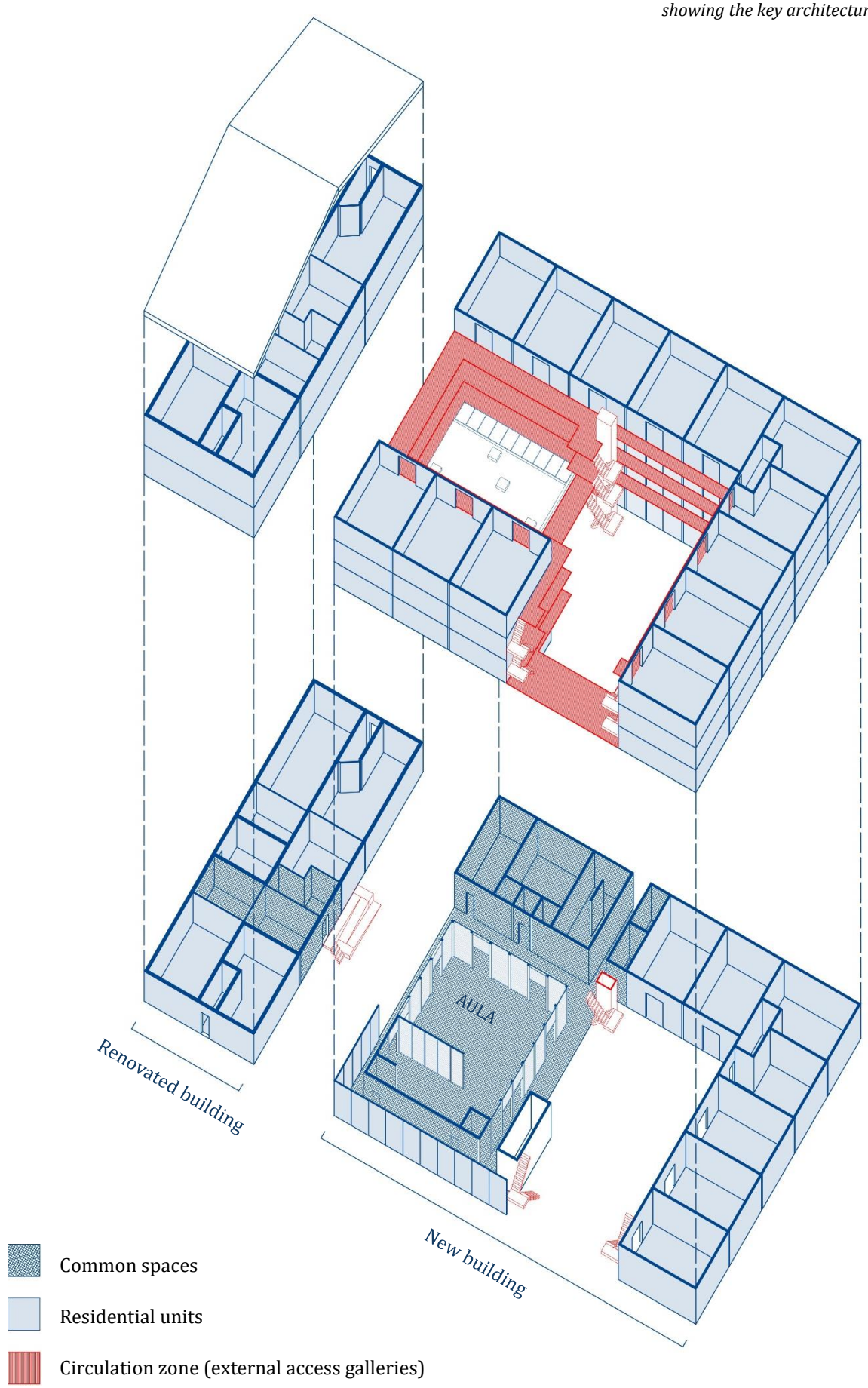




Figure 41 *– Aerial view of the Collegium Academicum in Heidelberg*



Figure 42 *– Photograph of the new building*



Figure 43 *– Photograph of the renovated building*

Positioning: How my perspective developed during the fieldwork

My perspective changed during the two-week fieldwork stay – initially in a shared apartment on the ground floor of the new building, and later in a mixed household in the renovated building. Experiencing the project from within its daily spaces shaped how I interpreted the spatial dynamics of self-management.

In the new building, my first impression was one of vibrancy: constant movement in the hallways, sounds from shared kitchens, and frequent spontaneous encounters created an atmosphere that felt open and socially rich. Interviews soon nuanced this picture. Several residents described feeling overwhelmed by the intensity of the interaction, the acoustic permeability of the building, or the difficulty of withdrawing from communal life. Their stories sharpened my awareness of background noise, visual exposure, and the subtle pressure of constant visibility. The move to the renovated building changed my perception once again. The atmosphere was quieter and more individual.

I also encountered spatial layouts that I had not encountered in other living environments – particularly the proximity of the auditorium to the living spaces, which allowed educational and cultural activities to take place directly within the living environment. This overlap between domestic and institutional life determines how residents experience the boundaries between public and private space.

My positioning therefore developed in parallel with the fieldwork. The residents' stories repeatedly shaped how I observed the building, and my changing perception became part of the analysis process.

Structure of the chapter: Three spatial domains

This chapter analyses how the self-governance structure of the CA manifests itself in everyday spaces. It examines the ongoing dialogue between architecture and rules, between design intentions and lived adaptations, and between cooperative ideals and the frictions of collective life. The division into three themes is the result of my own spatial ethnography. It reflects patterns that emerged through observation and interviews.

1. **Semi-public threshold spaces**

   Semi-public transitional spaces form the intermediate zones – areas situated between circulation, meeting, and daily movement. Their intermediate character makes them highly sensitive to everyday behaviour: they are open enough to invite spontaneous interaction, and close enough to the living environment to generate expectations of care, responsibility, and mutual regulation. These spaces are therefore essential to understanding how self-governance becomes visible in practice.

   Within these zones, I observed two spatial logics: some transitional areas are consciously designed to structure movement and support collective life, while others have been taken over by daily routines. By examining this interplay between **designed and appropriated boundary zones**, it becomes clear how architectural intentions are constantly reinterpreted through use, and how cooperative norms take shape in the small, everyday negotiations that occur at the edges of the building.

2. **Common spaces**

   The aula, the kitchen, the outdoor areas, and the supporting spaces form the core infrastructure through which collective life is organised. These spaces are deliberately

designed to facilitate shared activities, daily routines, and the cultural and organisational ambitions of the cooperative. At the same time, these spaces reveal the tensions inherent in collective living. Their multifunctionality and central location require ongoing negotiations regarding noise, visibility, and the rhythm of shared use.

3. **Inhabitation of the private and shared living spaces in the new building**

   The shared apartments in the new building provide a good insight into how residents deal with privacy, autonomy, and daily living together. The first part examines how students appropriate and personalise their living units, transforming nearly identical floor plans into distinct environments that reflect individual preferences and collective negotiations. The second part explores how residents experience visual and acoustic privacy within an architecture characterised by transparency.

Contribution of the chapter

This chapter shows that self-governance becomes tangible through spatial routines, adjustments, and negotiations. It emerges from the way residents inhabit, adapt, and maintain their environments – and from the frictions that arise when diverse needs converge in a shared space. By analysing these spatial manifestations, the chapter provides an insight into how cooperative living functions in everyday life and identifies lessons for future student cooperatives in Ghent.

For designers, my spatial ethnography shows how design intentions are reinterpreted by daily routines, how residents compensate for a lack of privacy (both visual and acoustic), and how specific spatial configurations promote or hinder collaboration. These insights emphasise that cooperative living is successful by designing environments that enable residents to regulate transparency, define boundaries, and personalise their living units.

THEME 1

SEMI-PUBLIC THRESHOLD AREAS

3.4.2. Semi-public threshold areas

Semi-public threshold areas are the intermediate zones where movement, encounters, and informal governance naturally converge. In institutional and private student housing, these spaces are often minimised because they do not generate rentable square footage and therefore have little exchange value in a financialized housing market.[1]

However, these ambiguous zones – neither fully public nor fully private – are essential to the way students live together, establish norms, and develop a shared sense of responsibility. In the Collegium Academicum, such spaces make the governance model tangible, as they are the places where residents constantly reinterpret their environment. In these small acts of passing by, lingering, or informal use of the space, democratic self-governance takes material form.

A central analytical distinction is the separation between designed and appropriated threshold spaces. **Designed spaces** reflect either the intentions formulated during the co-design process or the architects' own spatial concepts; they materialise the original program and the values that were anchored in the project prior to construction. **Appropriated spaces**, on the other hand, arise from the way residents use, negotiate, and adapt to their environment in daily life. These are the moments when intended functions are reinterpreted, routines redefine spatial meaning, and collective norms are informally renegotiated. Through such continuous adaptations, residents actively participate in shaping their environment, and the built environment evolves in response to daily practice.

This part illustrates how cooperative living emerges through the continuous interplay between architectural intent and resident-driven transformation. Semi-public threshold spaces show how responsibilities are distributed and how the spatial form of the cooperative is constantly reshaped by daily practice.

[1] Aalbers, 'The Variegated Financialization of Housing'.

Designed boundary zones

Entrances and circulation in the renovated building

As you approach the site from Kolbenzeil, the rear of the renovated building immediately feels quieter and more secluded than the rest of the complex (Fig. 44.1). Between the street and the facade lies a modest green area with the 1-to-1 press model, a remnant from the planning phase that now serves as a tangible reminder of the project's origins. The entrances are located along the side facades and appear somewhat hidden (Fig. 44.2).

During my stay on the second floor of the renovated building, I was given only one key: the key to the ground-floor entrance. The stairwell behind this door feels closed off and anonymous, devoid of seating or traces of daily life. But as soon as you reach the hallway on the second floor, the atmosphere changes: shoes, coats, and everyday objects from the three apartments flow into the hallway, making it feel like an extension of the living spaces (Fig. 44.3). The apartment doors are often left ajar, reinforcing this sense of internal permeability. Throughout the entire week, I did not encounter a single closed interior door – neither the apartment door nor the doors to the individual rooms. This sequence – a secure outer threshold followed by open, shared interiors – creates a clear boundary between the renovated and new building.

A nuance to this observation: I lived in only one apartment and always entered through one specific entrance. Other households – for example, families in ground-floor apartments – possibly use their doors differently.

Narrow space between the buildings

Between the two buildings, adjacent to the auditorium, lies a narrow passageway that functions primarily as a service zone (Fig. 44.4). People stop here only briefly to unload cars, carry boxes, or drop off children's luggage. The ramp to the renovated building is paved with rough concrete tiles and does not look like a shared entrance (Fig. 44.5).

Ground floor entrances to the new building

On the west side of the new building, the outdoor space is dominated by bicycles (Fig. 44.6). I am surprised there is no underground bicycle parking; instead, long rows of bikes take up a large portion of the already scarce garden space on the ground floor. The street next to the bicycle parking is lively: I saw children playing in the snow with their parents, older neighbours walking by, and people coming to view the new apartments as potential tenants.

The entrances to the new building are paved with rough concrete tiles, which clearly mark the walking routes. A more public entrance, used by both visitors and residents, runs alongside the Aula. There is also an entrance on the garden side for those arriving by public transport, and another entrance near the bicycle parking area under the bridge.

Figure 44 *– Six photos of the immediate surroundings of the CA*

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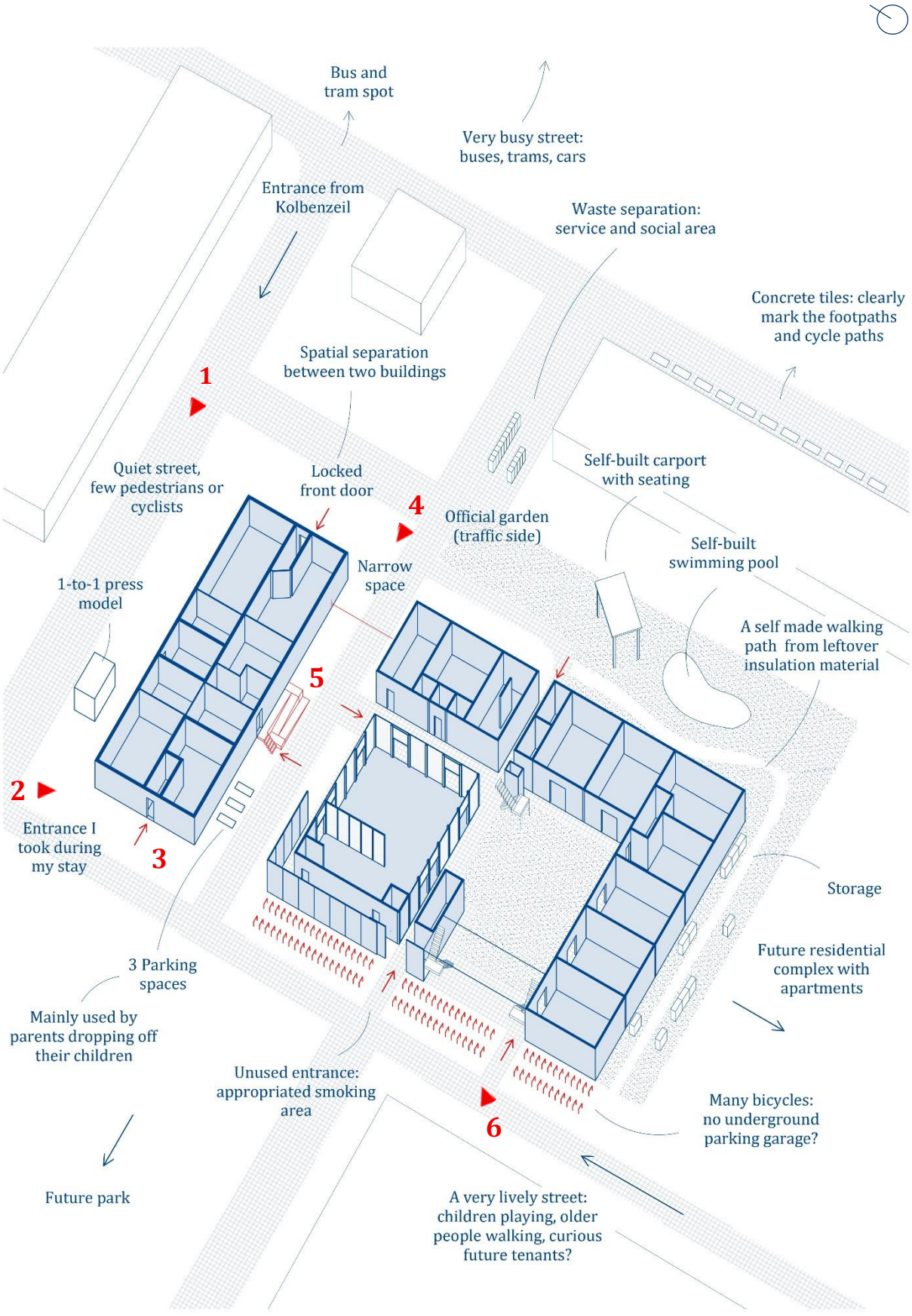
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Figure 45 *- Axonometric drawing of the immediate vicinity of the CA with the numbered, designed boundary zones*



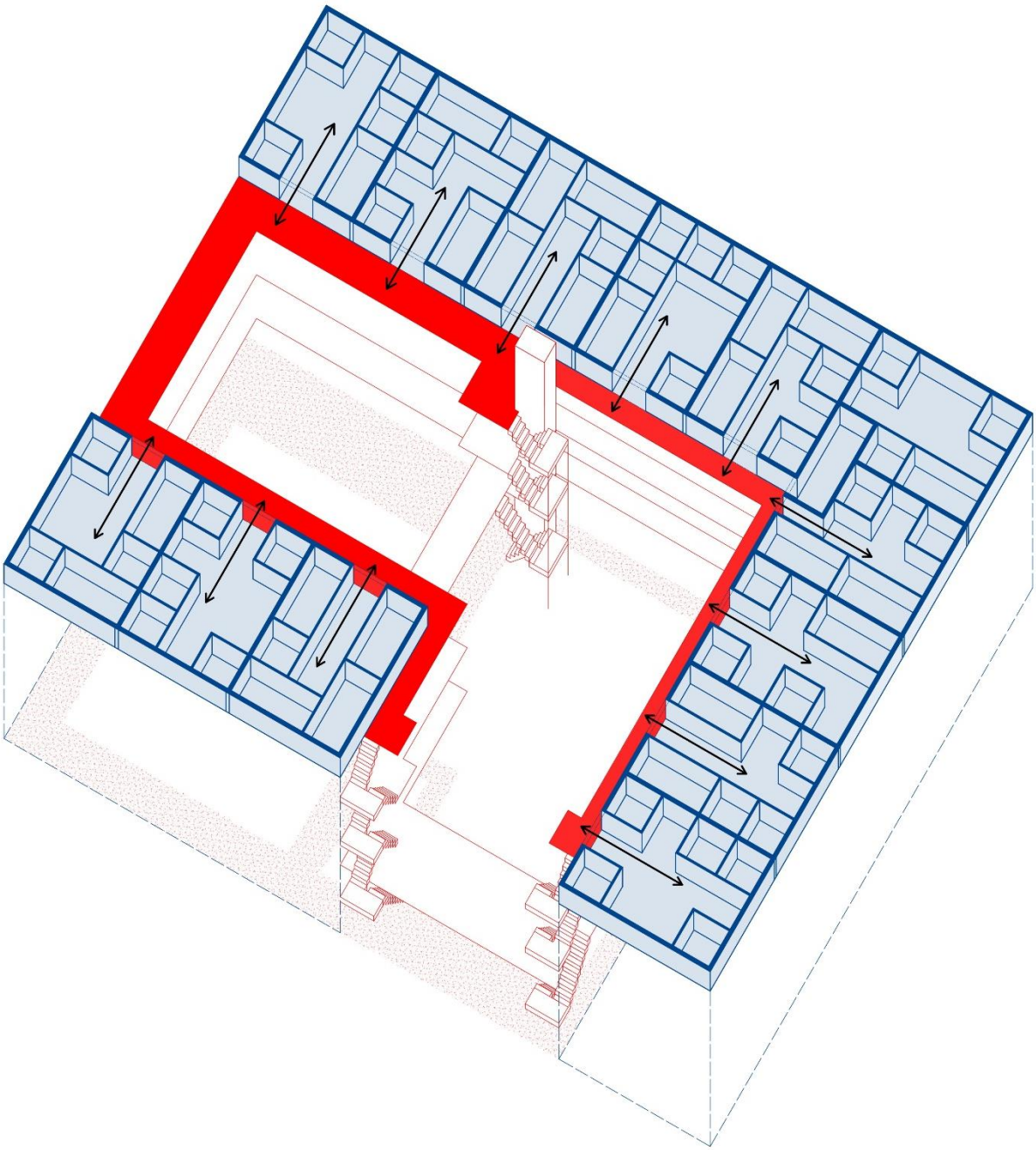
Circulation in the new building

On the ground floor, the shared apartments are situated directly along the pathways. Whoever moves along these paths passes directly by the glass front doors. This direct exposure creates a strong sense of transparency, which contrasts sharply with the more withdrawn entrances of the renovated building. Three central circulation cores connect the pathways to the upper floors. From these cores, residents step directly onto the external access galleries that run along the facades (Fig. 46).

These external access galleries, or *Laubengänge*, form the primary circulation system on the upper floors. During my winter visit, the galleries were relatively quiet, yet traces of daily life were visible: chairs and small tables outside the doors, clothes racks, bicycles, empty trash cans, plants, and even a shopping cart (Fig. 47). On the third floor, a landing with a table and chairs serves as an improvised terrace (Fig. 47). These objects demonstrate how residents also use the galleries for storage, informal gatherings, and moments of rest. The architects deliberately designed these galleries to encourage interaction and turn movement through the building into a social experience.

The glass entrance doors further enhance the building's transparency. Walking along the galleries, it is easy to look into the kitchens and living rooms of the shared apartments, and the deliberate absence of locks - a choice made by the residents - reinforces this permeability (Fig. 46). Movement in and out of the apartments remains fluid, and activity in the surrounding spaces was virtually always visible. While this openness creates a sense of constant presence, it also limits residents' ability to control their own visibility. Some respond to this by partially covering their doors or windows to restore their privacy. This dynamic is discussed in more detail in section *3.4.4. Inhabitation of the private and shared living spaces.*

Figure 46 *- Axonometric drawing of the new building, with an illustration of the circulation paths and their transparency*



Shared apartments (*Wohngemeinschaften*)

External access galleries (*Laubengänge*)

Transparency
→ Glass front doors

Figure 47 *- Six photos of the external access galleries of the new building*



Synthesis: The designed boundary areas

In both buildings, the threshold spaces reveal how the architects have incorporated specific assumptions regarding community, privacy, and circulation into the built environment. These spaces were shaped by a spatial program that predetermines how people enter, meet, and retreat.

In the renovated building, the architecture creates a clear difference between inside and outside. The controlled entrance and the open interior space form a model of social interaction based on trust without exposure, supporting residents who prefer quieter, more autonomous routines. The threshold spaces thus stabilise the separation between the renovated building and the more public rhythms of the cooperative.

The new building follows a contrasting logic. Here, openness is built into the circulation system itself. The external access galleries – deliberately added by the architects – function as elevated public walkways that run directly alongside the glass doors of the shared apartments. This design integrates visibility, permeability, and interaction into daily movement.

Key insights for the development of a student cooperative in Ghent (Chapter 4)

** Selective use of open circulation: Apply open galleries only where social contact is desired; use privacy-protecting layouts elsewhere*

** Layered entrance: A sheltered, screened entrance followed by open interiors increases comfort and reduces exposure*

** Integrated bicycle infrastructure: Bicycle parking at street level dominates the outdoor space; underground or covered bicycle parking is recommended*

Appropriated boundary zones

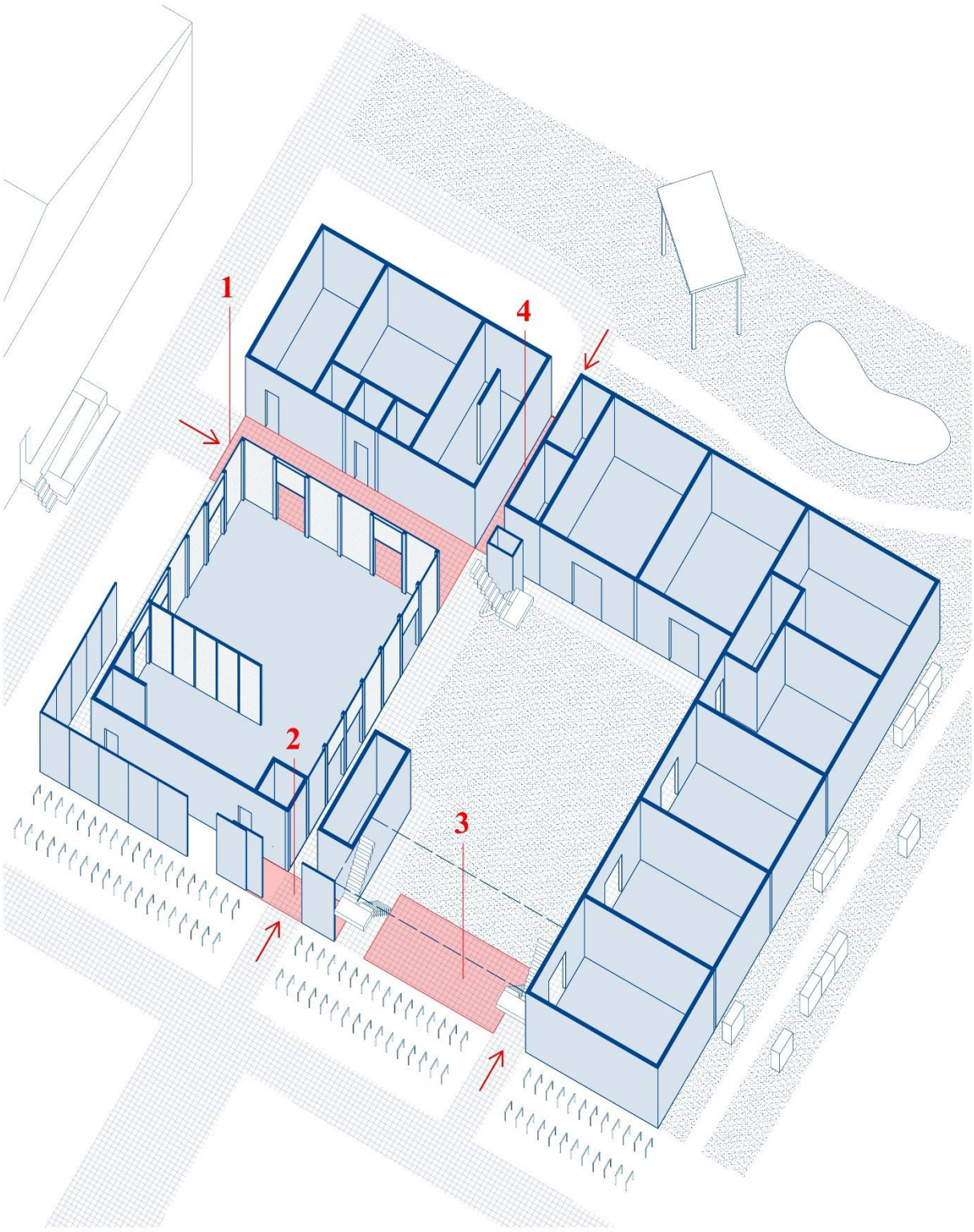
The threshold areas surrounding the new building demonstrate how residents actively redefine the space through everyday actions. Originally intended as neutral circulation or service zones, these places have been reinterpreted, repurposed, or contested through their use. Their meaning lies in the social, organisational, and emotional practices that develop within them. Three different forms of appropriation emerge throughout the site:

- **Appropriation for self-management:** Circulation zones become instruments for coordinating collective life: displaying maintenance plans, storing materials, or communicating internal rules. These practices transform boundary zones into informal governance structures where responsibilities, norms, and values are made visible.
- **Appropriation as negotiation zone:** Some spaces become arenas where tensions regarding noise pollution, privacy, or coexistence are managed. Improvised signalling, behavioural expectations, and redefinition of space (e.g., prohibiting loitering, rerouting walking paths) demonstrate how residents collectively and continuously regulate conflicts.
- **Appropriation for intimacy and social interaction:** Some areas are developing into places to linger, smoke, play, or relax. With only minimal infrastructure such as shelter, lighting, or simple seating, these areas become informal environments where residents spend time together, build relationships, and endure the emotional rhythms of daily life.

The appropriated boundary areas make self-governance spatially visible by revealing the cooperative's capacity to adapt, renegotiate, and continuously reinvent its spatial organisation through daily use. These practices reflect Lefebvre's concept of appropriation: the lived, affective reclaiming of space according to the needs of the inhabitants.[1] They also align with autogestion, as Purcell understood it as the everyday implementation of collective self-management whereby residents organise, maintain, and regulate their environment.[2] According to Boudon, these boundary zones show how the architecture of the CA is completed by use: through the routines, negotiations, and appropriations that constantly reshape the built environment.[3]

[1] Purcell, 'Possible Worlds', 147–50.
[2] Purcell, 'Possible Worlds', 147–50.
[3] Boudon, *Lived-in Architecture*.

Figure 48 *- Axonometric drawing of the new building with the numbered, appropriated boundary zones*



1. Public entrance
2. Smoking area
3. Ping pong area
4. Entrance along the garden

1. Public entrance

The entrance between the Aula and the public restrooms serves as the main entrance to the new building. The space is divided into two separate zones. On one side is a lower concrete corridor with a clear functional purpose: *Gemüsekultur Heidelberg* delivers seasonal vegetables here weekly (Fig. 50.4). I lived in an apartment with a membership card, and my housemates praised the convenience – fresh produce was delivered directly to the door – encouraging them to experiment with seasonal dishes. This corridor is also filled with everyday objects: shopping carts, a drying rack, a table with two chairs, brooms, posters, wooden panels, and a purple-painted cargo bike (Fig. 50.2, Fig. 50.6).

The opposite side is elevated and is illuminated by a glass skylight. This section serves as the "official entrance": it contains the mailboxes for all 46 shared apartments, is connected to the public restrooms, and is directly accessible from the stairs and the elevator (Fig. 50.5). Posters aimed at external visitors mark the space as publicly accessible and position it as a threshold between the cooperative and the outside world.

This entrance connects the narrow passageway between the old and new building directly to the heart of the project and runs along the glass facade of the Aula. You might expect a constant bustle here, but a prominent sign declares:

"Do not chill here because of the noise volume, be considerate of your/our neighbours".

The sign is strategically placed at the beginning of the entrance, facing the renovated building (Fig. 50.1). It serves as a clear signal that proactive efforts are being made to reduce noise pollution from activities in the Aula (the recurring conflicts about noise pollution will be addressed later). Situated between residential blocks, this space embodies tension: a natural meeting point and comfort zone for the residents of the new building, yet overshadowed by conflicts regarding noise pollutions between those seeking rest in their bedrooms and those seeking community in the shared spaces. It is a zone, where possibilities for coming together merge with enforced constraints of living together.

In this entrance, two forms of appropriation become visible. First, the space is **appropriated as a zone of self-management**: vegetable deliveries, shared storage, and public communication transform a simple passageway into an informal organisational centre. At the same time, it becomes a **negotiation zone** where residents regulate tensions regarding coexistence. The improvised sign shows how the community collectively redefines the space in response to conflict, turning a potential meeting place into a controlled passageway.

Figure 49 *– Main photo of the public entrance*



Figure 50 *- Six photos of the public entrance*

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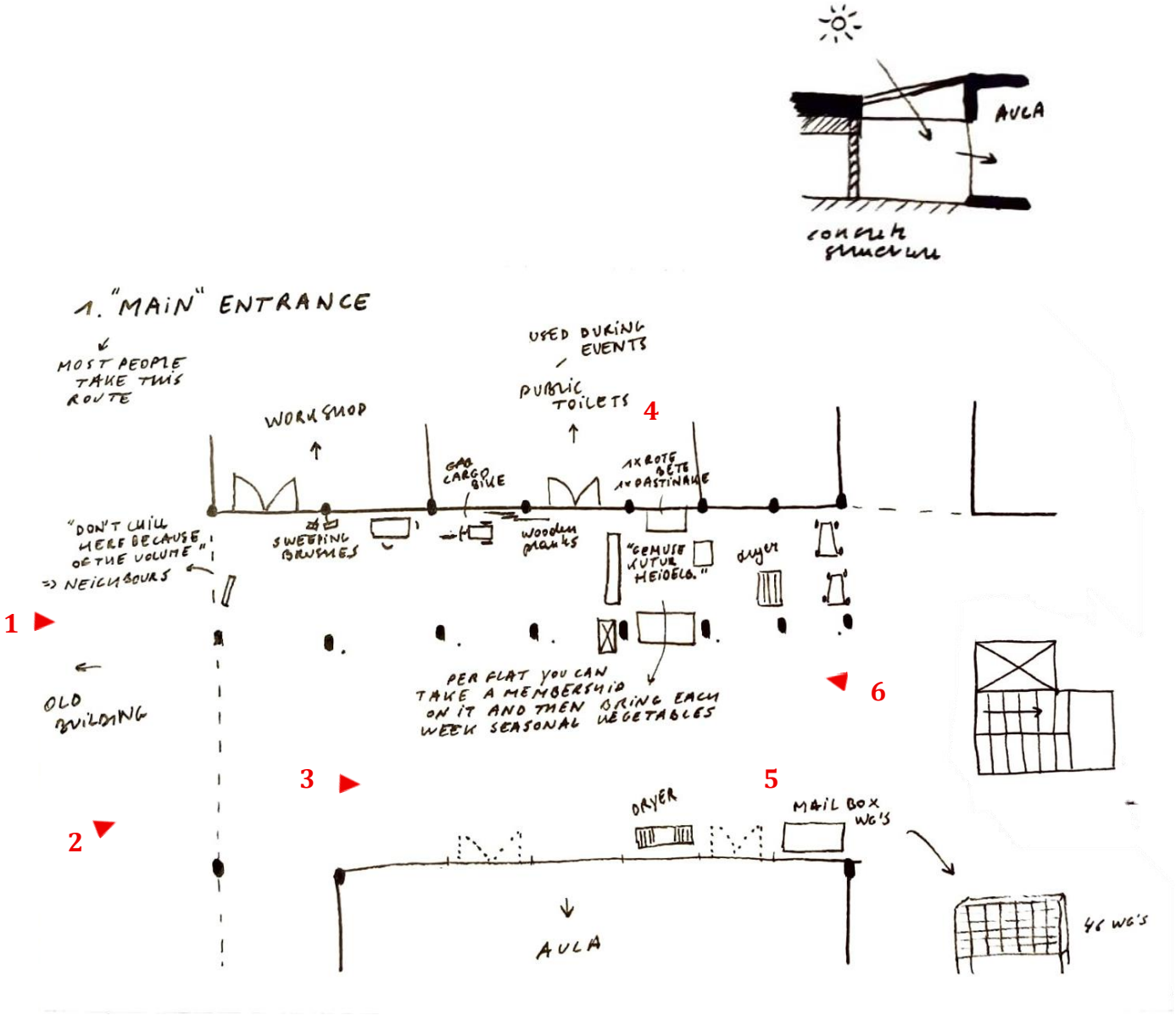
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Figure 51 *– Ethnographic sketch of the public entrance, made during the field visit*



2. Smoking area

On the west side of the new building, there are theoretically two entrances, marked by concrete paths, but only the entrance next to the ping-pong table is actually used. The other entrance is entirely dedicated to smoking, a place to linger rather than a passageway, as evidenced by the benches placed between the path and the stairs, one of which even extends halfway across the paving stones to discourage quick passage (Fig. 53.1-2).

During my stay, this space remained constantly vibrant, rarely empty, even on icy winter days: residents wrapped in warm clothing, drinking hot coffee from their apartments, chatting animatedly with blankets over them. This is a space of encounter and social lingering. I also noticed that only the external walkaway on the ground floor has lighting, the other hallways on the upper floors do not have these (Fig. 53.3). I assume that it was in the initial design already the idea that these areas would be used a lot. The infrastructure, with concrete tiles and lighting, is basic and creates the opportunity to linger and create social bonds. Nina emphasises the appeal of this space when describing her daily route from the bike shed to her apartment,

> *Nina (CA Resident): On the way, I pass the smoking area – that is a very social place where people hang out. Sometimes I stop there and chat for a bit before going upstairs to my flat, even when I am still carrying my backpack from studying.*[1]

This area, situated directly next to the kitchen, serves as an informal extension of the communal living space. When I attended the Sunday language course, I often saw teachers go to this zone for a short break. Enclosed by a staircase, a kitchen wall, and sliding wooden facade panels, the room offers a subtle sense of security and seclusion (Fig. 53.5-6).

The smoking area is a clear example of **appropriation for intimacy and social interaction**. A space originally designed as an entrance has been reinterpreted as a social sanctuary where residents linger, relax, and build relationships.

[1] Nina, interview, October 16, 2025.

Figure 52 *– Main photo of the smoking area*

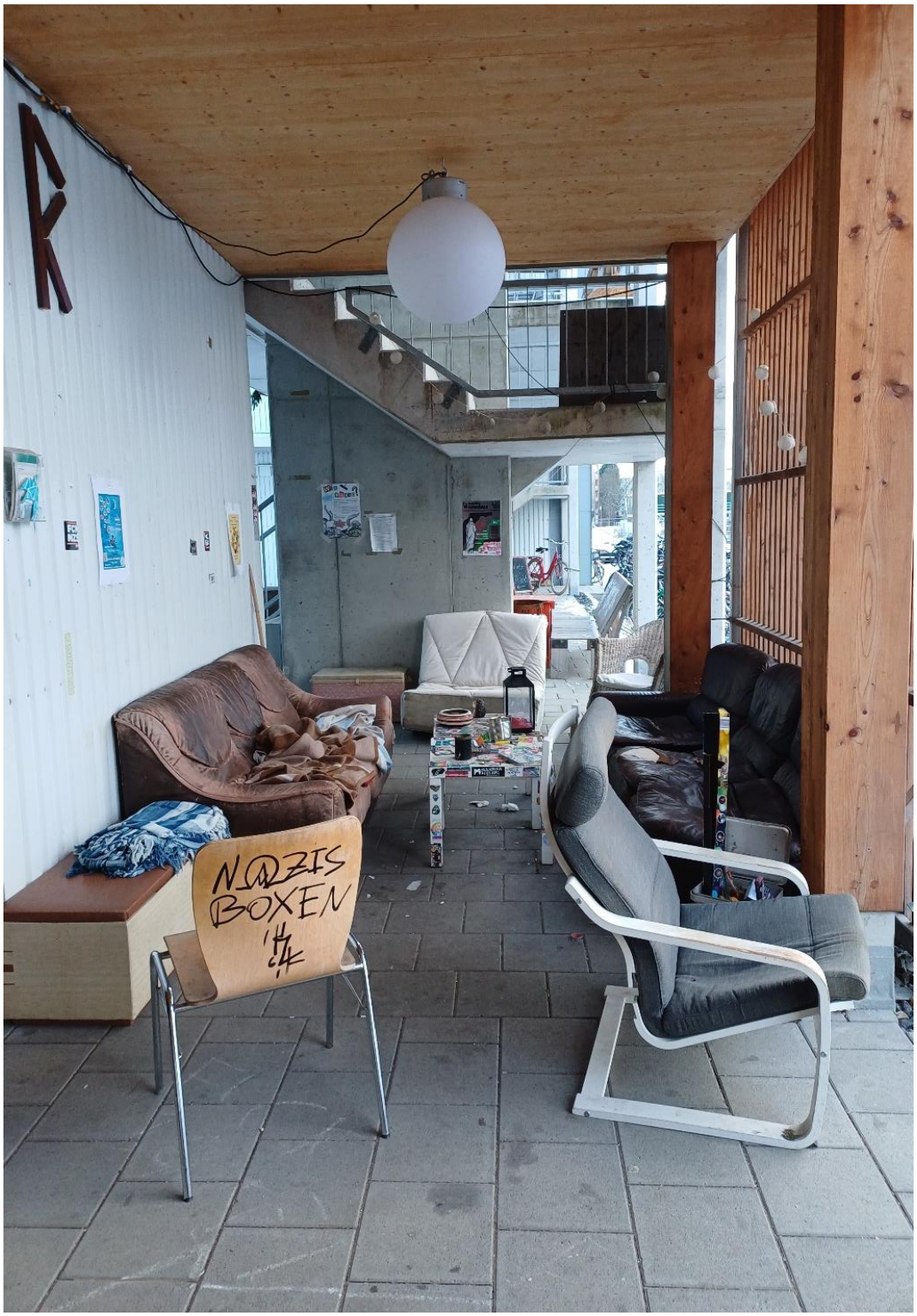
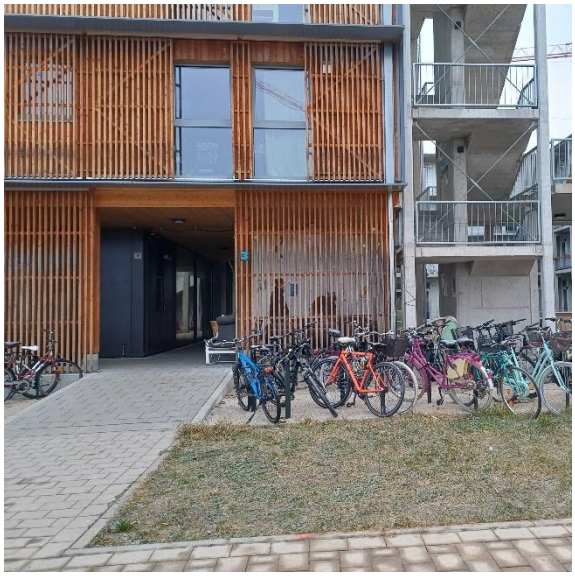
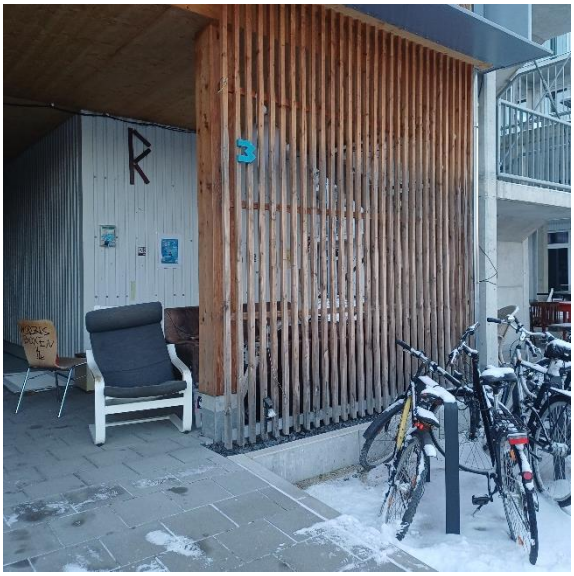


Figure 53 *– Six photos of the smoking area*

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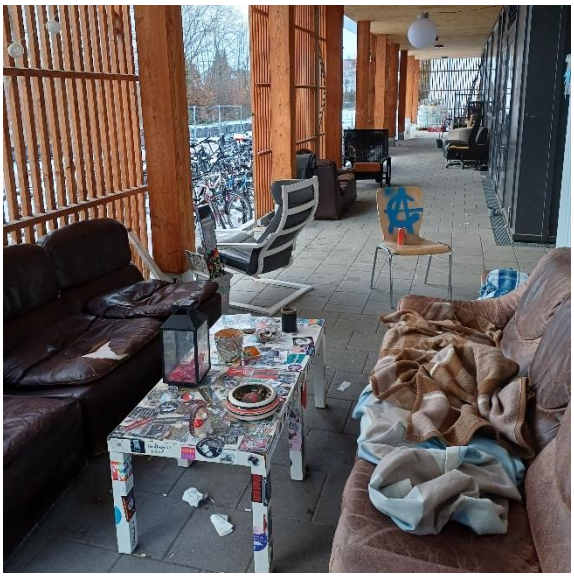




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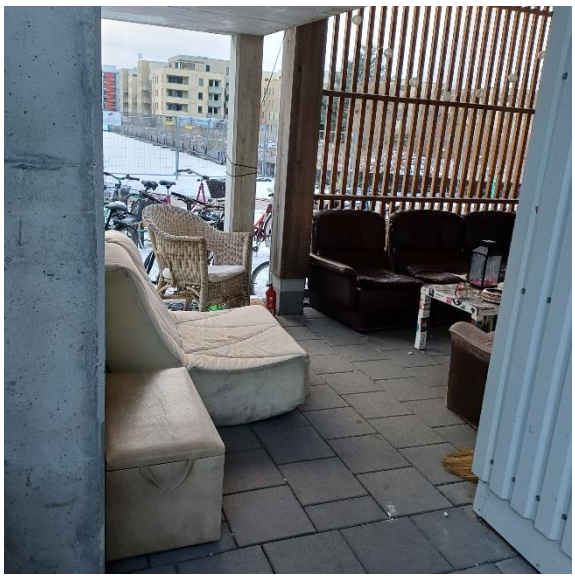
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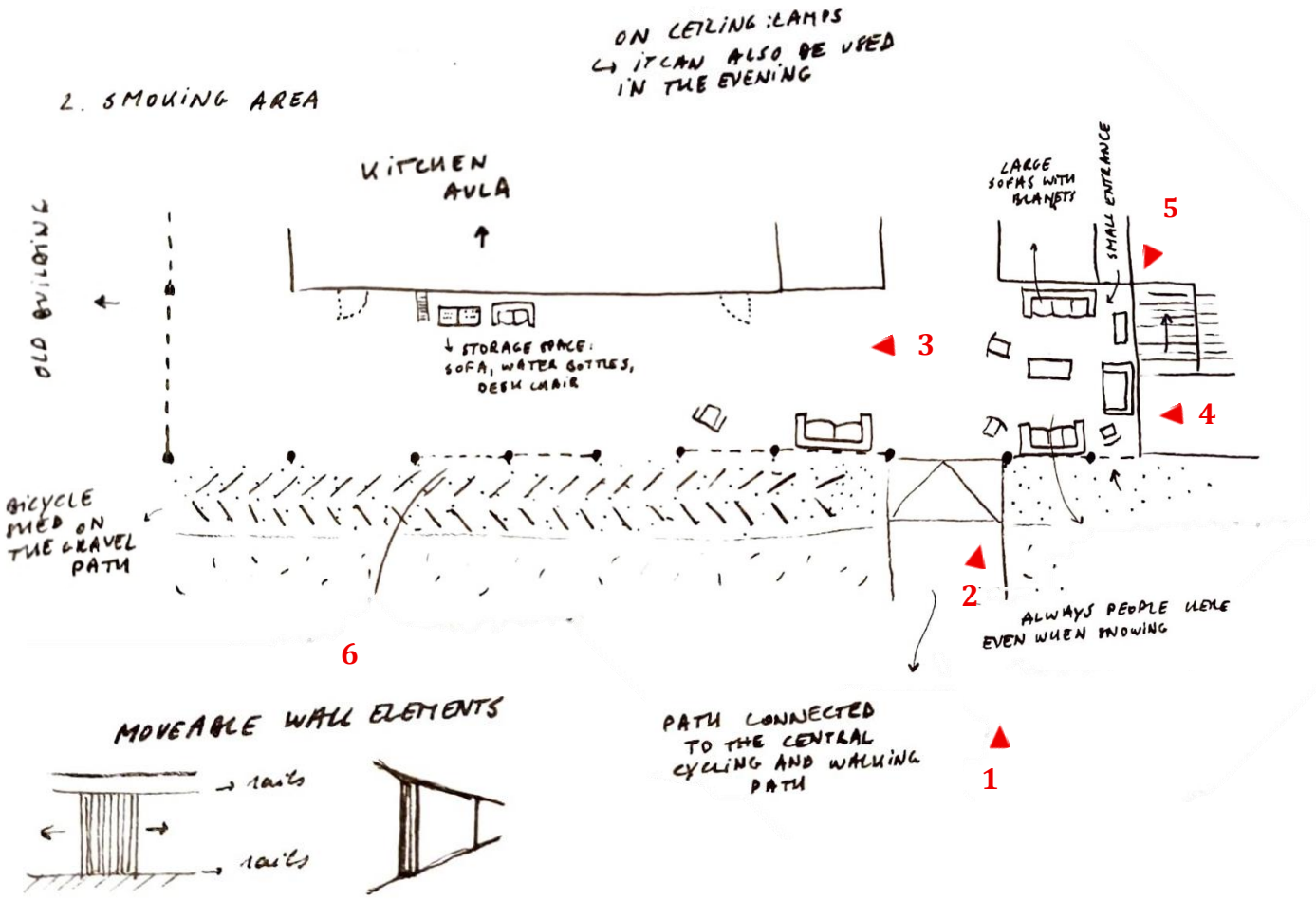
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Figure 54 *- Ethnographic sketch of the smoking area, made during the field visit*



3. Ping-pong area

The ping-pong area is located on the west side of the project, beneath a bridge connecting two parts of the new building and flanked by two staircases (Fig. 56.1). Wooden planks are stacked under one of the stairs, and next to the other stand two benches built by the residents (Fig. 56.3-4). Even on freezing, snowy days, people gathered there: they pulled gloves over their numb fingers, used the planks as makeshift rackets, and laughed and played despite the cold (Fig. 56.5). Their determination to play, regardless of the weather, shows how strong a social anchor point this place has become.

The area is spatially defined by the surrounding walkways (Fig. 56.2). The surrounding paths guide movement along the edges rather than through the centre: residents arrive by bicycle, park by the bridge, and continue their way along the side paths, but no one walks straight through the play zone. This creates a natural buffer that keeps the activity visible yet undisturbed. The bridge above reinforces this barrier character. It shelters the space from rain and snow, making it an attractive place to linger. What was originally a transition zone between traffic routes has been redesigned as a semi-protected social enclave where public visibility and shelter come together.

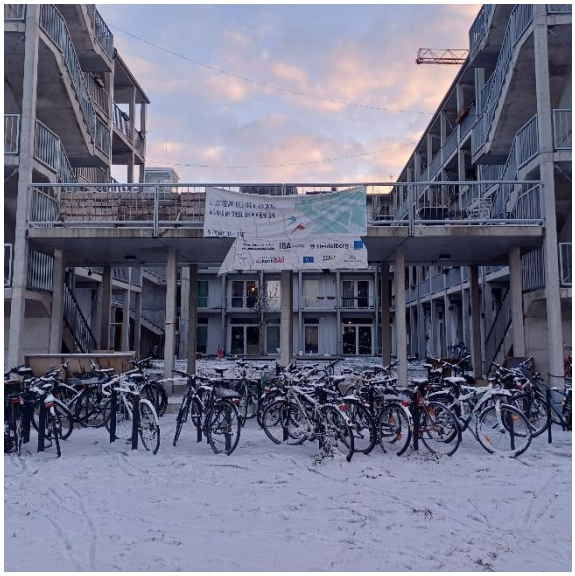
The ping-pong zone is a clear example of **appropriation for intimacy and social interaction**. I assume that the space under the bridge was never consciously designed as a functional component in itself, but rather arose as a byproduct of the terrace construction. Residents have reinterpreted this residual zone as a lively meeting place where play takes centre stage.

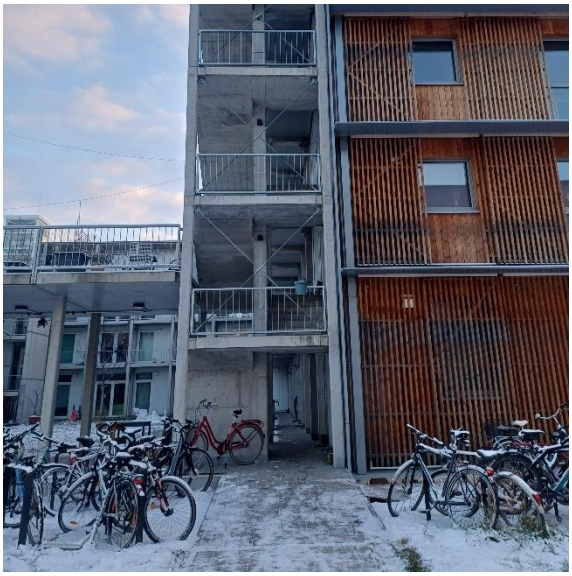
Figure 55 *– Main photo of the ping-pong area*



Figure 56 *– Six photos of the ping-pong area*

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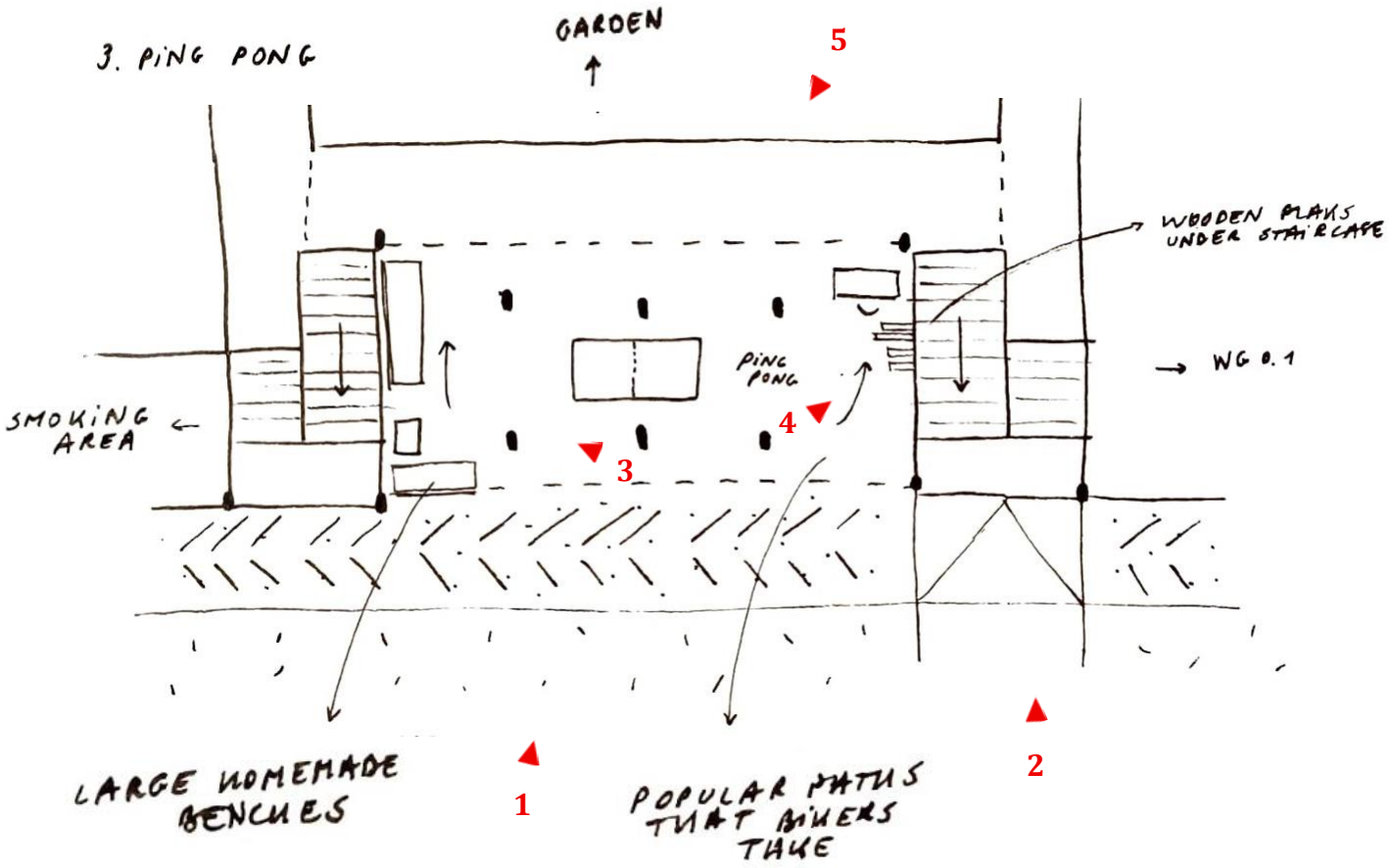


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Figure 57 *- Ethnographic sketch of the ping-pong area, made during the field visit*



4. Entrance along the garden

The garden-side entrance to the new complex serves as a convenient passage for residents who use the nearby tram or bus stop. It does not feel like a place to linger, but rather a place for quick access to essential information, which is reinforced by the absence of seating (Fig. 59.1).

Immediately upon entering, to the left of the entrance, mind maps of the General Assembly of October 8, 2025, hang on the wall, informally outlining the core values and tensions such as *Gemeinschaft* (Community), *Umgang mit Konflikten* (Conflict management), *Bildung* (Education), and *Hierarchien (*Hierarchies*)* (Appendix B4). These visualisations reveal the internal structure of CA and openly acknowledge the frictions inherent in cooperative life, utilising the entrance as a space for reflection and collective learning (Fig. 59.2).

On the right, the maintenance plan is prominently displayed, with an overview of all fourteen clusters and the associated monthly tasks (Fig. 59.4). Its visibility is remarkably effective. I was standing there once when two residents walked past, and one of them said, mid-step:

> *"Oh right, our monthly task – what was that again?"*

This daily interaction reinforces maintenance as a shared responsibility and underlines that the preservation of the building depends on the cooperation of everyone.

Next to the plan stand two cabinets: one for leftover food, bearing the inscriptions *Essen für Alle* (Food for everyone) and *Fairteiler Regeln* (Sharing rules), and another serving as a giveaway corner containing clothing, oil, and stools (Fig. 59.5-6). The rules for food sharing emphasise awareness, care, and waste reduction, viewing the pantry as a tool for promoting collective ethics.

This entrance is primarily **appropriated as a zone for self-management**. The mind maps, maintenance plan, the food cupboard and the giveaway corner transform a passageway into an informal governance interface where responsibilities, values, and internal rules are made visible. At the same time, the space acquires a pedagogical dimension: residents are constantly confronted with reminders of collective ethics and the tensions of living together.

Figure 58 *– Main photo of the entrance along the garden*



Figure 59 – *Six photos of the entrance along the garden*

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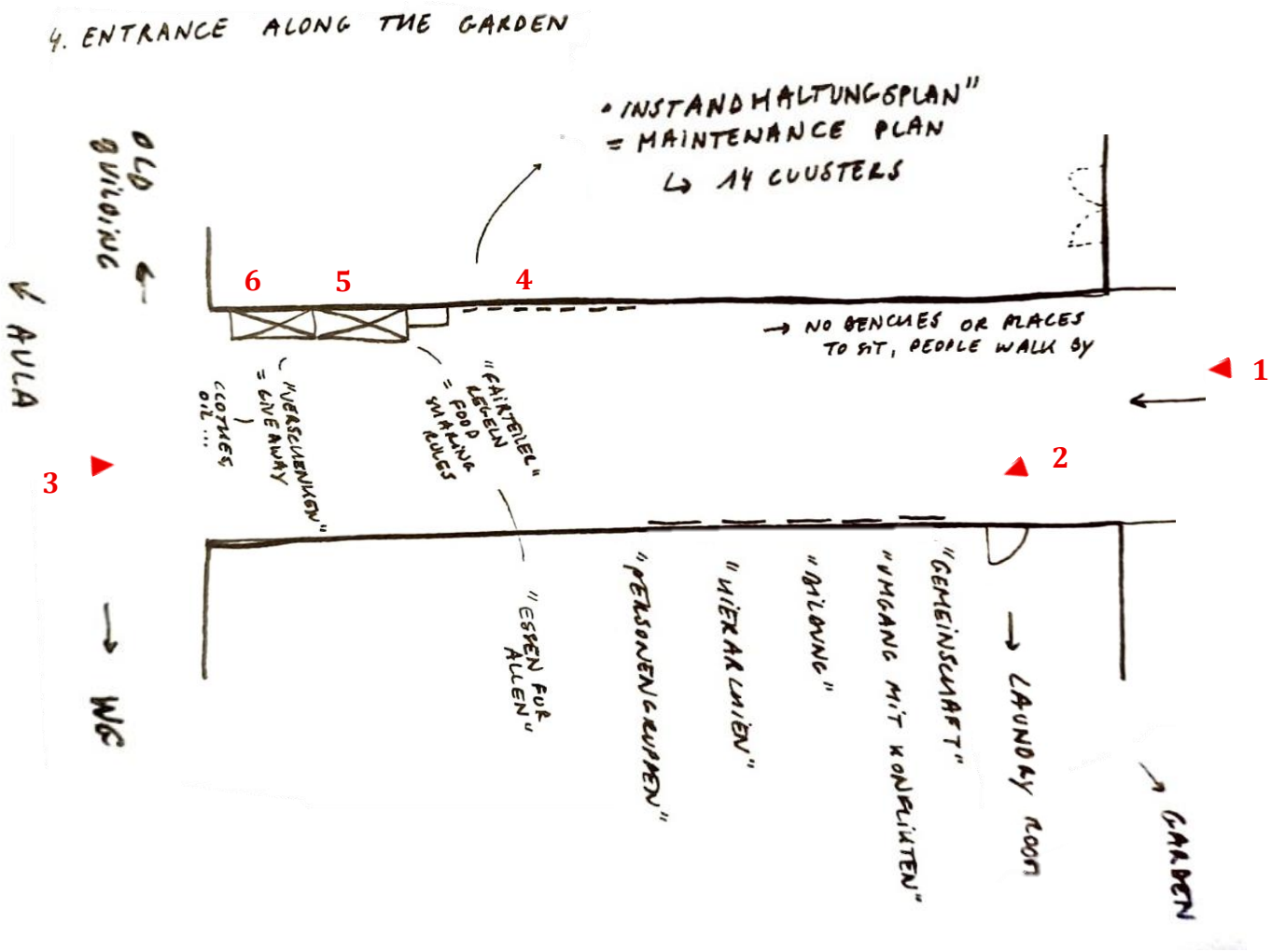
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Figure 60 *- Ethnographic sketch of entrance along the garden, made during the field visit*



Back regions

Goffman distinguishes between front regions – performative spaces that enforce politeness and decorum for the audience – and back regions, adjacent to the front zones, which function as service areas where routine tasks and informal behaviour can take place out of sight.[1]

Spread across the ground floor are various spaces that serve as informal service zones. On the north side, the outer corridors contain benches, tables, and chairs intended for the Aula, where public events require a neat and orderly appearance (Fig. 61.1). The corridor on the west side, parallel to the communal kitchen, is crammed with empty bottles, chairs, and other items temporarily stored out of sight (Fig. 61.2). Behind the south facade, piles of earth, bricks, concrete slabs, stones, and hemp panels form another informal storage zone (Fig. 61.3). The spaces function as practical back regions where the cooperative's daily maintenance can take place.

Moreover, the trash cans along the curb have become an informal meeting place that functions as a social threshold. Residents take out their trash, pause for a moment, and often strike up a conversation between the bins. The spot is far from comfortable, yet it invites lingering because everyone passes by. The behind-the-scenes atmosphere that Goffman describes does not remain hidden but merges with the relational infrastructure of the cooperative.

Remarkably, the cooperative ownership actively tolerates the visibility of these informal service zones. Because the residents manage the building collectively, they need flexible, easily accessible spaces for ongoing maintenance, repairs, and improvisation. In institutional or private student housing, such messy storage spaces would typically be hidden. At the CA, however, these spaces are accepted as part of the daily reality of self-governance. Their presence reflects a characteristic aspect of cooperative life: the integration of daily activities, care, and maintenance into the spatial structure of the project itself. In this sense, the informal service zones illustrate **appropriation as self-management**: residents use, adapt, and organise these spaces to sustain the daily functioning of the cooperative, making residual spaces essential components of collective life.

[1] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

Figure 61 *– Three photos of the back regions*



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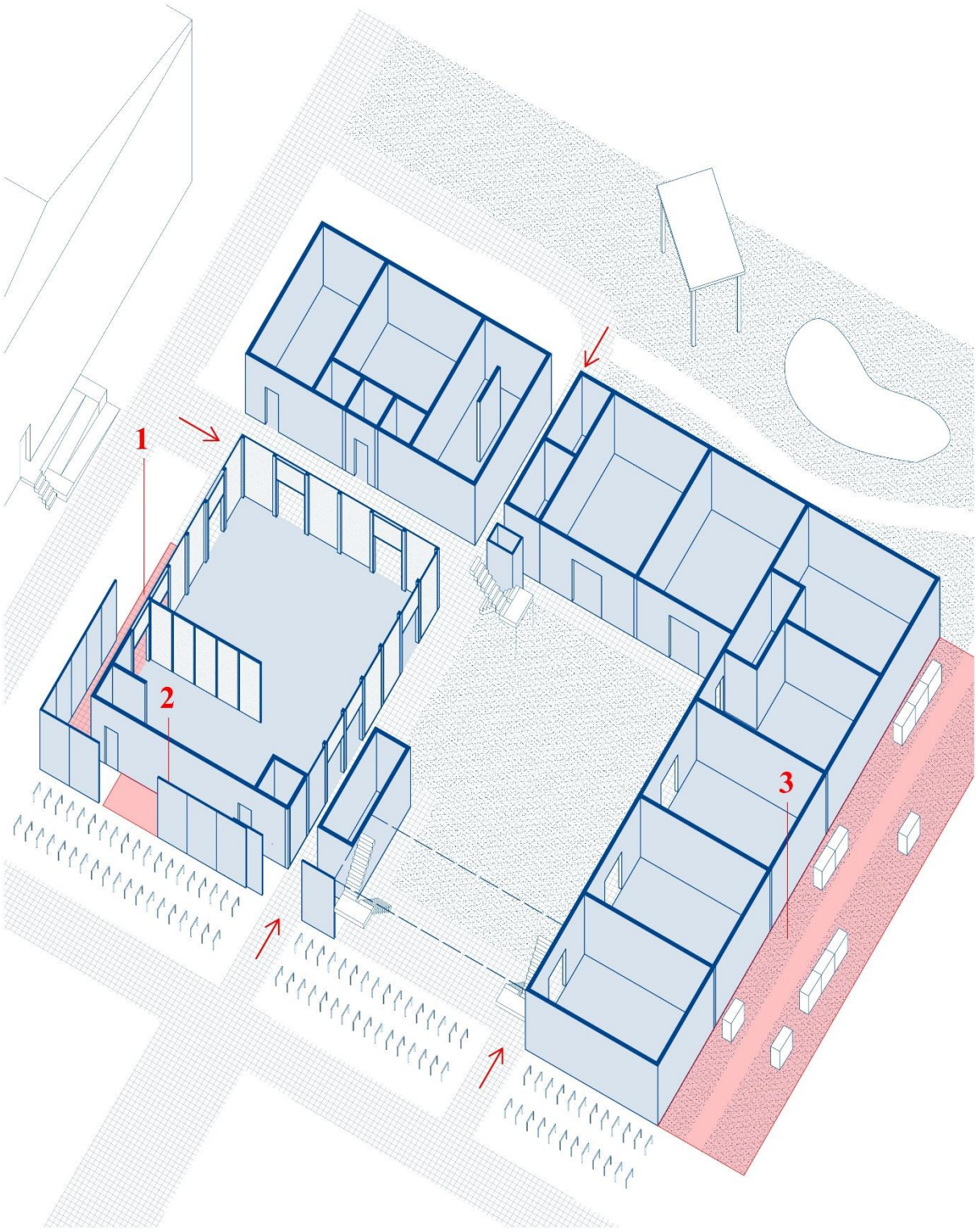


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Figure 62 *- Axonometric drawing of the new building with the numbered back regions*



1. North corridor
2. West corridor
3. Storage

Synthesis: The appropriated boundary areas

The appropriation of the boundary zones illustrates how cooperative ownership concretely shapes self-management in everyday spatial practice. The unfinished rawness (bare concrete tiles, no furniture) is not a defect, but a stimulus for autonomy: students reprogram them amidst changing needs, conflicts, and desires. A pattern emerges across the various examples: appropriation always occurs at circulation points, where flows of people, goods, and information intersect. These spaces are situated "between" primary functions – neither fully private, nor fully public, nor purely circulation, nor purely residential – and this intermediate position makes them buffer zones where governance, care, and social interaction are practiced in small but meaningful ways.

Within these zones, the three forms of appropriation become spatially visible. **The appropriation of space for self-management** is most evident at the garden entrance, where the project's internal ethics are anchored. These practices align with the idea of prefigurative pedagogy, in which residents learn self-management through daily routines.[1] Newcomers and visitors are confronted with this labour and with the tensions the community grapples with, thereby making the cooperative's organisational culture spatially visible.

The appropriation of space as a negotiation zone emerges where tensions regarding noise pollution, privacy, or living together need to be regulated. The public entrance demonstrates how spatial self-management requires constant vertical conflict regulation from CA's executive boards and horizontal conflict management among individuals. The eye-catching sign visualises how noise pollution affects spatial behaviour. The students, as co-users and administrators, use simple means to show the residents of the old building, but also to students of the new building that are disturbed by the noise, that they are taking responsibility.

The smoking area and the ping-pong zone are clear examples of **appropriation for intimacy and social interaction**. In both places, the minimal infrastructure – concrete tiles, basic lighting, and the shelter of the bridge – creates ideal conditions for lingering, playing, and chatting informally. Their everyday appearance combines two distinctive characteristics: clutter – the material traces of use such as benches, shelves, or bottles – and informality – the procedural openness that allows for spontaneous gatherings and an unregulated rhythm of use. Clutter indicates that these spaces are actively used, while informality ensures there is no fixed script for their use.

At the same time, several of these zones function as Goffmanian back areas.[2] In these semi-hidden spaces, the polished public face of the cooperative recedes into the background, and the practical, messy infrastructure of daily life becomes visible. Residents smoke, relax after meetings, or share their frustrations; teachers slip away during language classes; neighbours chat while taking out the trash. These small encounters are important because they connect daily life with participation: informal conversations often resurface later in plenary debates, and behind-the-scenes routines – such as waste processing or temporary storage – create social bonds that strengthen the cooperative's cohesion. In this sense, back regions function as relational infrastructures that sustain both the emotional and organisational life of the project.

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[1] Schwittay, 'Prefigurative Pedagogies'.

[2] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

Finally, these appropriated boundary zones demonstrate how architecture, design, and ownership collaborate yet play fundamentally different roles. The architecture provides the physical framework – circulation pathways, sheltered nooks, and residual spaces. Design decisions such as lighting, paving, and openings add basic functionalities that make these areas usable. However, it is the legal and financial ownership of the cooperative that enables residents to freely appropriate these spaces, without fear of sanctions or intervention by external management. In the CA, collective ownership enables a form of spatial production based on use value, self-management, and everyday appropriation, demonstrating that ownership ultimately determines which forms of life can unfold.

In summary, these areas demonstrate how a cooperative housing project sustains itself through small acts of spatial negotiation, care, and social interaction.

Key insights for the development of a student cooperative in Ghent (Chapter 4)

** Minimalist intermediate spaces: Small, unadorned zones that invite residents to furnish and customise them according to their own wishes*

** Visible management interfaces: Spatial cues and organisational boards that maintain cooperative values and responsibilities in the daily routine*

** Sheltered outdoor spaces: Semi-covered outdoor zones that naturally evolve into informal meeting places*

** Freedom of use without overregulation: Ownership and management structures must enable residents to personalise and reconfigure shared spaces without fear of sanctions*

THEME 2

COMMON SPACES

3.4.3. Common spaces

The common spaces of the CA – the auditorium, kitchen, outdoor spaces, and supporting spaces – form the infrastructural core of collective life. They bring together cultural activities, daily routines, and self-governance, while simultaneously offering varying degrees of visibility, intimacy, and social expectations. However, these spaces also reveal the frictions that arise when diverse resident groups share a highly flexible environment. By examining how these spaces are used, discussed, and adapted in practice, it becomes clear how the democratic ethos of the cooperative takes spatial form and where architectural constraints begin to put daily life under pressure.

Auditorium (*Aula*)

The Aula forms the symbolic and spatial heart of the project. Its realisation was a non-negotiable requirement of the founders, and the architects translated this priority into a large central hall. As the only communal space in both the new and the renovated building without a fixed program, the hall appears to have been deliberately designed to serve a dual function: a venue for cultural events and a central place for daily gatherings, communal meals, and informal meetings.

The following section describes the spatial layout and daily functions of the Aula, before analysing how its scale, transparency, and location create tensions within the cooperative, particularly in relation to mixed ownership structures and the coexistence of different resident groups.

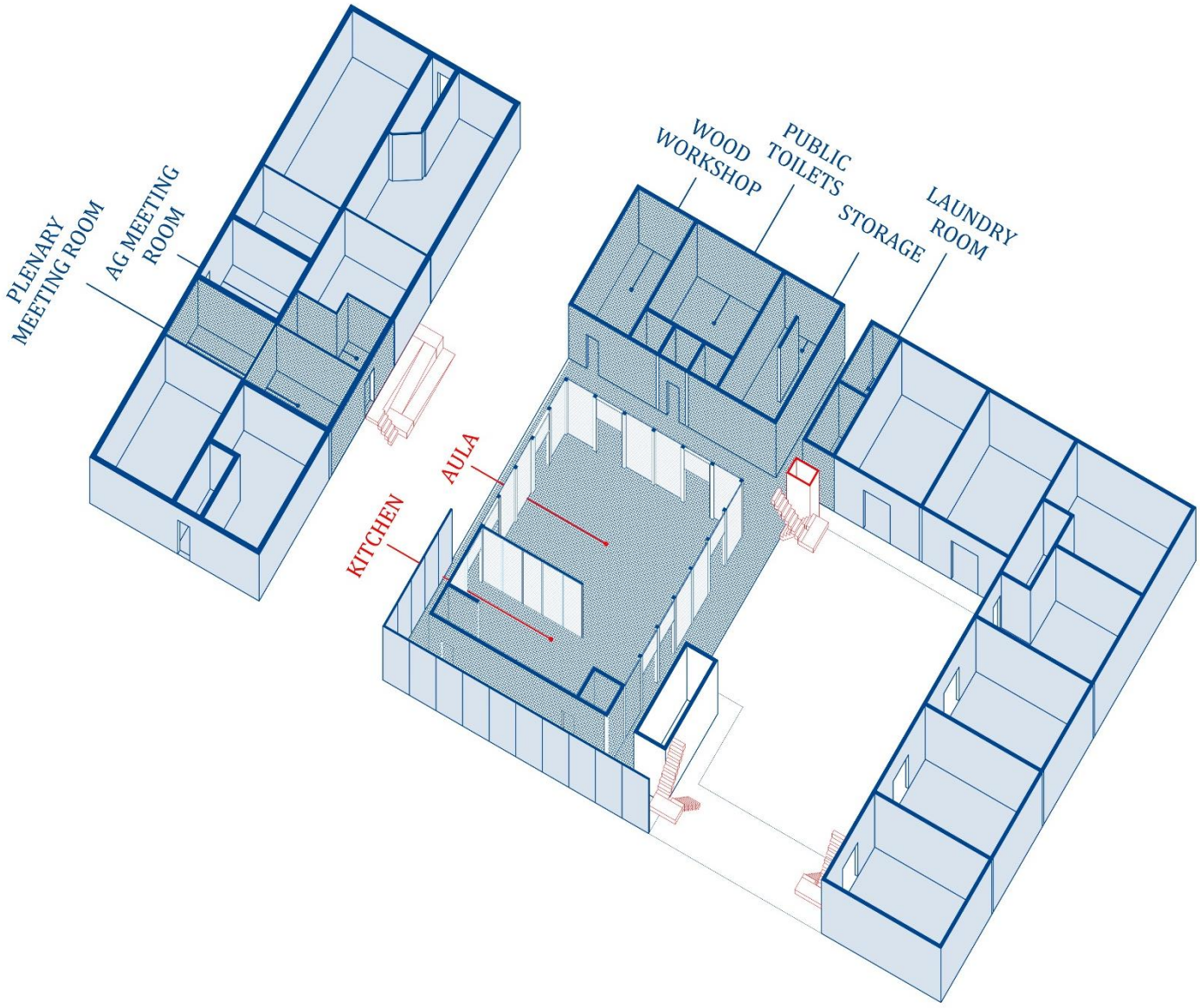
Design intentions and daily use

The Aula consists of an open hall of 330 m^2 that is almost entirely enclosed by glass, with an adjacent kitchen separated by a transparent wall. The hall contains virtually no fixed furniture – benches, tables, and coat racks are all movable – allowing the space to be adapted for various purposes. This high degree of flexibility confirms that multifunctionality was a central design intention.

Various internal activities take place: the hobby evening on Thursday where residents share skills, tango on Friday evening, and larger events such as the Winter Ball on Saturday. The space is also used by external groups for theatre classes, exhibitions, film screenings, and university-related gatherings. These activities are coordinated by AG Raum, the working group responsible for access, planning, and pricing. Rental prices are negotiated individually: student groups – such as the theatre class that rehearsed during my stay – pay significantly less than professional organisations. This flexible rental model constitutes an important source of income for the cooperative.

In addition to its cultural functions, the Aula also supports socially oriented initiatives. Every Sunday, residents organise German language lessons for refugees, taught by volunteers from both the new and the renovated building (Fig. 64). Together, these activities emphasise the dual identity of the Aula: it serves as a shared facility for residents and, at the same time, as a cultural and social link between the CA and the rest of the city.

Figure 63 *- Axonometric drawing of the CA with the common areas, where the Aula and the common kitchen are marked*



Common spaces

Residential units

Figure 64 *– Photo of the language course initiative*



Spatial tensions in the Aula

1. Tension between scale and everyday usability

Although the Aula was designed as a multifunctional space (event space and community room), its size limits its usability in daily life. The hall remains largely empty because all the furniture is movable. This works well for large events but creates a bare and impersonal atmosphere for daily use. For small gatherings, the space often feels disproportionately large. During a movie night, for example, two sofas in the middle of the hall created an atmosphere that felt anything but cosy, which highlighted the lack of spatial intimacy (Fig. 66). As Sarah remarks,

> *Sarah (CA Resident): In the exam season, people study in the aula. But it would be nice to have a cosy study space. And maybe also a cosy common space, because I do not think that the aula is comfy. I do think it is kind of empty, but it is important for events.*[1]

Klara notes that the space only becomes appealing when there is activity,

> *Klara (CA Resident): If there is something going on in the aula I like to be there. I am not that often in the aula when there is nothing going on there.*[2]

These descriptions reveal a structural tension between the two intended functions. Due to its generous dimensions and flexibility, the Aula is highly suitable for cultural programs, yet these same characteristics make it less suitable as a daily meeting place.

Decentralised social life as an alternative

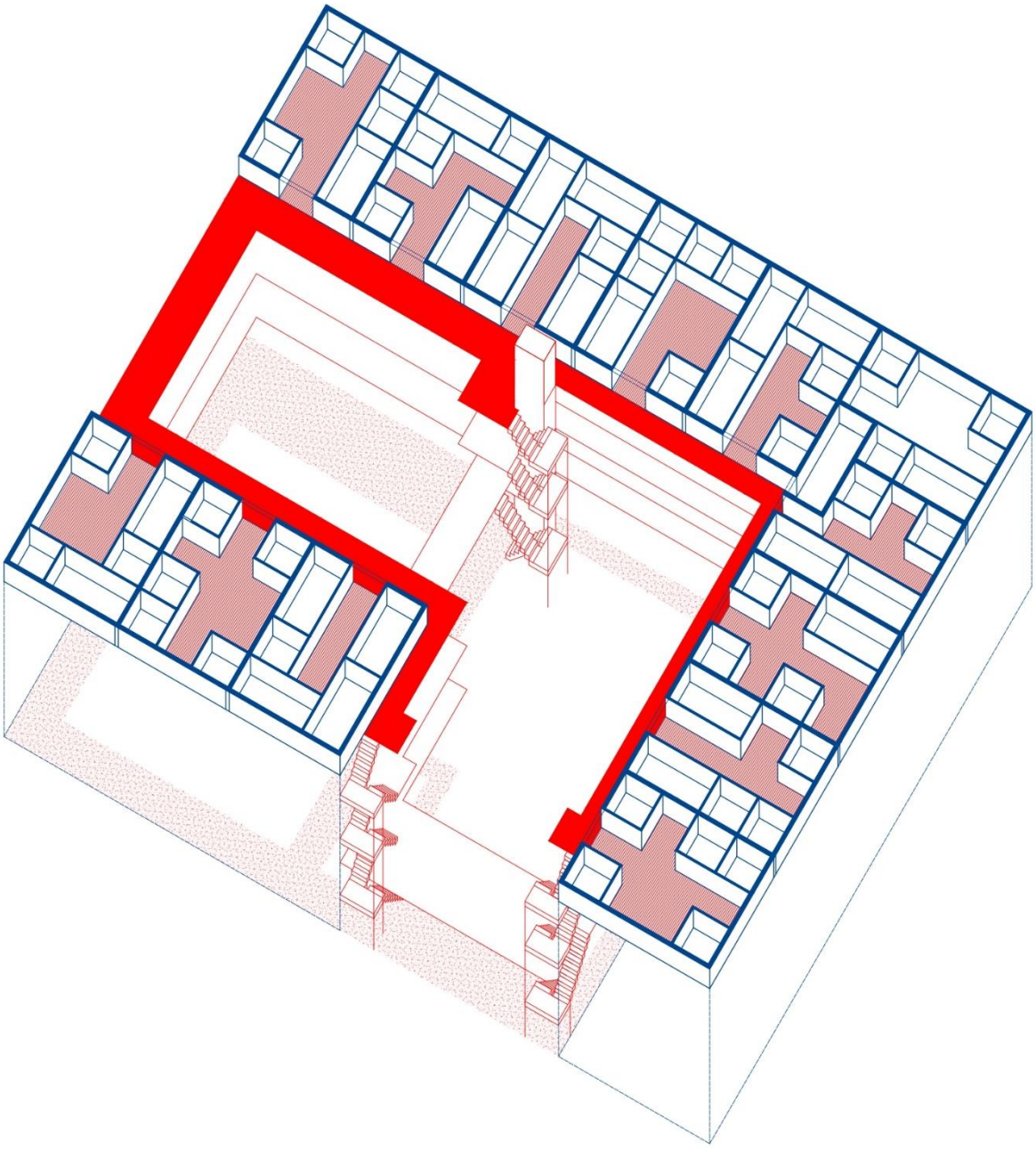
This tension is reflected in the behaviour of the residents. During the fieldwork, the Aula was rarely used informally; social life was concentrated instead in the shared living rooms of the apartments (Fig. 65). In the new building, the doors of the living groups are always open and made of glass, creating a degree of permeability between the apartments. This spatial layout creates a decentralised form of community life: the shared living rooms function as semi-public spaces where residents can move freely between the apartments. As Sarah describes it,

> *Sarah (CA Resident): I really like coming here (WG 0.2), when I can not study in my own apartment. And being here, even when the others are not. And when they are here, I find it very pleasant to coexist with people. That is something you can really do in the CA.*[3]

The circulation system reinforces this decentralised pattern: the external access galleries increase the spatial flexibility, allowing residents to enter apartments and move between them relatively easily. This raises the question of whether the limited daily use of the Aula stems primarily from a lack of spatial intimacy or reflects a broader preference for decentralised, small-scale social interaction. Observations during fieldwork suggest that both dynamics play a role. Some residents appreciate the flexible and neighbourhood-like atmosphere, while others indicate a need for a cosier, central common space in the building.

[1] Sarah, interview, January 6, 2026.
[2] Klara, interview, January 6, 2026.
[3] Sarah, interview, January 6, 2026.

Figure 65 *– Axonometric drawing of the new building, showing the decentralised living rooms*



External access galleries

Open living rooms of the WGs

Figure 66 *– Photo of a movie night in the aula*



2. Tension of transparency: Visibility, exposure, and informal accountability

Personal experience: Two-sided visibility in daily life

The expansive glass facades of the Aula ensure constant visibility in both directions – a situation I experienced repeatedly during my stay. When you are sitting in the Aula, you are fully visible to everyone walking past outside, while at the same time you can easily look out through the transparent walls. During the movie night, this two-way visibility made the space unsuitable for informal use: the oversized, sparsely furnished hall offered no sense of security, and the transparent facade allowed passersby to look directly inside.

Yet, I also experienced moments when that same transparency created a sense of connection. From my ground-floor apartment (WG 0.2), the glass front door looked directly out onto the Aula (Fig. 67). One evening, while my housemates and I were having dinner, we could see the theatre group rehearsing in the brightly lit hall (Fig. 68). Their movements were fully visible, and the openness created a sense of familiarity and shared presence, giving the building a lively and socially connected atmosphere.

Residents' experiences: Visibility as comfort, burden and governance mechanism

Residents describe this dual effect of transparency in a similar way. Several interviewees appreciate the liveliness resulting from being able to see the activities in the building. At the same time, many note that constant visibility can become a burden. They describe feeling constantly seen as they move through the building and that they can not pass by unnoticed. During plenary meetings, for example, absence is quickly noticeable: residents walking past the Aula might be approached by others inside, creating social pressure to be present. Klara explains,

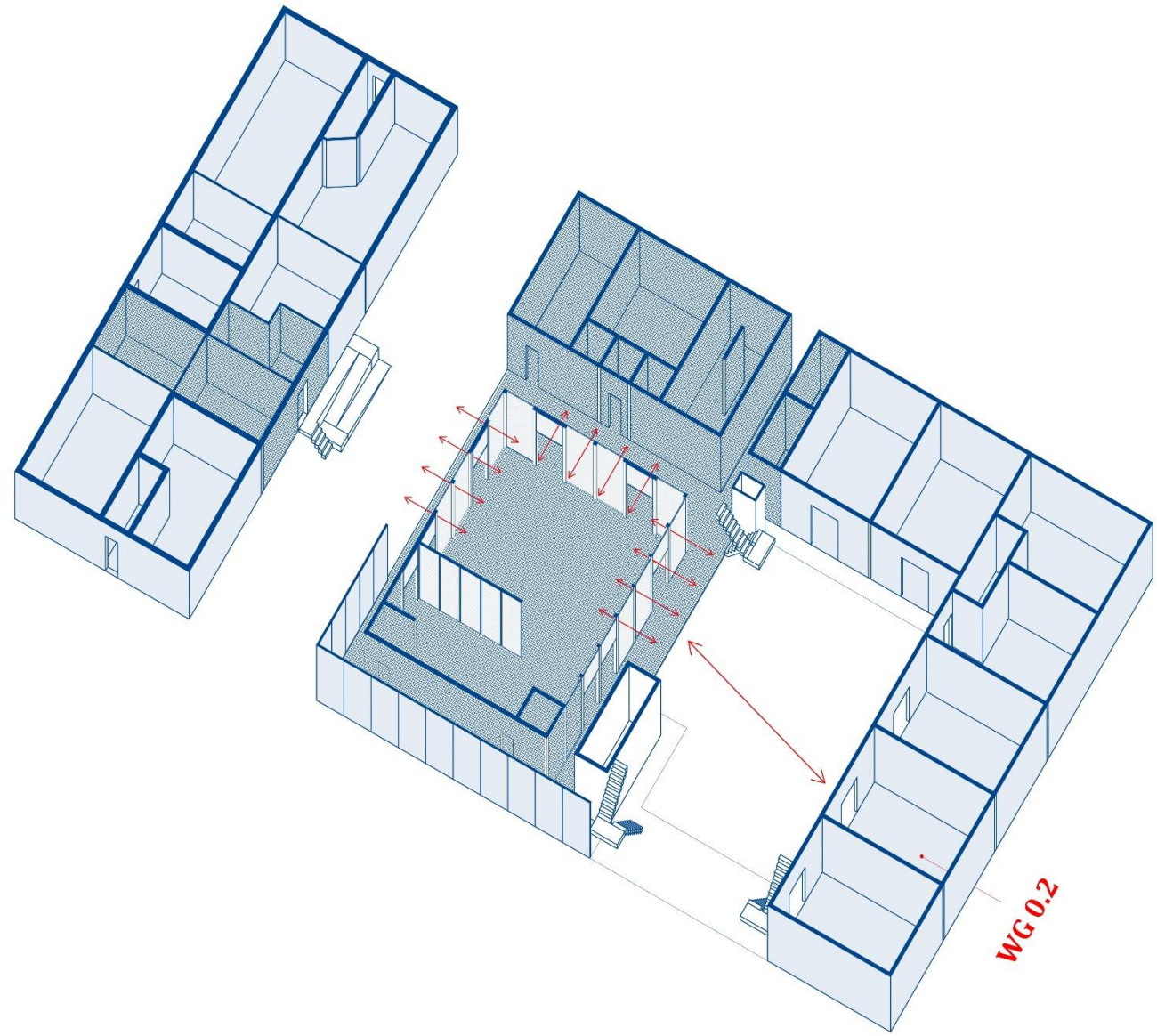
> *Klara (CA Resident): And sometimes I avoid the aula, because I am not in the mood for a plenary meeting. But then you can not get around the aula or into your flat without potentially someone seeing you and seeing that you are not at the plenary meeting. I think I got better with managing the emotions coming from that.*[1]

These experiences are closely linked to the cooperative's self-governance system. Architectural transparency functions as an informal accountability mechanism: it makes participation visible and absence legible. For some residents, this visibility stimulates involvement and strengthens community life. For others, it leads to emotional tension and the feeling of being constantly watched.

This exposes a deeper architectural problem. The circulation system offers no alternative route allowing residents to move through the building unnoticed. There is no secondary circulation, which means that residents must walk along the glass facade of the Aula and the external access galleries, both when leaving the building and when returning to their apartments. Consequently, the design excludes the possibility of choosing for themselves when they want to be visible and when they do not – a need expressed by several residents.

[1] Klara, interview, January 6, 2026.

Figure 67 *– Axonometric drawing of the ground floor of the CA, with the glass facade of the Aula and the location of WG 0.2*



Common spaces

Residential units

Transparency (glass facade of the aula)

Figure 68 *– Photo of the aula at night*



3. Tension due to location: Noise nuisance

The renovated building accommodates a mix of housing types and demographic groups, including families, long-term tenants, and students. The new building, on the other hand, houses students exclusively – introverted and extroverted students, neurodivergent students, and students with very different rhythms and social needs – yet they remain relatively homogeneous in terms of age and life stage. The spatial separation between the two buildings therefore creates two distinct living environments. Because the Aula is situated precisely between these two parts, it functions as a public buffer and conflict zone where different lifestyles and rhythms converge (Fig. 69).

Noise pollution affects both buildings, but in different ways: families on the ground floor of the renovated building are bothered by late-night activities in the Aula, while students on the first floor of the new building are disturbed by the rooftop air conditioning and bass vibrations echoing through the wooden structure (Fig. 69).

Negotiating noise nuisance in self-governance

These tensions became particularly visible during the plenary session on January 7, where noise regulation dominated the agenda. Residents proposed limiting loud events to twelve per year, five of which were allowed to last until 5:00 a.m. They divided themselves into proponents and opponents using the *Konsensfisch method* (page 111-112) to discuss which events were important, how they should be organised, and what impact they had on daily life.

The debate was intense and continued during the subsequent meetings, demonstrating that self-governance often revolves around negotiating conflicting interests. Proponents, on the one hand, emphasised the origins of the events: the legacy of the old CA as a cultural centre, explicit clauses in the lease warning against noise pollution, and the rental of AG Raum as a significant source of income and a networking opportunity for loans (Fig. 70). After the plenary session, a resident of the renovated building reminded the families that they had registered along with 180 students, fully aware that they were entering a lively environment. In my opinion, however, the proposed number of events remains substantial, especially since these weekends are often the only times when working residents can unwind from the week.

Opponents, on the other hand, emphasised equal liveability for all residents, including families and neurodiverse students. They pointed to the disruptive bass vibrations, the vulnerability of families on the ground floor as a silent minority, the risk that the CA would acquire a reputation as a 'party venue,' and past incidents such as fires in public restrooms (Fig. 71). Their proposals focused on management measures: distinguishing between internal and public events, ensuring trained security, and better communication regarding end times.

Architectural constraints and acoustic consequences

The core of these disagreements lies in an architectural problem: the Aula offers no acoustic buffer. The fully glazed facades and the direct connection to the wooden structure allow sound to pass through unimpeded, causing music, voices, and bass vibrations to reverberate throughout the entire building (Fig. 69). The architectural openness becomes a disadvantage when it comes to noise pollution. These discussions highlight the importance of dedicated, acoustically isolated event spaces. Only with such measures can residents with different schedules and needs – those who want to sleep and those who want to party – coexist.

Figure 69 *– Axonometric drawing of the CA, illustrating the problem of noise pollution*

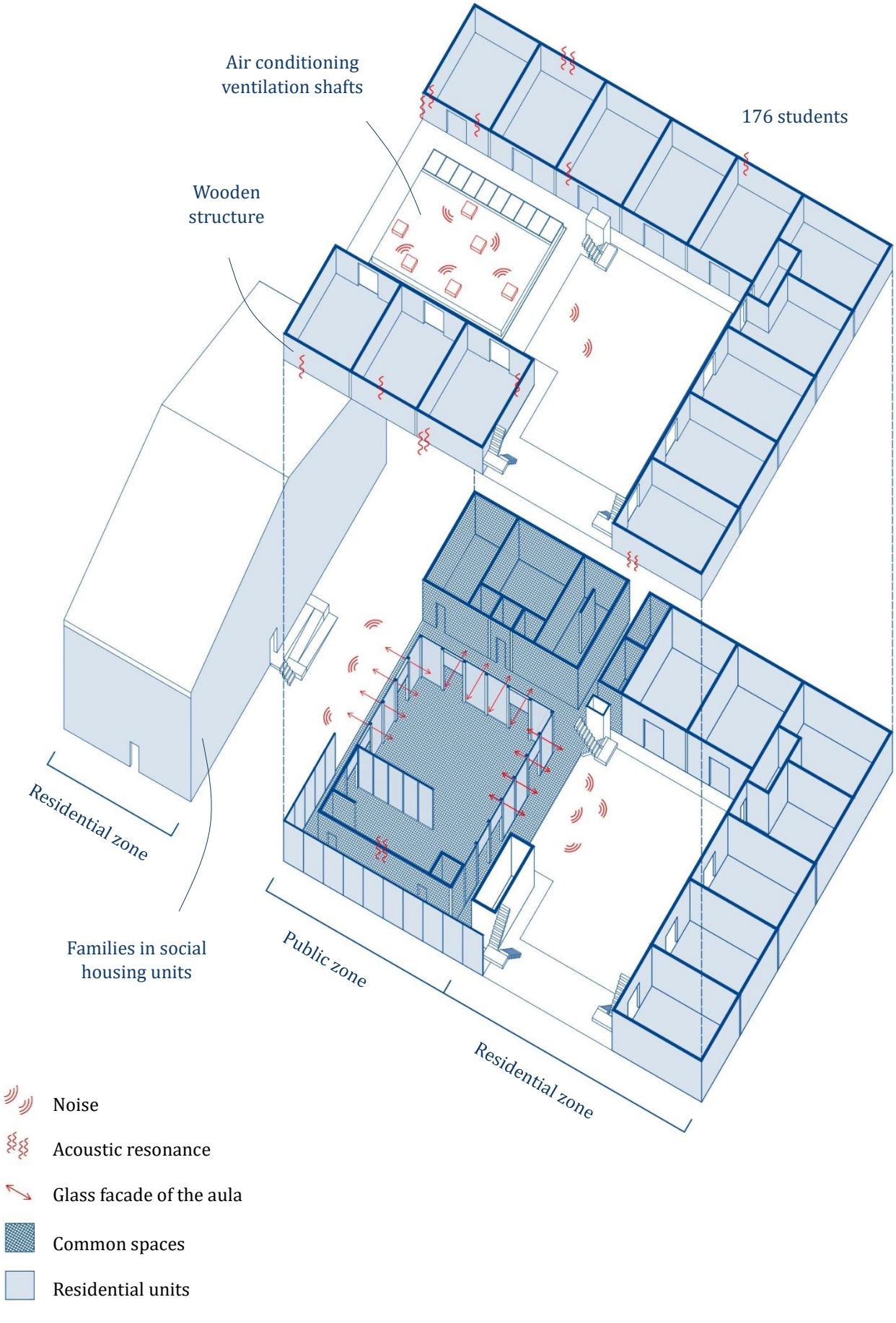
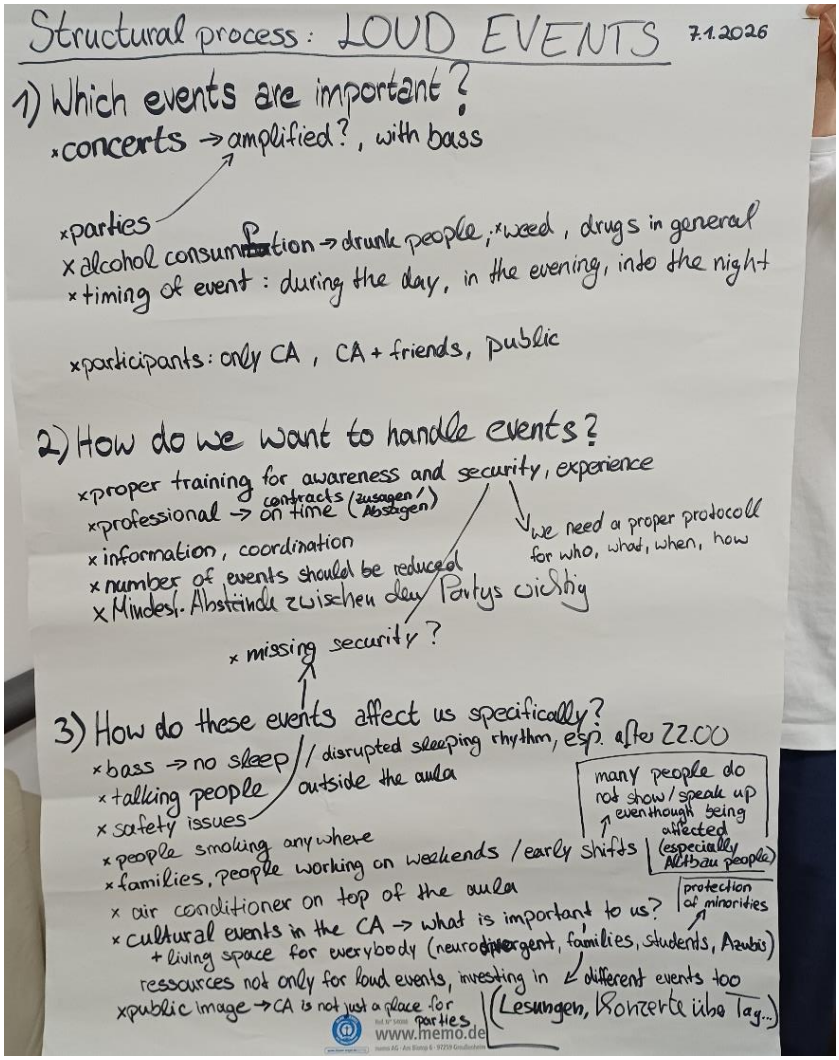
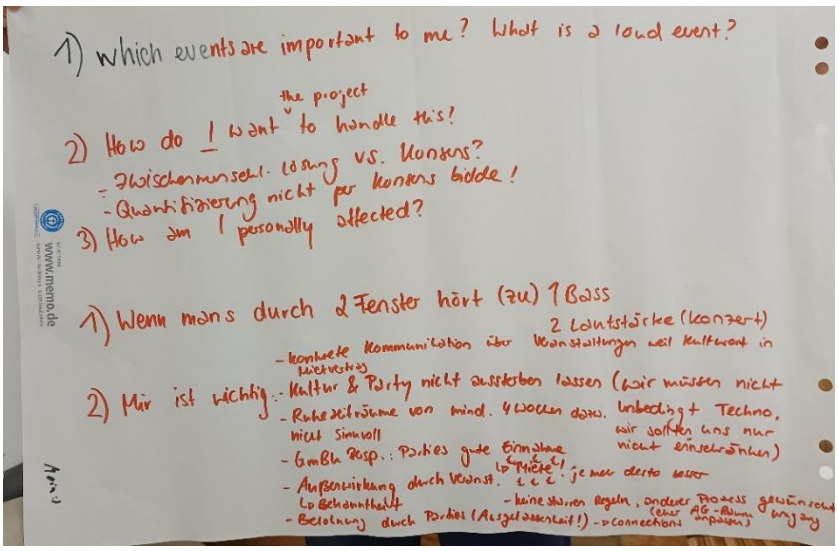


Figure 70-71 *– Arguments of proponents (70) and opponents (71) during the plenary session following the proposal (Translation in Appendix B4)*





Spatial insights from the Aula

The Aula was conceived as the cultural and symbolic heart of the CA, intended to unite residents through joint events and daily gatherings. In practice, however, the analysis shows that its scale, transparency, and location generate persistent tensions that offer crucial insights for future student-led cooperatives.

First, the scale and extreme flexibility of the Aula make it highly suitable for large events but unsuitable for daily use. The enormous, empty hall lacks spatial intimacy, which discourages informal studying, small gatherings, or spontaneous social life. Residents invariably prefer the smaller, decentralised living rooms, which offer comfort and openness. Secondly, the full transparency of the Aula has a dual effect: it creates visual connection, but also discomfort. Although the glass facades make the building appear lively and occupied, they simultaneously expose the residents to constant visibility. This acts as an informal governance mechanism: absence stands out and participation is socially enforced. The lack of alternative walking routes reinforces this dynamic, as residents cannot choose when they want to be seen. Thirdly, the location and materiality of the Aula – situated between two residential zones and largely surrounded by glass – make it a conflict zone where incompatible rhythms clash. Sound propagates easily across this open interface and affects the residents of both buildings.

These findings lead to a clear conclusion: architecture must prevent conflicts that governance alone cannot resolve. The design of the Aula forces residents to deal with tensions that could have been avoided.

Communal/Public kitchen

The kitchen, situated directly next to the Aula and separated only by a glass wall, plays an ambivalent role within the building's spatial layout (Fig. 73.1). According to Goffman, the kitchen functions simultaneously as both front and back region.[1] It is connected to the smoking area and the storage corridor – unmistakable backstage zones used for relaxation and practical tasks. At the same time, it is a central, highly visible meeting point where daily routines play out in full view. As a central point between the open Aula and the more sheltered back rooms, the function of the kitchen changes depending on who uses it and what is happening.

This front region quality became particularly evident during the Sunday language course. The kitchen transformed into the social hub of the cooperative: the mobile cooking unit was set up, the refugee girls prepared meals, and after serving, they created an informal dining area behind the coat racks – a small, cosy community within the larger space (Fig. 73.2-4). A piano, a ping-pong table, and a football table contributed to the convivial atmosphere and encouraged spontaneous interaction, regardless of the language barrier (Fig. 73.5-6). At these moments, the kitchen was not a service zone, but the beating heart of the community.

In this way, the space blurs the boundary between front and back. The glass wall visually extends the activities of the Aula into the kitchen, while the side doors mark a clear transition to the backstage areas accessible to residents.

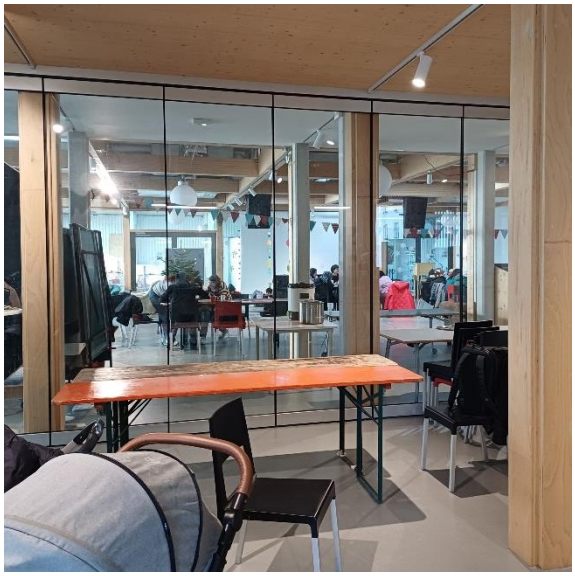
[1] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

Figure 72 *– Main photo of the communal kitchen*



Figure 73 *– Six photos of the communal kitchen*

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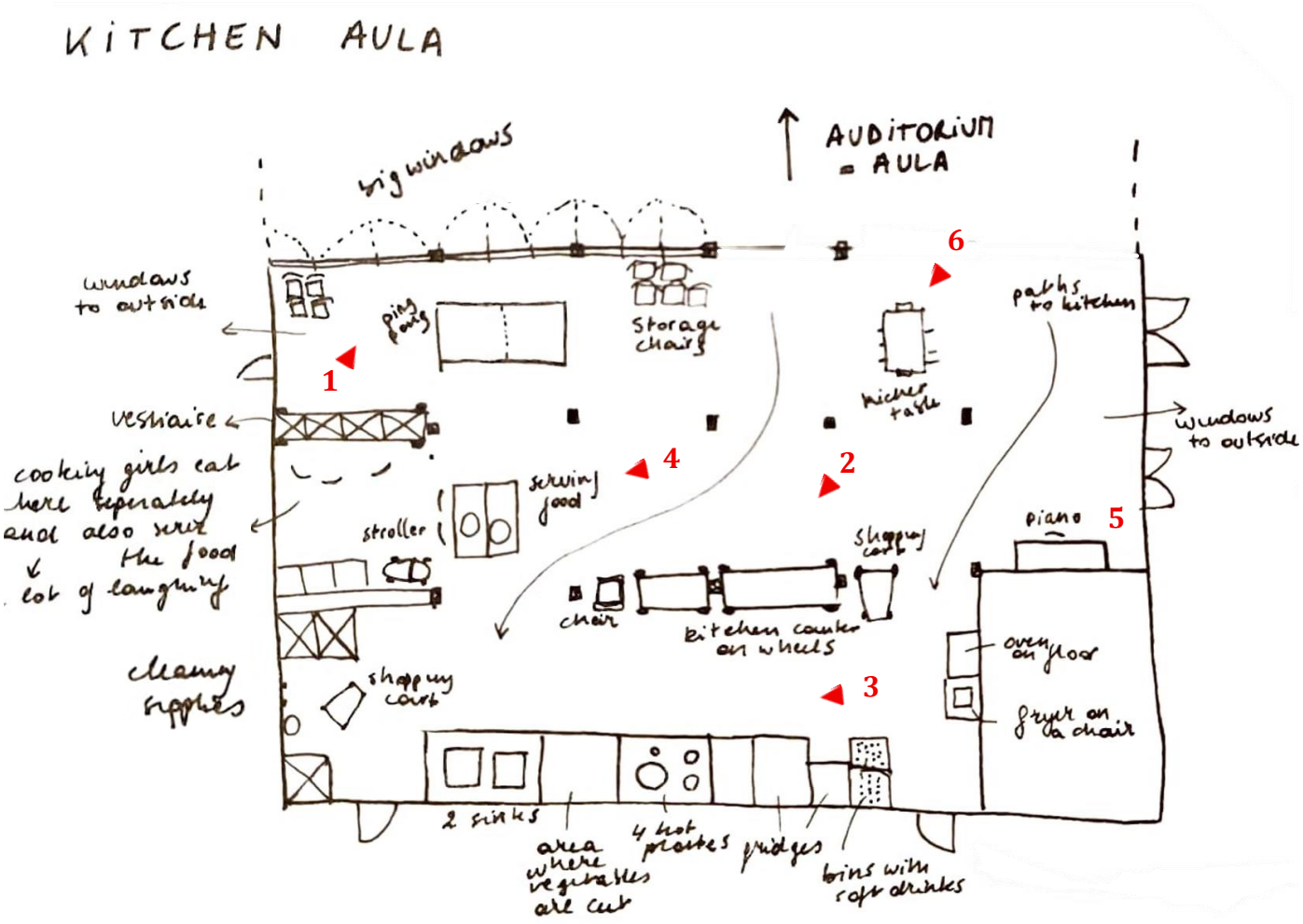
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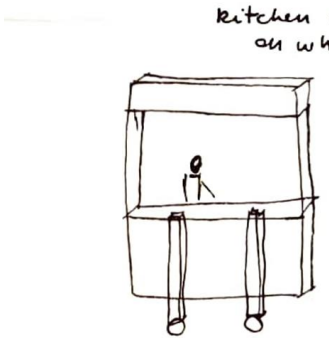




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Figure 74 *- Ethnographic sketch of communal kitchen, made during the field visit*





Supporting spaces

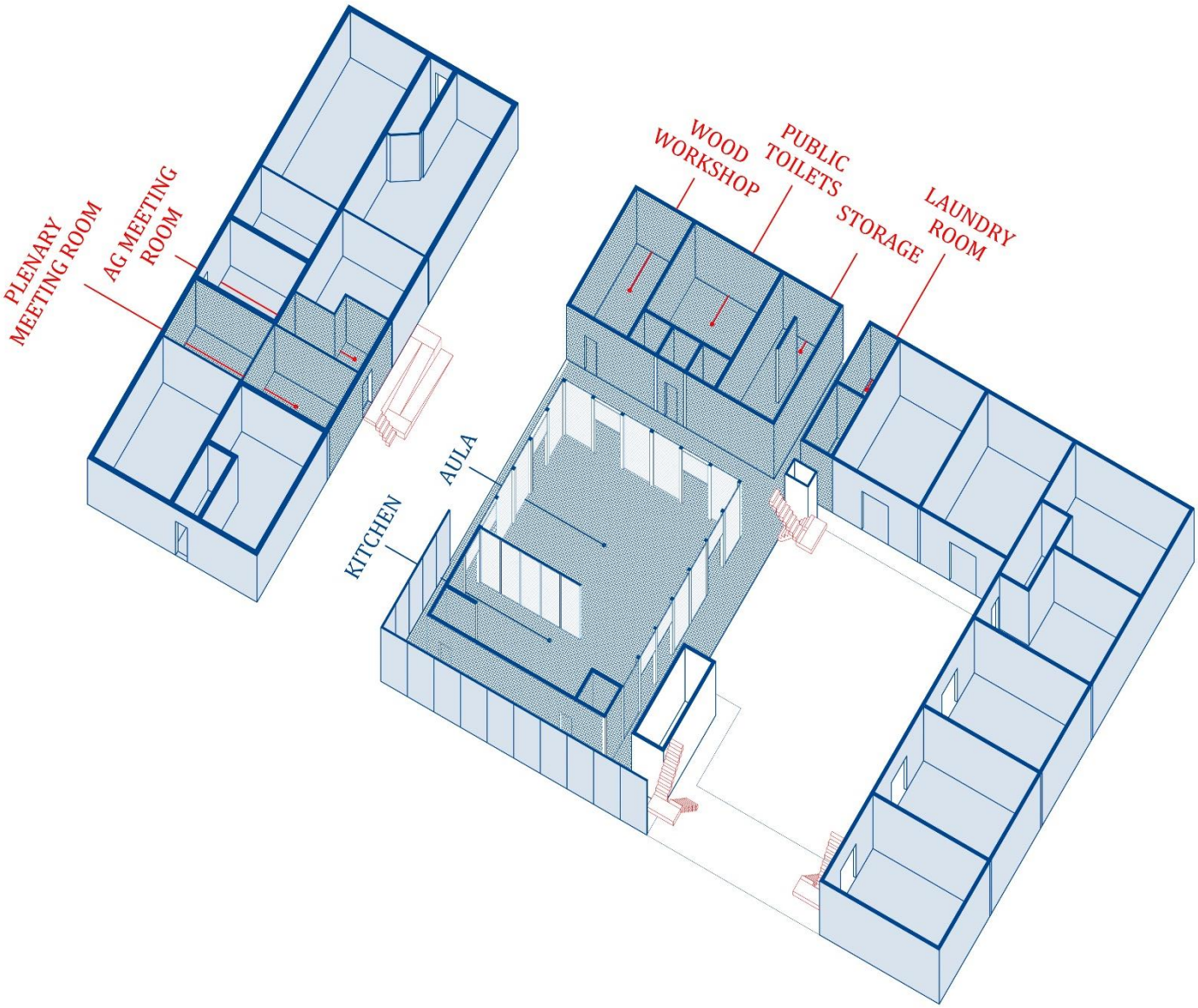
This section describes the supporting spaces that structure daily life in and around the Aula and the renovated building.

Opposite the Aula are the **public restrooms** – spacious enough for large events – and the building's only fully enclosed **storage space** (Fig. 76.1). Next to this storage area lies the **laundry room**, equipped with five washing machines and five dryers for the 256 residents of both buildings – approximately one machine per fifty people (Fig. 76.2). An online reservation system ensures organised use.

Located next to the restrooms is the **woodworking workshop**, one of the most appreciated spaces by the residents (Fig. 76.3-4). During the AG Workshop meeting, members proudly showed me the workshop. As a rare student-run makerspace, it enables hands-on learning and a strong sense of ownership. The cooperative also plans to open the workshop to the public in the future.

In the renovated building, directly at the entrance, is a small **AG meeting room** with a large table, sofas, chairs, a printer, and storage cabinets. Additionally, there is the divisible **plenary meeting room**, where sessions in the windowed section benefited from the smaller scale and comfortable furnishings, creating a warm and more intimate atmosphere for debate (Fig. 76.5-6).

Figure 75 *- Axonometric drawing of the CA with the common areas, where the supporting areas are marked*



Common spaces

Residential units

Figure 76 *– Six photos of the supporting spaces*

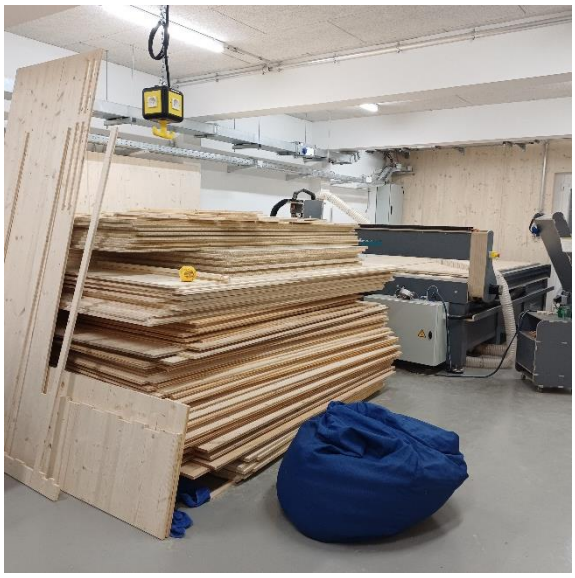
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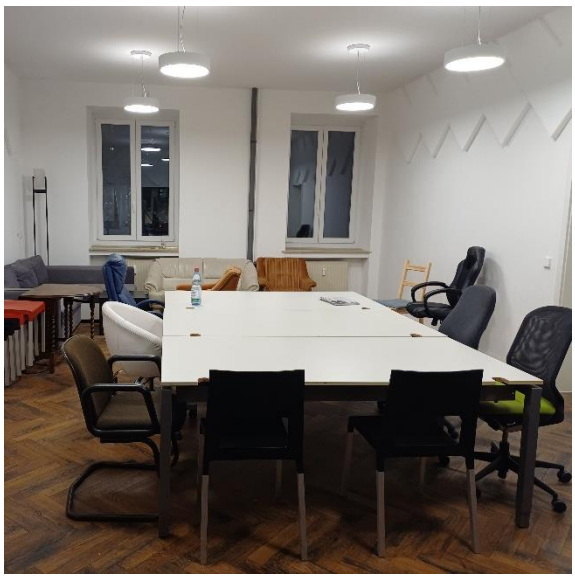
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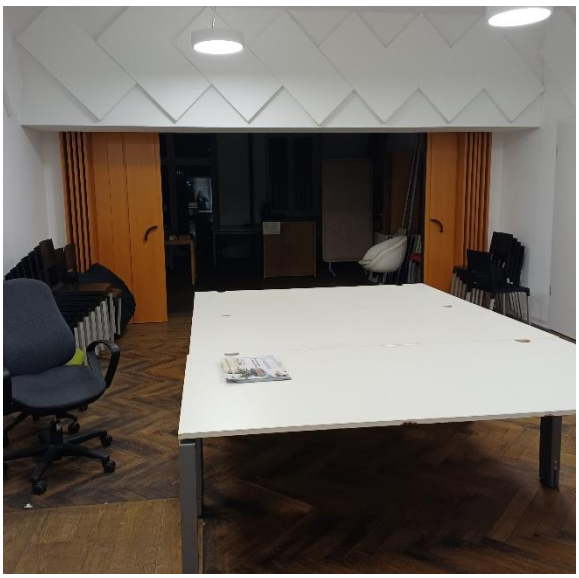




4

5





6

Outdoor spaces: Garden, courtyard, and bridge terrace

The outdoor spaces of the CA vary significantly in quality and use. The **garden on the east side** is the clearest expression of the residents' autonomy: students collectively constructed a carport, a seating area, a swimming pool, and a winding path from leftover hemp insulation – elements they are still proud of (Fig. 78.1). Despite this creativity, the garden's location on the main street limits its appeal. As Sarah explains, she misses a quiet, sheltered place,

> *Sarah (CA Resident): I do not like our garden because it is so close to the street. I miss having a garden where I can just sit and be without so much stuff happening.*[1]

During my visit in the winter, the garden was hardly used; whether this was due to the season or a general lack of appeal remains unclear.

The **courtyard,** on the other hand, proved to be a much more active space. Even in winter, it immediately transformed into an arena for snowball fights, demonstrating how the central location and the enclosure by the building blocks make the space naturally inviting for spontaneous use (Fig. 78.2).

According to several residents of CA, the most successful outdoor space is the **bridge terrace** on the first floor (Fig. 78.3).[2] Situated on the west side and connecting the two wings of the new building, it benefits from the evening sun and a constant stream of people walking past. Residents consistently describe it as the defining outdoor space of the project. The arrangement of tables, chairs, homemade benches, and potted plants betrays intensive use. Its elevated position offers views of the courtyard and the future park, making it a natural meeting place where people pause, linger, and meet others.

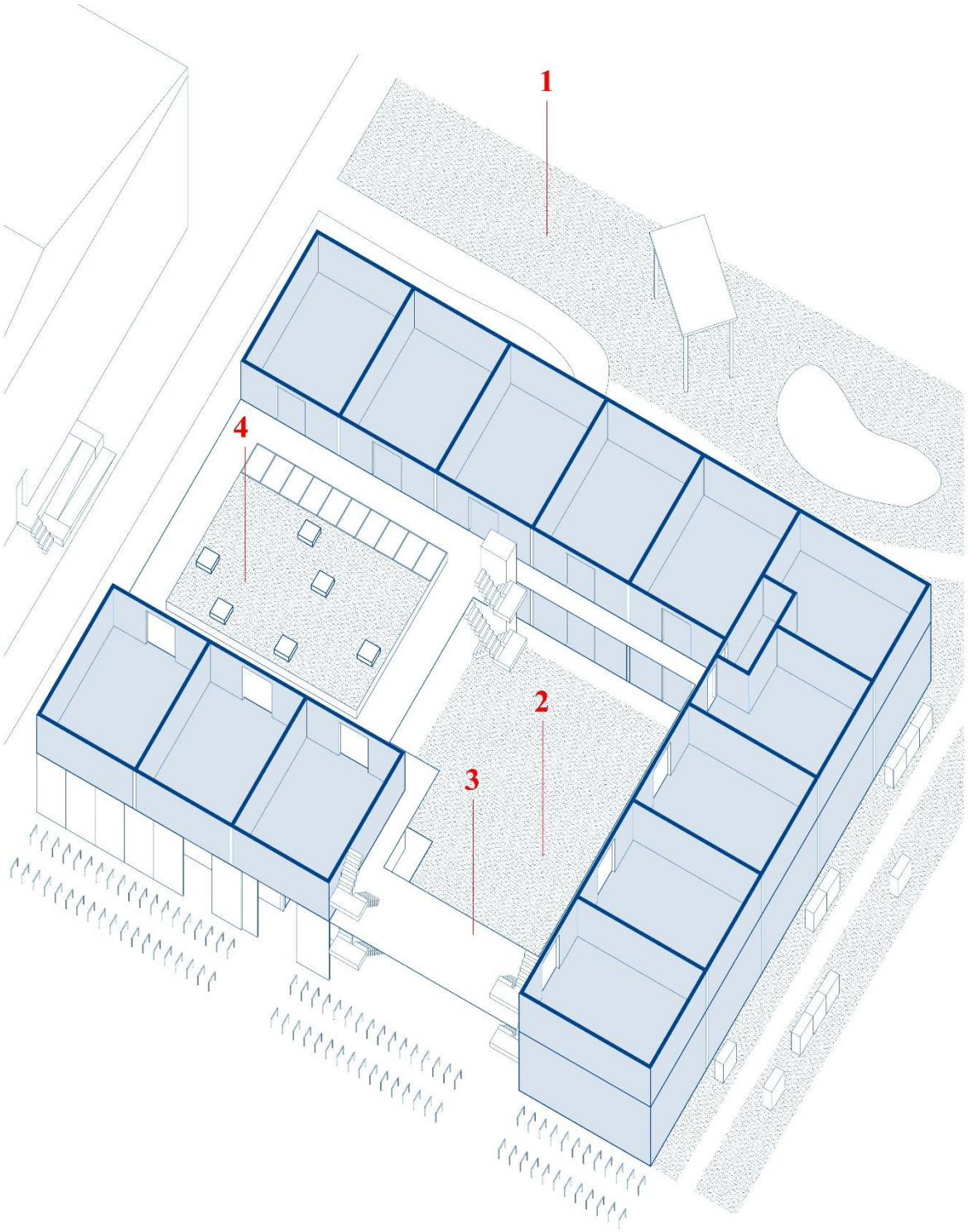
Above the Aula lies the **roof garden**, technically an outdoor space, but currently inaccessible due to missing balustrades. Even if the garden were to become legally accessible, the presence of ventilation shafts and air conditioning units makes it unlikely that it will become a frequently used communal space (Fig. 78.4).

Across these spaces, a clear discrepancy emerges between the number of residents and the amount of high-quality outdoor space available. The outdoor spaces on the ground floor are limited and often exposed to traffic, whereas the most vibrant social life takes place on the terrace on the first floor. The future park adjacent to the site will likely become a significant expansion of the cooperative's outdoor living and compensate for the current spatial limitations.

[1] Sarah, interview, January 6, 2026.

[2] Jonas, informal conversation with the author, Heidelberg, January 3, 2026; Nina, informal conversation, January 7, 2026.

Figure 77 *- Axonometric drawing of the CA, with the outdoor spaces*



1. Garden on east side
2. Courtyard
3. Bridge terrace
4. Roof garden

Figure 78 *– Six photos of the outdoor spaces*

1





4

2





3





Synthesis: How common spaces shape self-governance

The auditorium, kitchen, supporting spaces, and outdoor areas together form a layered landscape of communal life in the CA. Each space offers a different degree of visibility, permeability, and social expectation, creating a gradient that continuously shifts between front and back areas.[1] In all these spaces, the architecture invites, and even depends on, appropriation. Residents rearrange furniture and personalise nooks. These practices confirm Lefebvre's argument that use value arises from lived experience: the communal spaces are environments that are constantly being reshaped by routines, negotiations, and conflicts.[2]

Shared responsibility and everyday stewardship

The CA's ownership model, without external landlords, encourages a strong sense of shared ownership of the common spaces. Instead of being overseen by an external agency, access and daily upkeep are managed by the residents themselves. The governance structure enables a sense of shared use and shared care: people feel free to enter the spaces while simultaneously treating them with care, aware that their actions directly impact their neighbours.

This dynamic aligns with research into psychological ownership by Peck et al.: when people feel that a space belongs to "them," they are more inclined to take care of it, intervene when something is wrong, and hold one another accountable.[3] At the CA, this sense of co-ownership arises through everyday interactions – cleaning, gardening, and simply being present in the shared spaces. The result is a form of stewardship that is both practical and relational. As Sarah explains, the self-management structure changes her relationship with the space and how carefully she maintains it,

> *Sarah (CA Resident): I feel more responsible for the building, because it is self-governed, and the building does not belong to some rich person. So I do notice that I am treating it differently.*
>
> *Interviewer: Would you think differently about it if the project were part of a developer?*
>
> *Sarah (CA Resident): Yeah, I would say so. (…). In general, I feel more responsible. I really want to do everything right; for example, after I have done my laundry, I have to leave the washing machine door open. (…). I feel more responsible because we are responsible. It is not just one person, or one group, but we are all responsible for ensuring that everything works. (…) I feel like a co-user, but also a bit of a co-owner, more than in other forms of living without self-governance.*[4]

Her experience illustrates how self-management changes daily behaviour: responsibility is shared, and care becomes a collective norm.

Together, these insights show that the common spaces of the CA function as active governance environments. Their design invites appropriation, makes collective life visible, and requires continuous management.. Cooperative living thus transforms shared spaces into places where democratic self-governance is exercised, contested, and continuously reformed by daily routines and collective labour, while spatial conditions simultaneously influence how governance unfolds in practice.

---

[1] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

[2] Purcell, 'Possible Worlds'.

[3] Peck et al., 'Caring for the Commons'.

[4] Sarah, interview, January 6, 2026.

Key insights for the development of a student cooperative in Ghent (Chapter 4)

** Avoid overly large multi-purpose halls: Large, flexible spaces are suitable for events, but fall short as daily social meeting places*

** Provide decentralised social spaces: Students naturally gather in small, shared living rooms rather than in one central "core"*

** Use transparency carefully: Fully glazed facades create unwanted views and social pressure*

** Offer alternative walking routes: Residents must be able to move through the building without constantly being seen*

** Integrate acoustic buffers: Sound from events penetrates glass and wooden structures easily*

** Design kitchens as hybrid front and back spaces: Kitchens function simultaneously as social meeting places and service zones*

** Design high-quality outdoor spaces with smaller, well-oriented spots: Sheltered, sunny, and carefully positioned outdoor spaces naturally become the most used meeting places and support daily shared routines*

THEME 3

PRIVATE AND SHARED LIVING SPACES IN THE NEW BUILDING

3.4.4. Inhabitation of the private and shared living spaces in the new building

This section examines how residents use the private and shared living spaces of the new building. Whereas the previous themes focused on the building as a whole, the analysis now shifts to the intimate scale of the shared apartments (WGs). Here, architectural openness becomes part of daily life: residents negotiate privacy, personalise their rooms, and collectively shape the atmosphere of their shared spaces.

Through interviews, observations, sketches, and spatial documentation, the first part shows how students adapt the identical 90 m^2 floor plans and how these adaptations result in a wide range of living environments. The case study of WG 0.2 illustrates this process in detail, followed by a comparative overview of other WGs to highlight how location, orientation, and resident choices influence the character of each apartment. Two recurring themes emerge: the ongoing interplay between private and shared space – including reflections on the ideal balance between the two – and the strong sense of autonomy residents exercise in shaping their environment.

The second part focuses on how residents experience the openness of the building – particularly the challenges of visibility, proximity, and sound. Rather than re-examining the architectural logic, the emphasis lies on the lived experience: how residents cope with constant exposure, how they manage acoustic permeability, and what informal strategies they develop to create moments of withdrawal.

1. Shared apartments (WGs): Adaptation, autonomy and spatial diversity

Flexible private and shared spaces

The shared apartments in the new building all start from the same architectural premise: a 90 m^2 unit designed for four residents. In line with the CA's ecological principle – aiming for no more than 25 m^2 of living space per person – each WG is initially divided as follows:

- 4 x 7 m^2 private rooms = 28 m^2
- 62 m^2 shared space
- resulting in approximately 22.5 m^2 per person

This standardised layout reflects the project's ambition to promote communal living and keep private spaces modest.

However, the layout is not fixed. The lightweight, movable partitions allow residents to adjust the size of their private spaces and expand them as desired from 7 m^2 to 14 m^2 (Fig. 79). Any increase in private space reduces the common space accordingly, but the total surface area of the WG always remains 90 m^2. This flexibility means that each living group finds its own balance between private and shared space: some opt for maximum common space, while others prefer larger individual rooms.



Figure 79 *– Exploded axonometric drawing, showing the flexible private and shared spaces*

Diversity of living units

Over time, the choices residents make – how much privacy they claim, how they furnish the rooms, and how they collectively organise the common areas – have resulted in a striking diversity of living environments. Despite the identical starting point, the living groups now differ significantly in atmosphere and spatial layout. Some feel light and open, others more enclosed; some are very personal, while others have remained close to the original layout and furniture.

I visited various apartments to observe how students transform these standardised units into unique living environments. Residents themselves emphasise this diversity and the inspiration it provides,

> *Klara (CA Resident): I like my flat a lot. I also like to visit other flats just because it is the same, but so different. And it is so inspiring to see what people have made out of it. For example, this spice rack is very cool. I love visiting other flats and getting inspiration for my own. And it is so easy to implement in my own flat because it is the same.*[1]

This freedom promotes a lively and autonomous atmosphere: individual creativity becomes a way to make the space one's own, while simultaneously strengthening the collective care for the project.

In the following section, various living groups (WGs) are introduced to illustrate this diversity. I begin with WG 0.2, where I lived for a week and which I describe in detail. The subsequent WGs are discussed more briefly. Together, these examples demonstrate both the diversity of living units and how different positions within the cooperative create different spatial atmospheres.

A. Ground floor: WG 0.2

WG 0.2 is located on the south side of the project, directly on the busy path that runs from the bicycle storage past the ping-pong table. This ground-floor location ensures a constant flow of pedestrians past the apartment, making it highly visible and closely connected to the building's daily rhythm. The apartment is also unique because of its unusually high ceilings, which match the height of the Aula. Residents have utilised this vertical space to create custom-made mezzanines in both the private and the shared spaces. My flatmates proudly explained that they had done this without asking permission in the plenary meeting.[2] This everyday autonomy also appears in other interviews, as Klara explains,

> *Klara (CA Resident): We have a few rules to keep the building in good condition. For example, you are not allowed to drive screws of a certain length into the walls, because that would make the walls unstable. But if you stick to these rules, you can basically do anything. Many people also move and leave the things they made behind for the next residents, and if they do not like them, they can just take them away again. In my apartment, we have a swing and I love it. It has become so normal for me that I am afraid of the day I live somewhere without a swing.*[3]

WG 0.2 is a particularly clear example of how residents have translated this freedom into spatial practices.

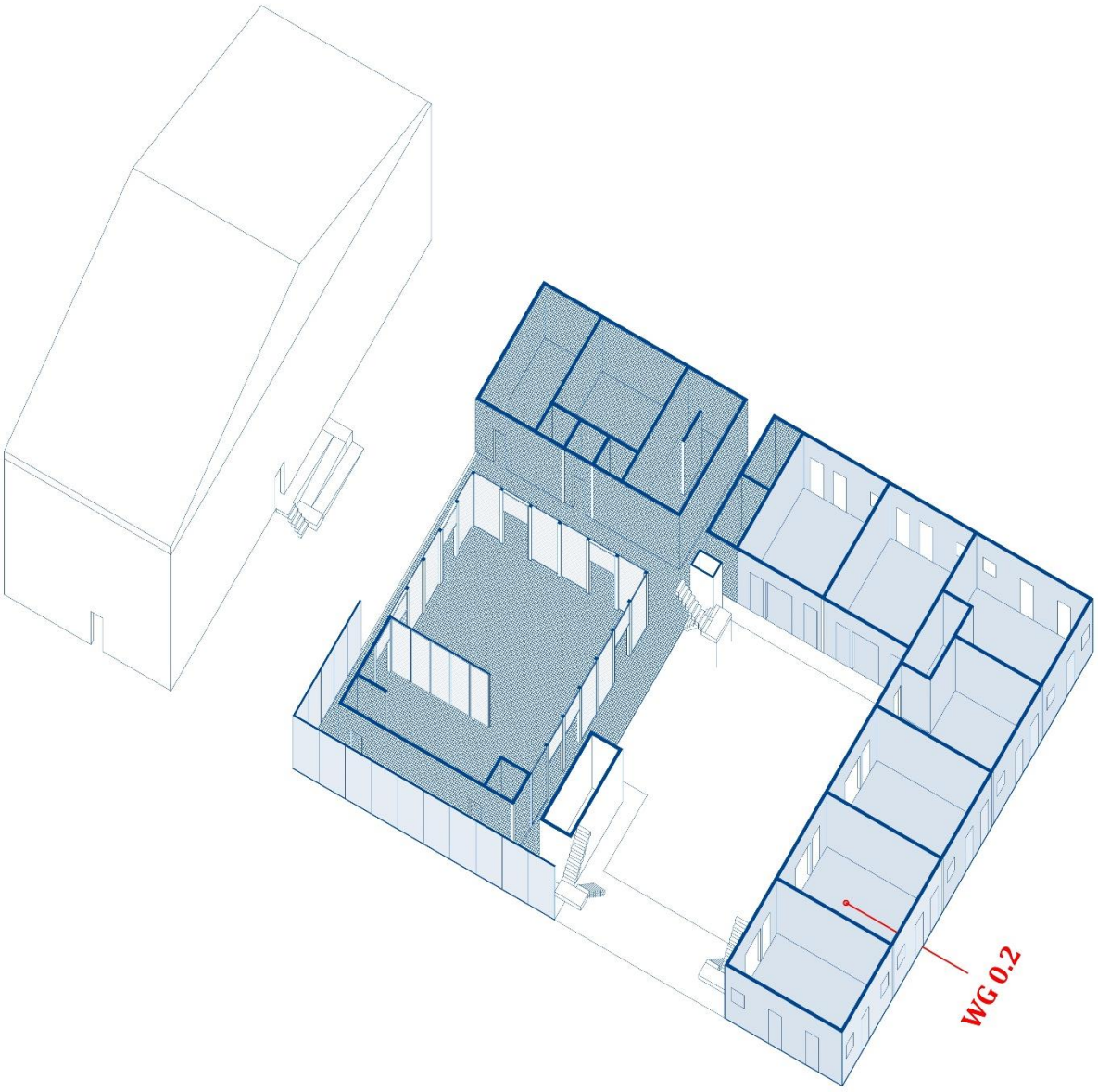
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[1] Klara, interview, January 6, 2026.

[2] Anonymous, informal conversation with the author, Heidelberg, January 3, 2026.

[3] Klara, interview, January 6, 2026.

Figure 80 *– Axonometric drawing of the CA, showing the location of the shared apartment WG 0.2*



Common spaces

Shared apartments (3-4 students/flat)

Investigated apartment

Figure 81 *– Main photo of shared apartment WG 0.2*



Shared spaces of apartment WG 0.2

The glass front door immediately draws the eye from the hallway into the living room at the far end, creating a transparent main axis visible to passersby (Fig. 82.A1). The entrance itself bustles with life: two closets, a guitar leaning against the wall, a tall cabinet full of dry goods (muesli, oatmeal), and a large refrigerator with a microwave and radio on top of it (Fig. 82.A2). Cleaning follows a colour code (green/orange/red) indicated on the wall: each resident has a designated zone for the month, with clothespins marking tasks, such as Eric's garbage collection shifting from green (done) to orange/red (needed).

Sunlight streams into the south-facing living room through a floor-to-ceiling window (the upper part opens), creating a cosy nook with two sofas, a coffee table, and a beanbag chair (Fig. 83.B1). This generous space is due to the fact that residents of the corner apartments opted for private rooms of 7 m^2 instead of 14 m^2. During my stay, friends of my flatmates spontaneously dropped in to relax, even without the official housemates present. This highlights how these shared living rooms form the true, cosy meeting places.

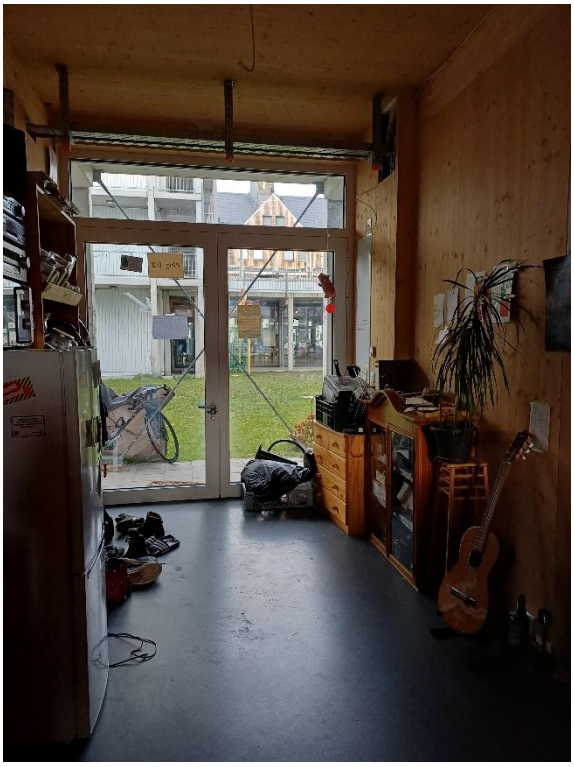
The kitchen is divided into three functional zones. Along the wall is the standard cooking area, equipped with an oven, dishwasher, sink, and a countertop for vegetables and chopping (Fig. 85.C1). Next to it is a small table that serves as storage, with pots and pans on a shelf above and trash cans neatly arranged below (Fig. 85.C2). A playful "muesli ranking" with cereal box labels (S-A-B-C-D) hangs above. The third zone is a custom-designed dining area, built around a central pillar against which a bicycle leans casually (Fig. 85.C3). Four chairs surround the table, and shelves below provide storage for plates and cutlery.

An additional 14 m^2 space, taken from the smaller rooms, forms a separate area on the left: a cupboard for spices, drinks, and preserves, a piano, a whiteboard for notes, a computer table, an extra sofa (which was not used during my stay), and an original wardrobe. A triangular mezzanine above, accessible via a ladder along the edge of the room, offers space for mattresses among the clutter and also serves as a guest room when the private rooms are occupied.

A vestibule behind the kitchen provides cleaning supplies and a pull-up bar, and leads to the unlocked bathroom (toilet, sink, large closet, and solar-heated shower). A simple green and red "occupied/vacant" sign on the bathroom door enhances the apartment's informal, homey feel.

A: Entrance hall

Figure 82 *– Two photos of the entrance hall of WG 0.2*



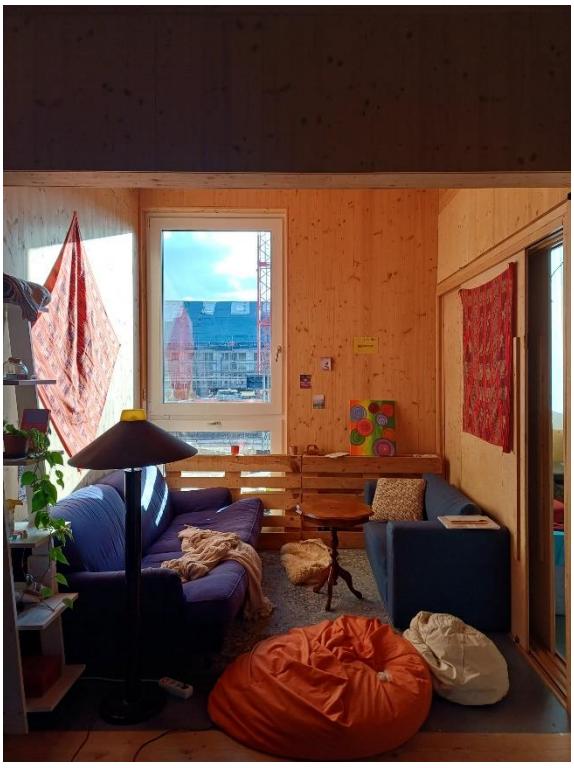
A1



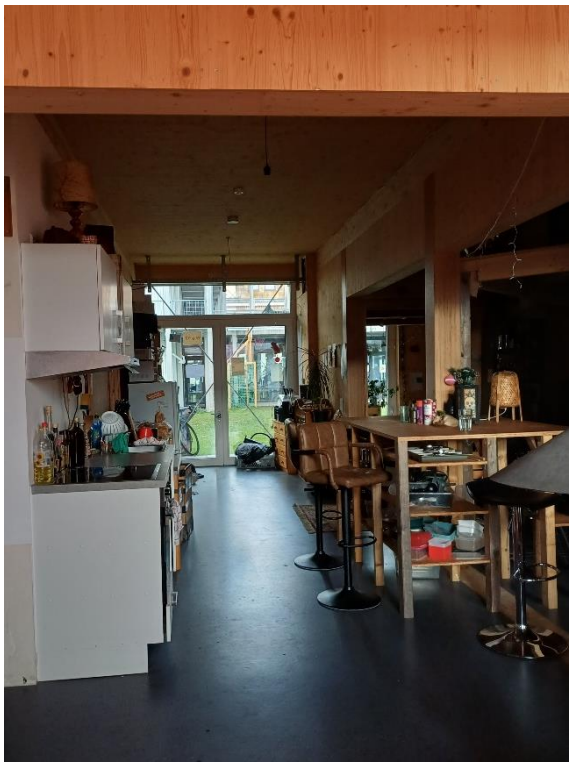
A2

B: Living room

Figure 83 *– Two photos of the living space of WG 0.2*

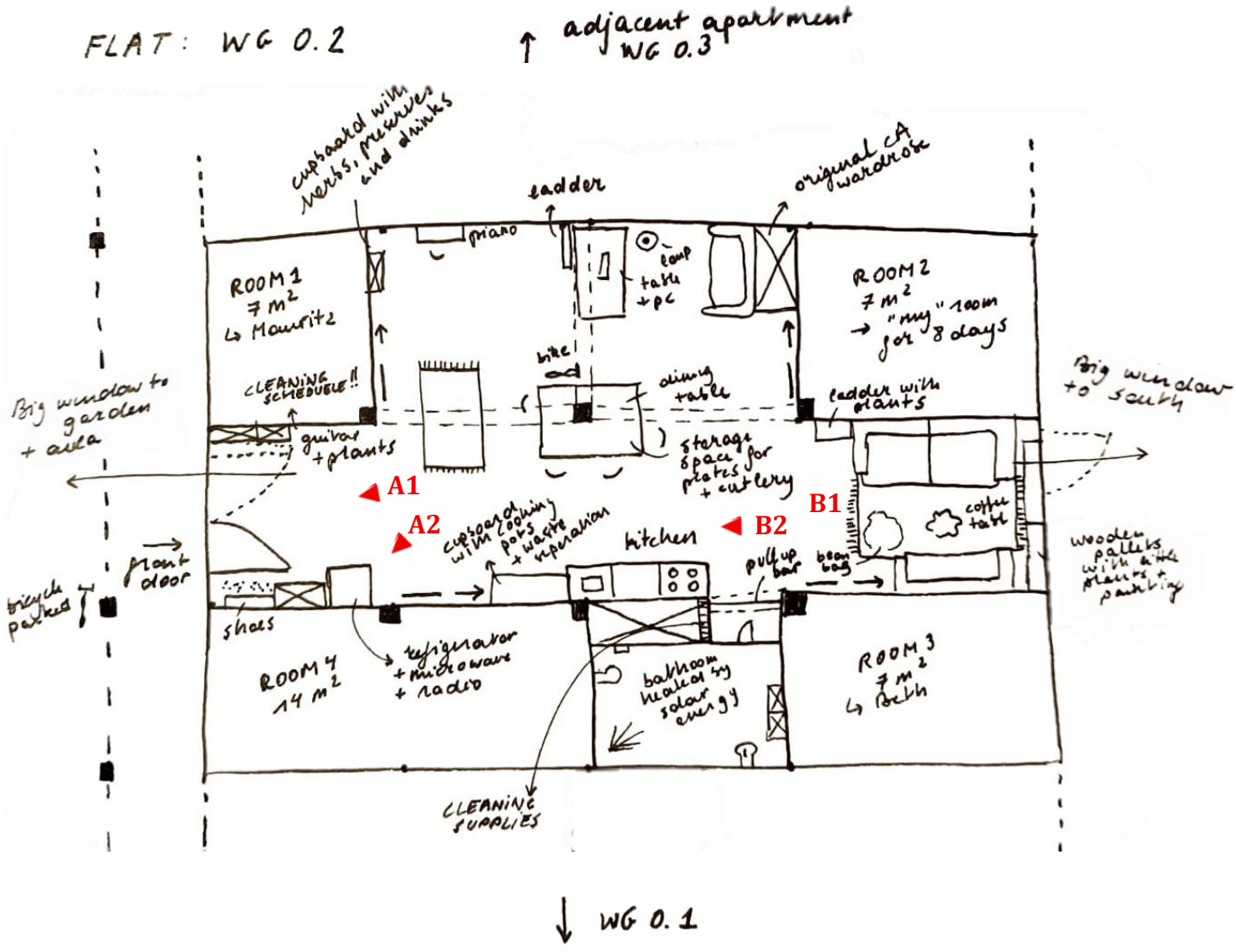


B1



B2

Figure 84 *- Ethnographic sketch of WG 0.2, made during the field visit*



C: Kitchen

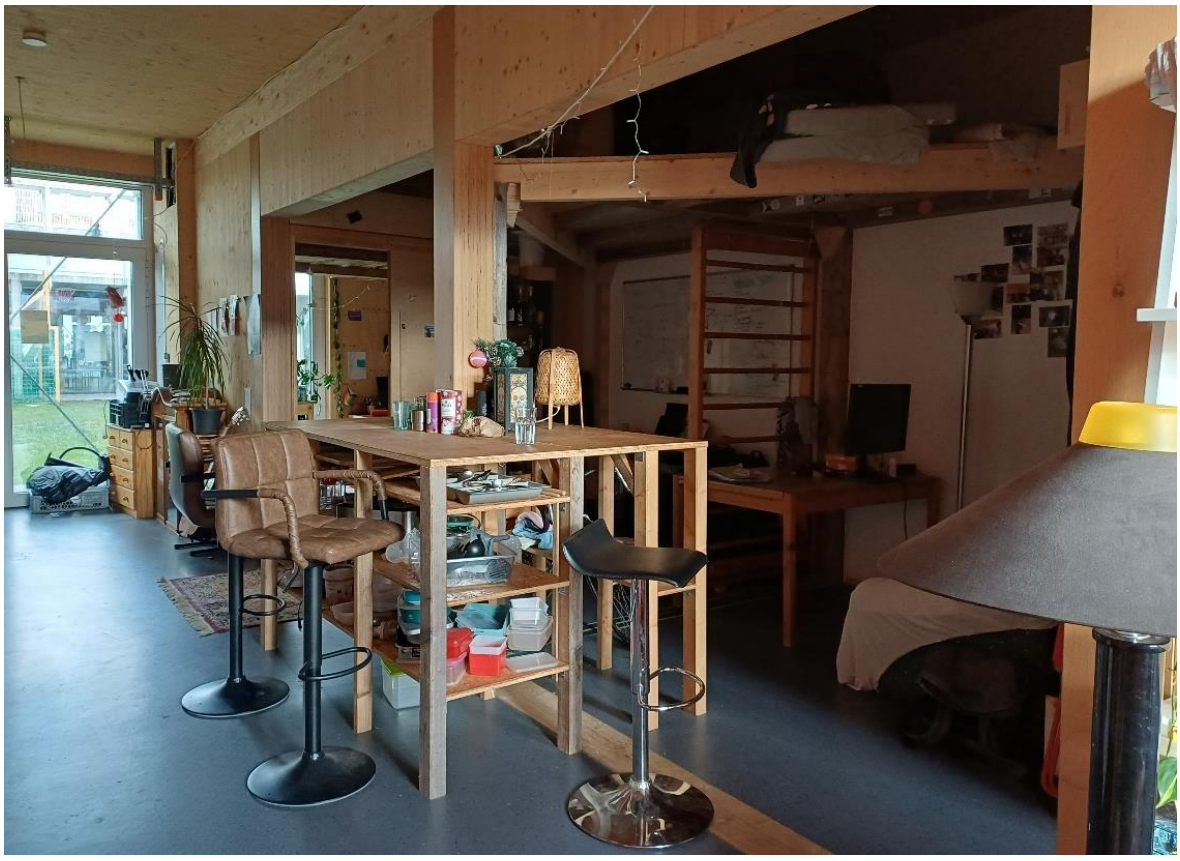
Figure 85 *– Three photos of the kitchen of WG 0.2*



C1

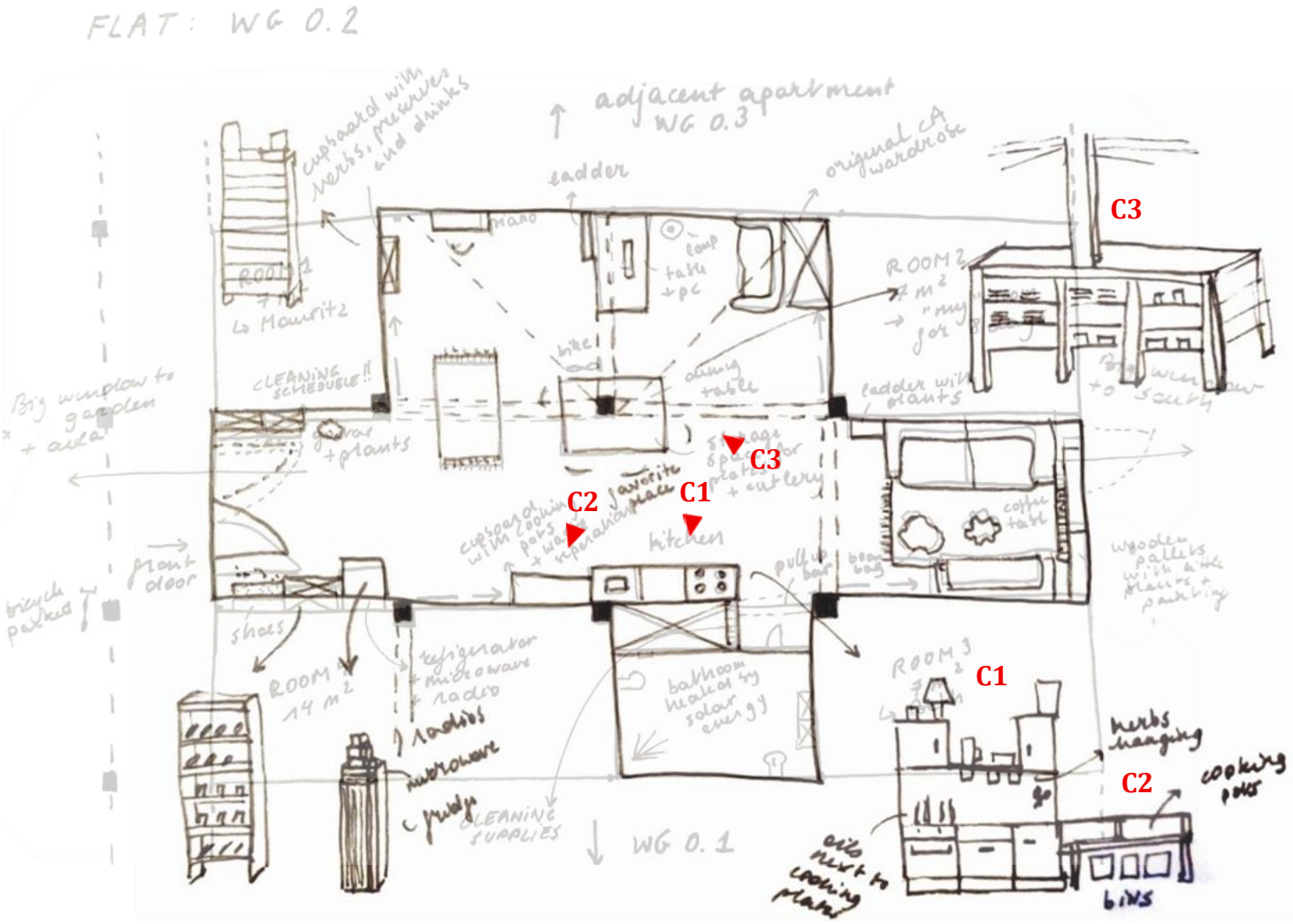


C2



C3

Figure 86 *- Ethnographic sketch of the shared spaces in WG 0.2, made during the field visit*



Private spaces of apartment WG 0.2

WG 0.2 consists of three 7 m^2 rooms and one 14 m^2 unit. The sliding doors connecting the private and communal areas remain open most of the day and are only closed for sleeping (Fig. 87.A). This design allows the communal atmosphere to flow naturally into the private spaces, making the smaller rooms feel larger and more integrated into daily life. A drawback is that the two side-by-side wooden sliding doors offer minimal sound insulation. During my stay, I often had to use earplugs to sleep when conversations took place in the kitchen.

I stayed in two rooms: Luka's 7 m^2 room has a homemade triangular mezzanine bed with a wooden railing, a standing table suitable for dining chairs, and ladder shelves reaching to the ceiling – all handmade and charmingly improvised (like his box with plugs that falls over if you bump into it) (Fig. 87.B). Eric's 14 m^2 room feels enormous by comparison: the window, which overlooks the hallway, requires curtains for privacy, and the flickering hallway light makes a sleep mask essential. A mesh ladder provides access to his upstairs bed, with a sofa underneath (Fig. 87.C).

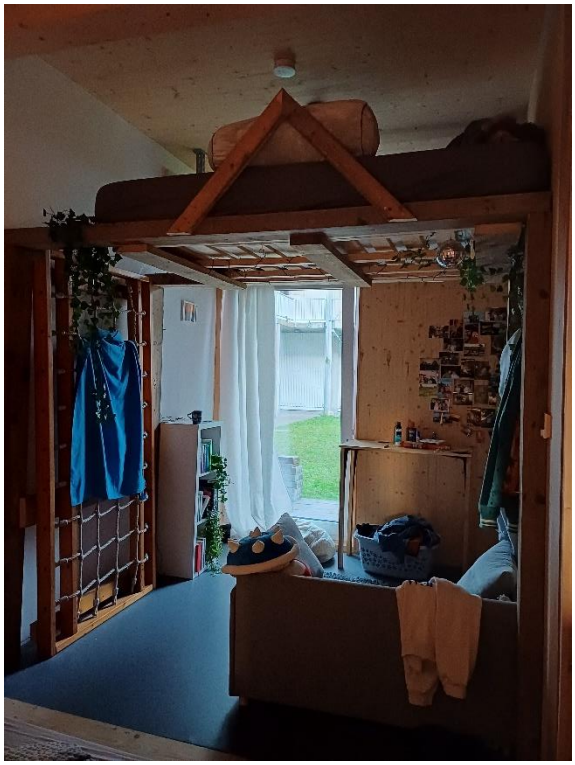
Figure 87 *– Three photos of the bedrooms of WG 0.2*



A

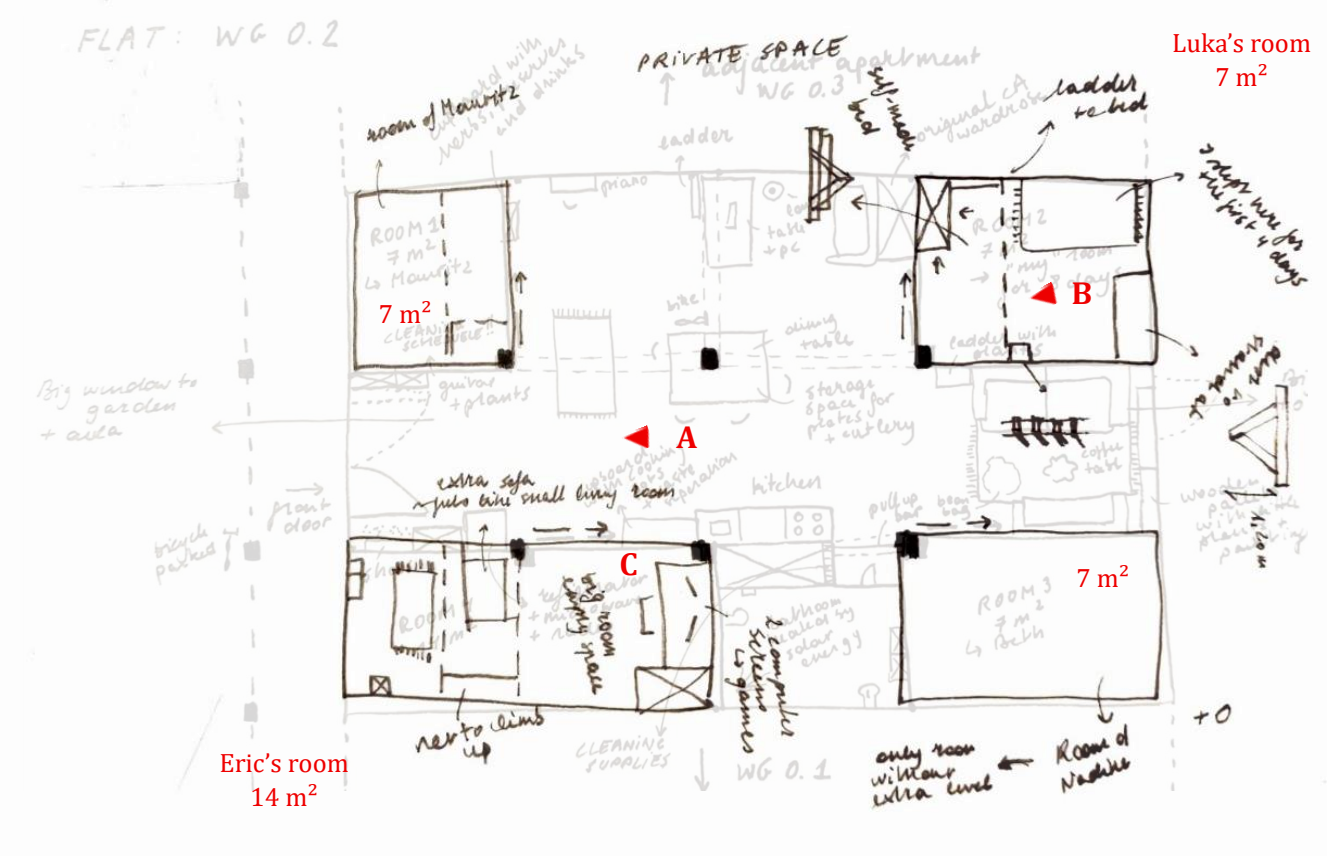


B



C

Figure 88 *- Ethnographic sketch of the private spaces in WG 0.2, made during the field visit*



B. Upper floor apartments

First floor apartments

WG 1.1 (3x7m^2), located behind the stairs on the west side, benefits from two additional windows for natural light without a direct view of the pedestrian route. However, it loses sunlight due to the shadows cast by the stairwell and experiences heavy pedestrian traffic at the door (Fig. 90).

WG 1.6 (4x7m^2), located between the staircase next to the courtyard and the other staircase next to the bicycle shed, offers a balanced mix of privacy. Each of the four rooms is 7 m^2, creating a generous communal space, including an additional alcove currently serving as storage. However, this alcove feels redundant, suggesting the layout tends towards excess. A second cooktop adjacent to the living room forms an L-shaped kitchen to maximise the available space (Fig. 91).

WG 1.12 (4x7m^2) overlooks the future park (and the roof garden), with all 7 m^2 rooms again providing unused additional communal space (Fig. 92).

WG 1.13 (3x7m^2) is located on the western corner of the project. Two additional side windows provide plenty of daylight in the living room, but they border directly on the external access gallery (Fig. 93.A). The glass front door connects to the frequently used path next to the roof garden, creating a second sightline to the apartment (Fig. 93.B). Together, these elements ensure that the common areas are heavily exposed to constant foot traffic. Klara, who lives there, describes this experience,

> *Klara (CA Resident): Our apartment is very exposed to the outside world. I would say one of the most exposed apartments, because we are directly in line with the large bridge and the other bridge along the roof garden. And everyone from our row of apartments walks across both bridges, so basically everyone walks around us. We have a large glass door, so every time you sit in our living room or work in the kitchen, you are being watched by passersby. And we also have two extra windows, namely the windows of our living room, so every time I sit on the couch, people can see me. Sometimes I find that very difficult to deal with.*[1]

This configuration creates a strong sense of visibility and illustrates the broader dynamic of openness that will be discussed in the second part.

[1] Klara, interview, January 6, 2026.



Figure 89 *– Exploded axonometric drawing, with the investigated shared apartments on floor +1*

Figure 90 *– Photo of WG 1.1 with 3 rooms of 7 m²*



Figure 91 *– Two photos of WG 1.6 with 4 rooms of 7 m²*

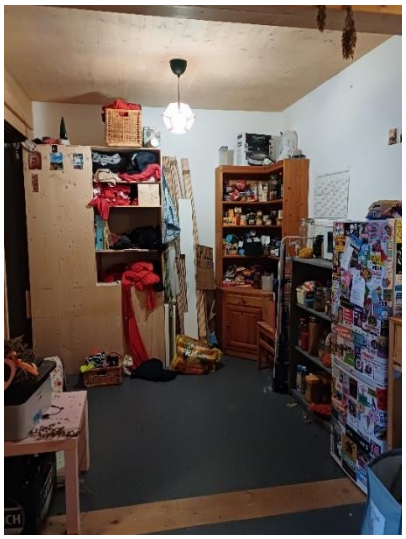




Figure 92 *– Two photos of WG 1.12 with 4 rooms of 7 m²*





Figure 93 *– Four photos of WG 1.13 with 3 rooms of 7 m²*

A



B







Second floor apartments

WG 2.2 (4x7m^2), near the stairs, is a popular spot, as it is bathed in sunshine thanks to its south-facing location. All 7 m^2 rooms offer ample communal space, which is well-utilised and furnished without feeling overly spacious (Fig. 95).

With only two 7 m^2 rooms, the communal areas of **WG 2.3** (2x7 m^2) are noticeably smaller and darker. This points to a risk: completely private 14 m^2 rooms could make the communal areas unattractively dark and stuffy (Fig. 96).

WG 2.5 is situated in a corner of the complex and is accessible via a shared vestibule – often crammed with mattresses – that shields it from the rest of the building. With only three rooms (two of 7 m^2 and one of 14 m^2), the apartment feels lighter and more spacious, partly thanks to the extra east-facing windows (Fig. 97). This layout has two sides: the solid interior door offers genuine privacy, unlike the other WGs which open directly onto a hallway, but at the same time creates a sense of some seclusion from the rest of the complex.[1]

WG 2.8 (3x7m^2) is located immediately after the stairs, and the glass front door offers an unavoidable view into the apartment, combined with heavy foot traffic – and three 7 m^2 rooms (Fig. 98).

Third floor apartments

Like WG 1.1, **WG 3.1** (4x7m^2) is situated on a corner and benefits from additional windows in the side wall, but the glass door directly adjacent to the stairwell invites curious glances from passersby. All 7 m^2 rooms create well-appointed, spotless communal areas (Fig. 99).

Traffic along **WG 3.9** (4x7m^2) remains moderate; mainly residents of WG 3.10 use the stairs in the courtyard. All four rooms are 7 m^2 in size, resulting in the well-known, excessively spacious common area that feels larger than necessary (Fig. 100).

[1] Sarah, interview, January 6, 2026.



Figure 94 *– Exploded axonometric drawing, with the investigated shared apartments on floor +2 and +3*

Figure 95 *– Three photos of WG 2.2 with 4 rooms of 7 m²*





Figure 96 *– Two photos of WG 2.3 with 2 rooms of 7 m²*





Figure 97 *– Two photos of WG 2.5 with 2 rooms of 7 m²*



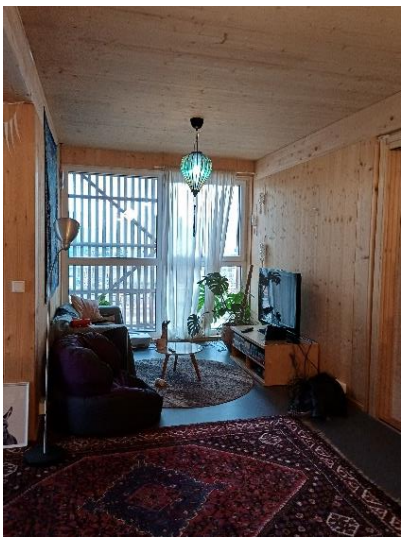


Figure 98 *– Two photos of WG 2.8 with 3 rooms of 7 m²*




Figure 99 *– Two photos of WG 3.1 with 4 rooms of 7 m²*




Figure 100 *– Three photos of WG 3.9 with 4 rooms of 7 m²*




Synthesis: Use of the private and shared spaces

The ideal living area per person

When all four rooms are 7 m^2 in size, the resulting 62 m^2 of shared space often feels too large. Various living groups with this configuration have alcoves or corners that remain unused or feel spatially redundant. Residents describe these oversized communal spaces as pleasant but not fully functional: they exceed what daily routines actually require. Personal observations and conversations with residents therefore suggest that the most balanced layout within the 90 m^2 consists of three rooms of 7 m^2 and one room of 14 m^2. This layout appears to offer the best balance between private and shared space. Converted to surface area, this results in:

- Private space: 3 × 7 m^2 + 1 × 14 m^2 = 35 m^2
- Shared space: 90 m^2 – 35 m^2 = 55 m^2
- Shared space per person: 13.75 m^2

This configuration reduces the shared space just enough to make it proportionate, easier to furnish, and more actively used. The larger private room also accommodates residents who prefer more personal space without compromising the collective atmosphere of the living group.

Feeling of autonomy

The cooperative ownership enables a strong sense of autonomy among the residents. Many describe the building as "theirs," a shared facility that they can shape according to their own vision. This sense of collective ownership encourages creative interventions: the custom-made mezzanines or the swing are typical examples. These modifications were carried out without formal permission from the plenary meeting. Over time, such interventions accumulate: newcomers inherit, modify, or dismantle previous additions, creating a continuous cycle of spatial transformation.

This dynamic aligns closely with the theory of psychological ownership by Peck et al. which posits that people take better care of shared resources when they experience a sense of "ownership" regarding them.[1] In the CA, this is clearly visible: autonomy enables stewardship rather than neglect. Residents personalise their spaces with an eye to long-term consequences, avoid structural damage, and leave modifications in a state that future residents can take over. Creativity is consistently tempered by responsibility.

Having investigated how residents shape their living environment, the next section examines how they experience the openness of the building in daily life – particularly the challenges regarding visibility, proximity, and noise.

[1] Peck et al., 'Caring for the Commons'.

2. Experiencing and managing the lack of visual and acoustical privacy

Nina noted at the beginning of my fieldwork:

> *Nina (CA Resident): The good thing here is that you are never really alone. And the bad thing is that you are never alone.*[1]

With this, she sums up how the open architecture is experienced in daily life and how it influences moods, routines, and relationships. Glass front doors, external access galleries, and permeable partitions create a constant proximity – sometimes reassuring, sometimes overwhelming – and residents develop their own strategies to cope with this intensity. To better understand this dynamic, in-depth conversations with Klara and Sarah are included in the following section. Their stories, supplemented by my own observations, reveal the ambivalence of life in a very transparent environment.



Figure 101 *– Photo of the facade of the new building next to the courtyard*

[1] Nina, interview, October 16, 2025.

Conversation with Klara

Klara lives in WG1.13, one of the most exposed apartments in the building, as described in the previous part. On nice days, the constant stream of passersby creates a sense of togetherness, and she describes how spontaneous encounters can improve her mood,

> *Klara (CA Resident): When I am in my apartment and it is a good day and I am happy and not stressed, I love that so many people walk by. I always wave to my neighbours when they pass by, and they wave back. Everyone coming down the main staircase always glances inside, and if someone is there, they wave. Or in the summer, we have our window open and people come by for a chat. We even had a party on the bridge there, and our window turned into a bar.*[1]

For her, these everyday interactions can create a sense of warmth and connection. Sometimes these small gestures can change her mood,

> *Klara (CA Resident): It can also turn a bad day into a good one when someone waves and smiles at you and is happy to see you. And if I could shut myself off so easily, I might just stay in that bad mood. Because the decision, whether people see me and wave, is not up to me, it can sometimes take a positive turn. Or it can make the situation worse. It just depends.*[2]

At the same time, she also describes the constant visibility as a source of stress and something difficult to handle,

> *Klara (CA Resident): Because everything is made out of glass (front doors) you can always see what everyone is doing, but also everyone can see what you are doing. And sometimes I miss the peace and quiet. (…) And you can not escape reality for a moment, because everyone is watching you. And if you get up at 1:00 PM one day, for whatever reason, and you are sitting there cooking in your pyjamas, everyone looks at you and walks past. Some people do not have a problem with that, and it might be a kind of "me problem". But it can definitely affect you.*[3]

Some residents respond by partially covering their windows or hanging makeshift curtains to soften the view from the gallery. These small adjustments reveal a shared need to regain control over when and how one is visible. Moreover, sound spreads easily between the rooms, making silence something that must be negotiated,

> *Klara (CA Resident): In the apartments themselves, our doors – I mean, you have probably noticed – let a lot of sound through. So it takes a lot of communication to get some silence. Which can sometimes be quite tiring and stressful. For example, when your housemates are making noise. They do not mean any harm; they are just living their lives. But if it is too loud for you at that moment, you have to keep communicating with each other. So it just takes a bit more effort.*[4]

To manage these tensions, the residents of her apartment have developed their own strategies for creating moments of privacy. One of those solutions is a shared calendar that allows residents to schedule time in the apartment for moments when they need peace and quiet,

> *Klara (CA Resident): We also have a shared calendar in the apartment, and we have a rule that everyone can put a time in the calendar when they need the apartment to themselves. For example, one of my previous housemates had online therapy on Thursdays and did not want anyone in the apartment then, but she did want her own space where she felt comfortable. So on those days, we always left that time and went for a walk or did some*

[1] Klara, interview, January 6, 2026.
[2] Klara, interview, January 6, 2026.
[3] Klara, interview, January 6, 2026.
[4] Klara, interview, January 6, 2026.

grocery shopping. Or if someone is going through a very stressful period, you can put a time in the calendar when you need some silence.[1]

This practice illustrates how residents actively interact with the spatial conditions of the building and make informal agreements that compensate for the limited architectural privacy. Klara also reflects on how her ability to live with this openness changes over time. What initially gave energy now threatens to become too demanding,

Klara (CA Resident): I think that this place is enormously beneficial for your development in a certain phase of life, whereas in other phases it can be very stressful. And I think that I am now entering a phase of my life where it is becoming too stressful to continue living here. So that prevents me from staying here any longer.[2]

Her experience emphasises that the suitability of this environment depends on personal rhythms, emotional resilience, and phase of life.

Conversation with Sarah

Sarah has been living in the student association for about two and a half years. She chose the cooperative because she wanted to live in a community-oriented environment and was unwilling to compete in Heidelberg's private rental market, which she perceived as stressful, expensive, and highly competitive (as examined in Chapter 2). What struck her was that, despite the extensive application process, the CA felt more accessible and less intimidating than the conventional housing options. For her, living in a community remains one of the strongest points of the project,

Sarah (CA Resident): One of the most important things I really like about the CA is that you live in a community. And honestly, I am used to that, because when I still lived with my parents, we also lived in an apartment complex. There, we knew our neighbours and it was very normal to invite them over for dinner. I really missed that when I moved to Heidelberg, because everything there was so isolated. So I would say that is a hugely important aspect: knowing your neighbours and living more in a community.[3]

Sarah's story illustrates why the CA distinguishes itself within the broader landscape of student housing. In both institutional student residences and the private rental market, students are typically placed in isolated living units with limited opportunities for meaningful interaction, resulting in fragmented and often lonely living situations. Against this backdrop, the CA offers a fundamentally different model: one in which daily life is shared, neighbours are familiar, and community is embedded in both the spatial layout and the organisational structure. At the same time, she also experiences the limitations of this constant proximity. Her room overlooks the hallway, making it difficult to retreat when she needs peace or privacy,

Sarah (CA Resident): My room overlooks the outside gallery, so I can not completely shut myself off. Our doors are not very soundproof either, something you have probably experienced. And sometimes I wish I could just completely shut myself off for a moment.[4]

For her, the challenge is also social in nature: because she lives so close to others, conversations, opinions, and expectations circulate constantly. This can create subtle

[1] Klara, interview, January 6, 2026.
[2] Klara, interview, January 6, 2026.
[3] Sarah, interview, January 6, 2026.
[4] Sarah, interview, January 6, 2026.

pressure to participate, be available, or simply be involved, even at times when she would rather withdraw,

> *Sarah (CA Resident): Sometimes it is just too much, too many people, too many opinions, too many discussions and it sometimes does feel like you have to do obey by some rules.*[1]

Her experience reflects Klara's ambivalence: the openness that enables a sense of community and daily support can also lead to sensory and social overload.

Synthesis: The lived experience of visual and acoustic privacy

Klara and Sarah's experiences show that the openness of the new building is a daily circumstance with which residents must actively deal. The combination of glass doors, external access galleries, and acoustically permeable interiors creates a form of constant proximity that can feel warm and socially enriching, but also intrusive or exhausting. What emerges from this is a pattern of ongoing negotiation: residents adjust curtains, communicate about noise disturbances, and develop informal tools – such as shared calendars – to create moments of privacy.

These stories nuance the common assumptions that transparency automatically enables a sense of community or that students uniformly desire a highly social living environment. The building is experienced very differently, depending on personality, emotional state, and stage of life. For some, it enables spontaneous encounters and a sense of connection; for others, it actually makes it more difficult to withdraw. The diversity of reactions emphasises that "the student" is not a homogeneous user group, but consists of introverts, neurodivergent residents, highly social individuals, and people with varying needs for privacy.

Key insights for Ghent

** Balanced spatial distribution: Strive for a proportionate ratio between private spaces and common areas (approximately 13.75 m^2 of common space per person)*

** Permission for non-structural modifications: Give residents the opportunity to customise and personalise their rooms and common areas to strengthen the sense of ownership*

** Avoid excessive visibility: Limit glass front doors and direct sightlines from hallways to maintain comfort and privacy*

** Create semi-private rest areas: Integrate quiet spaces, alcoves, or small corners into shared apartments for retreat and focused work*

** Ensure acoustic separation: Good sound insulation between private spaces and common areas is essential for a good living situation*

[1] Sarah, interview, January 6, 2026.

CONCLUDING SYNTHESIS

SPATIAL PRACTICE

3.4.5. Concluding synthesis: The mutual shaping of space and self-governance

Throughout the CA, spatial practice shows that self-management is something that is continuously shaped by space – and vice versa. The architecture of the cooperative – the thresholds, external galleries, shared spaces, and semi-hidden corners – creates conditions in which residents can interpret, negotiate, and sometimes even dispute how collective life should unfold. In these everyday interactions, the previously introduced theoretical concepts become tangible. **Appropriation** manifests as a slow, cumulative process in which residents rearrange furniture or repurpose boundary areas to meet new needs.[1] These small actions extract space from abstract design intentions and anchor it in daily routines. At the same time, the cooperative structure enables forms of **autogestion** that are inextricably linked to spatial planning.[2] Self-governance becomes visible in the way residents discuss decisions, distribute responsibilities, and resolve conflicts through the material environment itself.

The CA also functions as a **pedagogical environment** in which residents learn how to live collectively.[3] Skills such as conflict resolution, care, and mutual responsibility develop through repeated encounters in kitchens, shared apartments, and outdoor spaces. These spaces become learning grounds for cooperative life, where residents test boundaries, adjust expectations, and refine shared norms. Through these repeated interactions, residents develop a sense of **psychological ownership** that strengthens stewardship.[4] Because the building is owned by the cooperative and not by an external landlord, residents feel entitled to intervene, maintain, and care for their surroundings. This emotional involvement transforms shared spaces into places where responsibility is distributed and visibly exercised.

Finally, following the idea that design is completed by use, the architecture of the CA becomes a living project.[5] Spaces evolve as residents inhabit them; the built environment is therefore an active participant in shaping cooperative life.

In summary, these insights show that spatial practice and self-governance form a continuous feedback loop. The governance structure of the cooperative enables residents to appropriate, negotiate, and care for their environment, while spatial conditions – openness, thresholds, and shared infrastructure – determine how governance is learned, implemented, and transformed.

[1] Purcell, 'Possible Worlds', 149.

[2] Purcell, 'Possible Worlds', 147–48.

[3] Schwittay, 'Prefigurative Pedagogies'.

[4] Peck et al., 'Caring for the Commons'.

[5] Boudon, *Lived-in Architecture*.

3.5

CHAPTER SYNTHESIS OF THE COLLEGIUM ACADEMICUM

3.5. Chapter synthesis

The synthesis brings together the various levels of analysis developed in this chapter: the economic, the political through self-governance, and the spatial.

The ownership and financing structure forms the material basis for the project's autonomy. The dual model of *Hausbesitz-GmbH* (51% CA Club, 49% *Mietshäuser Syndikat*) protects the property against speculation, spreads the financial risk away from individual residents, and connects the CA to a broader solidarity network. This framework ensures long-term stability and protects the project against market pressure. At the same time, reliance on subsidies, development bank loans, and hundreds of small direct loans makes the project vulnerable to external constraints and internal pressure to remain "credible" to financiers. This subsequently influences decisions regarding the composition of the resident population, rental prices, and programmatic ambitions.

The CA also demonstrates how a historically rooted cooperative can translate democratic ideals into a sustainable, yet simultaneously fragile, daily practice of collective life. The three historical phases – Seminarstraße 2, Plöck 93, and the new CA – show that such projects only become stable when the continuity of alumni, political opportunities, and spatial resources align. The current CA selectively reactivates core elements and integrates them into a legally autonomous structure outside the university.

Internally, self-governance practices translate the structural autonomy of the CA into concrete routines of care, coordination, and shared responsibility. The layered organisational system – general assemblies, committees, weekly plenary meetings, working groups, initiatives, and clusters – creates multiple entry points for participation and enables residents to shape their living environment in a meaningful way. Recording participation helps ensure a transparent division of tasks, turning maintenance, repairs, and administrative work into recognised parts of the collective project. These structures enable a strong sense of ownership, mutual support, and democratic learning. At the same time, interviews and observations reveal the associated costs: the time investment in meetings, the emotional burden required to keep processes inclusive, knowledge gaps between successive generations of students, and unequal participation. This dynamic shows that flat hierarchies require continuous pedagogical and relational work to remain accessible to all residents. Conflict resolution instruments such as Schlau help address tensions, but they depend on a small group of highly committed residents and ultimately remain bound by the legal powers of the CA GmbH.

Finally, the CA demonstrates that self-management is embedded in daily spatial practices. Thresholds, circulation zones, and common areas become places where routines of care, maintenance, and social interaction take shape. Residents adapt the private spaces of their apartments with DIY solutions, and the collective space through signages, routines, and furniture adaptations. These spatial qualities promote visibility, accessibility, and collective responsibility. Yet, they also generate tensions: the transparency of glass doors reduces privacy, the large auditorium is better suited for major events than for everyday gatherings, and families sometimes feel marginalised in student-dominated spaces. These trade-offs highlight that cooperative spaces must be constantly adjusted to strike a balance between a sense of community, rest zones, privacy, and unequal care responsibilities.

In summary, the strength of the Collegium Academicum lies in maintaining a productive tension between anti-speculative ownership, the demands of self-governance, and a consciously transparent architecture that is both facilitating and, at times, challenging. When residents collectively shape both the organisational framework and the spatial environment, they cultivate a strong culture of responsibility, experimentation, and mutual care. However, this culture remains dependent on continuous effort: knowledge transfer, inclusive practices, and conflict mediation are essential to prevent inequalities from becoming entrenched. The CA thus offers a realistic and instructive example of what cooperative student housing can achieve when autonomy and responsibility are structurally supported, while simultaneously demonstrating that such successes require ongoing collective effort.

These insights now form the basis for Chapter 4, in which the organisational, spatial, and cultural lessons drawn from the CA are translated into concrete principles for the development of a student cooperative in Ghent.

4

RESEARCH INSIGHTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

CHAPTER 4: Comparative insights and practical implications for a student cooperative in Ghent

This chapter brings together the findings of the master dissertation and answers the two research questions:

> *How do ownership models in student housing shape the spatial practices of self management, and how do these contribute to affordability, (social) sustainability, and democratic forms of collective living?*
>
> *How can insights from these practices influence the development of a student cooperative in Ghent and stimulate a critical re-evaluation of established ideas regarding the design of student housing?*

It begins with a synthesis of the student housing landscapes of Ghent and Heidelberg. Since Chapter 2 already contains an extensive comparison, this chapter uses that material selectively and focuses exclusively on the structural pressures, obstacles, and preconditions that directly determine the feasibility of cooperative initiatives in Ghent. Subsequently, the translation of ownership and governance models into spatial practices is summarised by analysing Home Vermeylen and the Collegium Academicum. It examines the influence of these models on self-management, affordability, social sustainability, and democratic forms of collective life. The chapter concludes with concrete implications for Ghent, outlining the institutional, organisational, spatial, and cultural conditions necessary for the establishment of a student cooperative and for a critical review of conventional approaches to student housing.

These three components connect the structural context, the empirical analysis, and the future-oriented strategies, thereby forming a coherent foundation for cooperative student housing in Ghent.

4.1

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GHENT AND HEIDELBERG

4.1. Comparative analysis of Ghent and Heidelberg

Key insights from Ghent

The student housing market in Ghent is under persistent pressure, but at the same time offers opportunities for a cooperative initiative. In this section, the conditions for the feasibility of a student cooperative are analysed based on three elements: the dynamics at the city level that create both limitations and opportunities, the barriers to development, and the facilitating factors that provide room for experimentation with non-speculative housing models.

Structural pressure and the resulting opportunities

These are long-term dynamics in the Ghent housing market that both impose constraints and create space for alternative models.

Persistent shortage and typological mismatch	Ghent is grappling with a shortage of affordable student rooms, this is exacerbated by a supply that does not align with students' growing preference for small-scale, shared living arrangements. The shortage is therefore both numerical and typological. A cooperative can address this gap by developing forms of shared housing that are currently being overlooked by the market.
Pressure on the broader housing market	As students enter the regular rental market, competition increases in segments used by low-income households, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities. While a cooperative cannot reverse this dynamic, it can offer a non-speculative, stabilising alternative that alleviates pressure on vulnerable market segments.
Financialized development dictates new construction	Recent student housing is driven by investment logic, resulting in high rents and standardised typologies optimised for financial return. A cooperative introduces a different development logic: protecting affordability, preserving land value within the community, and aligning spatial decisions with the needs of residents rather than the expectations of investors.

Obstacles: What stands in the way of a cooperative?

These are barriers that directly hinder the establishment of a cooperative in Ghent.

Scarce land and structural dependence on external parties	The tight land market in Ghent leaves student groups virtually no room to secure a location or test alternative housing models. Because students cannot independently acquire land, obtain substantial funding, or guarantee the long-term continuity of the organisation, every cooperative initiative is structurally dependent on political support and institutional partners.
Limitations regarding scale	A cooperative cannot solve the city-wide shortage or counteract broader market dynamics. Its significance lies in demonstrating viable forms of collectively organised, community-oriented student housing.
Limited familiarity with cooperative models	Most students have little knowledge of cooperative living or the organisational work involved. Even in a politically engaged student environment like Ghent, housing is rarely viewed as a domain in which political influence can be exerted. As a result, the idea that maintaining and shaping a cooperative is a meaningful political act remains largely unknown. Setting up a cooperative therefore requires continuous knowledge building and public visibility.
Pressure for quick solutions	The urgency of the housing crisis forces institutions into large-scale, quickly implementable projects. A cooperative must therefore clearly articulate its added value and justify a slower, community-oriented approach.

Preconditions: What makes a cooperative feasible?

In addition to the obstacles, various developments in Ghent are creating a favourable climate for experimenting with non-speculative housing models. These factors offer a realistic basis for testing and anchoring cooperative principles in the housing landscape.

Institutional momentum	The city's housing department has a clear picture of the structural crisis, supported by the *Woonstudie* and ongoing policy work.[1] Interest in alternative ownership models is growing, and several research projects – including this thesis – indicate institutional attention.
Alignment with policy objectives	A cooperative aligns with Ghent's ambition to diversify the housing supply and strengthen socially anchored, long-term solutions. The focus on affordability, community, and sustainability complements existing policy priorities.
Demand for communal living	Students consistently show interest in living with friends or in small-scale shared living units – options that are largely lacking in the current market. A cooperative can directly address this unmet demand.

[1] Atelier Romain and Endeavour, *Woonstudie Gent*.

Key insights from Heidelberg

Heidelberg is grappling with structural pressures that closely resemble those in Ghent: a severe shortage of affordable student rooms, rapidly rising private rents, and limited opportunities for institutional providers to stabilise the market. This pressure led to a demand for non-speculative housing models, while obstacles such as scarce land, high land prices, and a political preference for large, quickly implementable projects limited experimentation.

However, what distinguishes Heidelberg are the specific preconditions that made the establishment of the Collegium Academicum possible:

- Release of redevelopment land: The withdrawal of the US military freed up 180–200 hectares of land, creating rare spatial opportunities for alternative projects.
- Supportive tenancy culture: A strong local tenancy tradition enabled an institutional climate open to collectively organised, non-speculative housing.
- Symbolic continuity: The historical legacy of the former Collegium Academicum reinforced the project's credibility and helped mobilise political and public support.

Only one facilitating factor overlaps with Ghent:

- Political recognition of the housing crisis: In both cities, the urgency of the student housing situation led to a willingness to consider alternative models.

Synthesis: Comparative insights

The comparison shows that Ghent and Heidelberg are shaped by similar structural pressures – shortages, rising rents, and a dominant private market – while also facing similar obstacles such as land scarcity and a political preference for rapid, large-scale solutions. However, the preconditions that made the Collegium Academicum possible – large redevelopment sites, a supportive rental culture, and symbolic continuity – were very specific to Heidelberg. Ghent shares only the political recognition of the housing crisis, not the structural possibilities that made the CA possible.

This comparison makes it clear that the Heidelberg model cannot simply be copied. Instead, Ghent must actively create the institutional and political conditions necessary for a student cooperative: acquiring land through partnerships, guaranteeing the continuity of the organisation, and anchoring cooperative principles in local policy.

4.2

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS CASE STUDIES

How do ownership models in student housing shape the spatial practices of self management, and how do these contribute to affordability, (social) sustainability, and democratic forms of collective living?

4.2. Case studies: How ownership models shape spatial practices

The comparative analysis by Home Vermeylen and the Collegium Academicum shows how ownership models structure governance, how governance shapes spatial practices, and how these practices influence the possibilities for self-management, affordability, social sustainability, and democratic collective life (Fig. 102-103). Together, the case studies reveal the mechanisms by which ownership becomes a spatial and social reality.

Home Vermeylen: Institutional ownership and outsourced responsibility

1. **Institutional ownership → Externalised governance structure**

   Home Vermeylen demonstrates how a university-managed ownership model creates a governance structure in which responsibility for shared spaces lies almost entirely externally. Cleaning, maintenance, repairs, and conflict resolution are handled by professional services, resulting in standardised procedures and uniform rules. This model leaves little room for participation or collective decision-making, as residents are not expected – or enabled – to take responsibility for their environment.

2. **Externalised governance structure → Passive spatial practices**

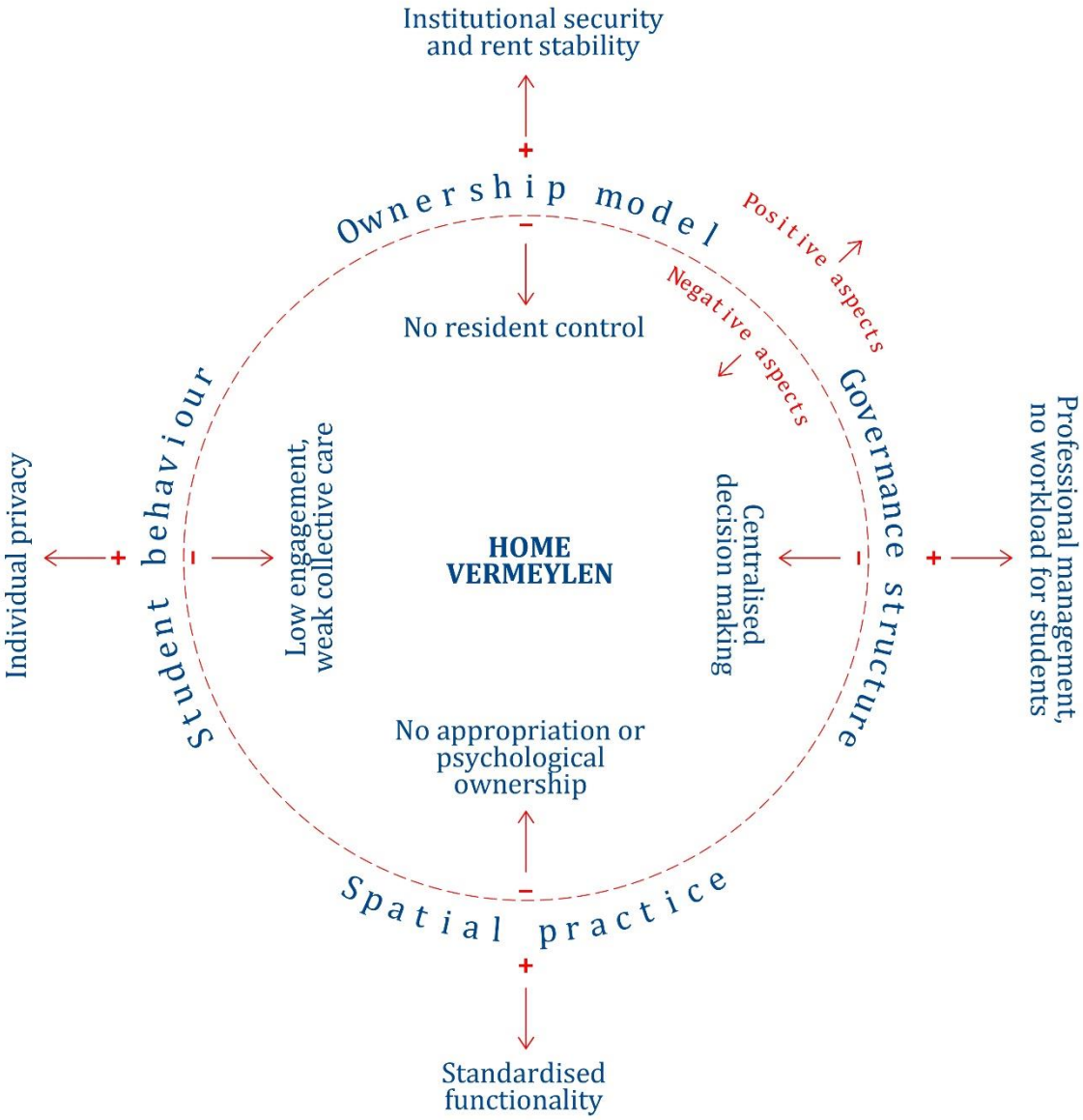
   Because responsibility is outsourced, shared spaces are used passively. Residents cannot modify kitchens, hallways, or common areas in a meaningful way, which hinders the development of a sense of ownership. The scale of the building reinforces this dynamic: with 28 students sharing a kitchen and 56 per floor, anonymity becomes the norm, making it difficult to develop shared routines. Common areas are functional, but too little has been invested in them and they are designed for circulation rather than for collective life.

3. **Passive spatial practices → Limited self-management, weak social sustainability, and minimal democratic participation**

   Passive spatial practices significantly limit the possibilities for self-governance, social sustainability, and democratic participation. Because residents lack both the mandate and the material conditions to organise community life, self-governance remains structurally limited. Social sustainability is undermined by anonymity and a low level of interaction, while democratic participation is minimal due to centralised decision-making and the lack of meaningful influence on the environment.

   At the same time, the model offers predictable rental prices, professional maintenance, and a high degree of privacy.

Figure 102 *– Diagram of the institutional model: mechanisms of externalised governance and passive spatial practice*



Collegium Academicum: Cooperative ownership and internalised responsibility

1. **Cooperative ownership model → Internalised governance structure**

   The Collegium Academicum demonstrates how cooperative ownership fundamentally reforms the governance of student housing by internalising responsibility and enabling structured participation. Because ownership is collective and protected by the *Mietshäuser Syndikat*, residents have actual decision-making authority and autonomy over the building. This ownership structure leads to a governance model in which responsibility is distributed among the residents. Governance is therefore participatory, formalised, and aimed at enabling residents to collectively manage their environment.

2. **Internalised governance structure ↔ Active spatial practices**

   This governance model generates direct active spatial practices. Common areas are continuously adapted, repaired, and redecorated by the residents themselves. The modular units and flexible common spaces encourage appropriation, thereby strengthening psychological ownership and long-term commitment. Daily maintenance – cleaning, minor repairs, organising shared kitchens – is coordinated collectively, making care for the space a routine.

3. **Active spatial practices → Opportunities for self-management, social sustainability, and democratic participation**

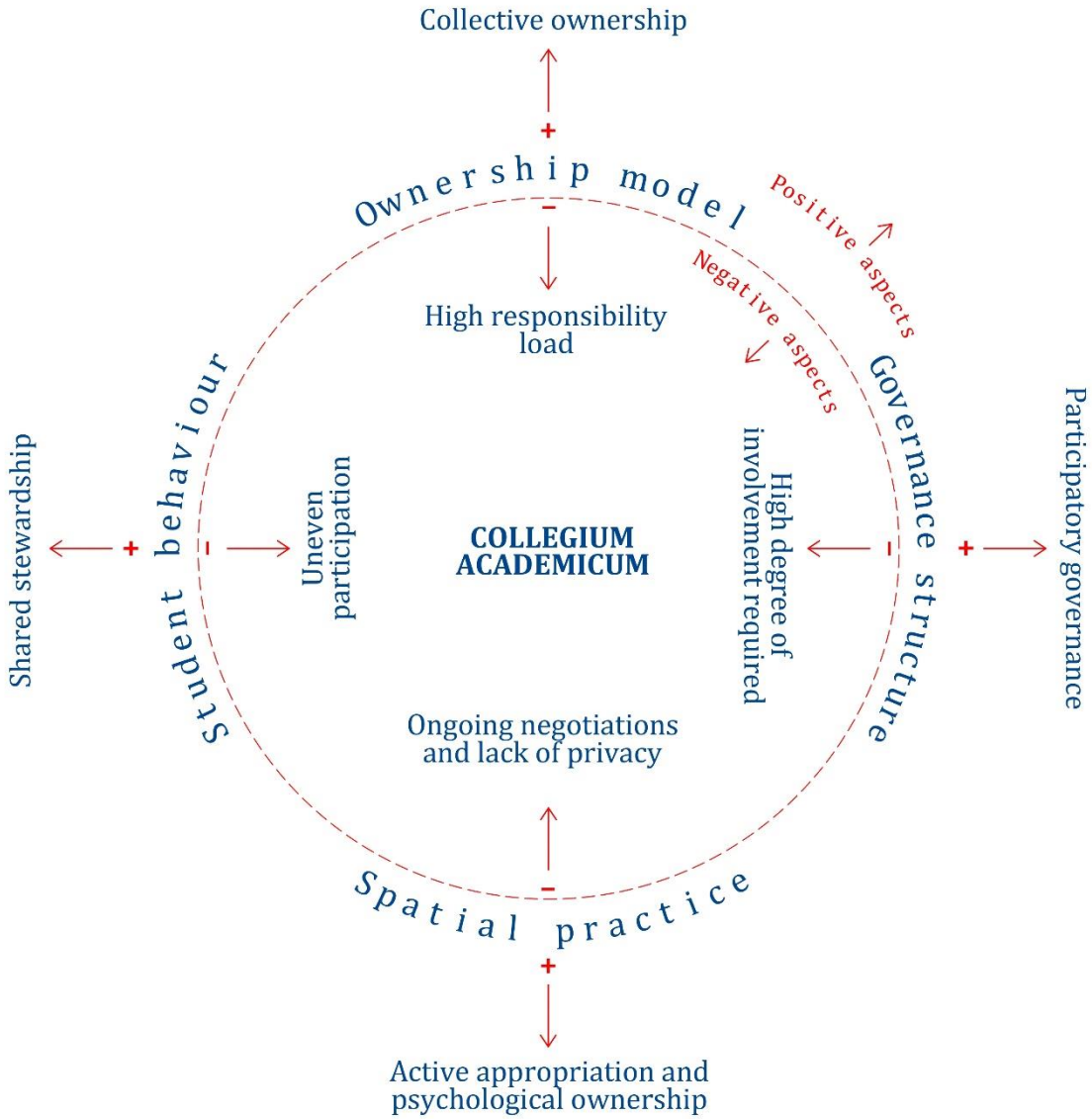
   Self-management is structurally embedded: residents have both the authority and the material means to organise communal life, and daily maintenance is considered a collective responsibility. Social sustainability is strengthened by daily cooperation, mutual support, and the informal norms that emerge when residents routinely shape and maintain their environment together. Finally, democratic participation is normalised as a lived practice – through transparent decision-making, rotating responsibilities, and ongoing negotiation regarding shared space.

   However, these strengths also entail tensions: the high degree of involvement can be demanding, and the expectation of participation may not suit every resident equally well, especially during periods of high turnover or unequal involvement.

Synthesis: How ownership structures shape daily collective life

The comparison makes clear that ownership models create the conditions under which collective life can develop. In a university-managed environment, responsibility is externalised, resulting in predictable and professionally maintained housing but giving residents little influence over shared spaces or common routines. In a cooperative environment, responsibility is internalised, allowing residents to shape and maintain their environment and anchoring self-management, social sustainability, and democratic participation in daily practice. Each model thus generates a distinct form of collective life: one aimed at stability through external control, the other at autonomy through shared responsibility. These mechanisms clarify how ownership becomes a spatial and social reality and form the basis for research into how similar preconditions can be created in Ghent.

Figure 103 *– Diagram of the cooperative model: mechanisms of internalised governance and active spatial practice*



4.3

INSIGHTS FOR GHENT

How can insights from these practices influence the development of a student cooperative in Ghent and stimulate a critical re-evaluation of established ideas regarding the design of student housing?

4.3. Conditions for the development of a student cooperative in Ghent

The following institutional, organisational, cultural, and spatial requirements outline how cooperative principles can be embedded in the Ghent housing landscape while simultaneously challenging conventional views on the development and design of student housing.

Institutional conditions

Creating the structural space for a cooperative

In the tight Ghent land market, a cooperative cannot take shape without explicit institutional support. Three elements are essential for creating the structural space in which a cooperative can stabilise and grow:

- Guaranteed access to land, via long-term leases or public allocation, since student groups cannot compete with private project developers.
- A protected ownership structure that prevents resale or speculative appropriation and guarantees long-term affordability.
- Formal partnerships with universities, the municipality, or government agencies to distribute administrative, financial, and legal responsibilities and strengthen the legitimacy of the cooperative.

These conditions form the institutional basis that enables cooperative ownership and governance to function in practice.

Organisational conditions

Embedding participation without overburdening residents

A cooperative depends on participation, but this must be structured in such a way that it remains sustainable in the long term. This requires:

- Clear participation rhythms, such as rotating roles, fixed meeting formats, and transparent mandates.
- Robust systems for knowledge transfer to ensure continuity despite high turnover.
- Protection against overburdening, through limitations on individual responsibilities and the possibility of external support for complex tasks.

These organisational structures translate cooperative governance into a manageable, collective practice rather than a burden borne by a few highly committed residents.

Cultural conditions

Building legitimacy and collaborative capacity

A cooperative must also take into account the cultural dimension of student housing. There is still much scepticism regarding self-organisation among students, and many students have little experience with collective living. Two strategies are central:

- Building trust and legitimacy through transparent communication, visible accountability, and collaboration with institutional partners.

- Creating opportunities for collective experiences, such as workshops, pilot projects, and temporary initiatives, allowing students to practice collaboration and develop self-management confidence.

These cultural foundations help shift the perception of student housing from a service provided to individuals to a joint project shaped by the residents.

Spatial conditions

Design choices that support collective routines

The spatial configuration of a cooperative must actively support the daily practices of collaboration, care, and shared responsibility. This requires design choices that differ fundamentally from the large-scale, standardised typologies prevalent in institutional housing:

- **Semi-public transitional spaces** – widened walkways, sheltered outdoor spaces, shared vestibules – create moments of informal coordination and daily visibility. They function as the social infrastructure through which self-management becomes a lived practice.
- **Dual circulation** enables residents to regulate their level of social exposure. A combination of direct, private routes and slower, more visible paths promotes autonomy while simultaneously allowing for chance encounters.
- **Flexible, robust living units** encourage long-term use and strengthen the residents' sense of ownership. Simple layouts, durable materials, and the possibility of adjustments allow residents to shape their environment over time.
- **Multiple small communal spaces**, distributed across the floors, are essential for daily life. Instead of one large multifunctional hall, the building must offer a series of intimate, appropriately scaled spaces where residents can cook, meet, study, or organise tasks
- A clear **spatial separation of public or noisy functions** is necessary to protect living comfort. Event spaces, workshops, or public-facing activities must be located at the edge of the site so that community life does not conflict with peace and quiet or privacy.
- **Acoustic and visual privacy** must be integrated from the outset. Selective transparency and sound-absorbing materials prevent noise pollution and social pressure.

These spatial principles translate cooperative governance into lived routines and make collective responsibility materially possible.

Synthesis: Conditions for a cooperative in Ghent

The analysis demonstrates that the development of a student cooperative in Ghent depends on the alignment of institutional support, organisational structures, spatial design, and cultural practices, enabling shared responsibility without overburdening residents. The goal is not to replicate the Collegium Academicum, but to translate the underlying mechanisms to the context of Ghent. The findings provide a framework for designing and managing student housing that strengthens affordability, resident engagement, and long-term social sustainability. At the same time, they invite a critical reconsideration of dominant, large-scale, standardised models.

4.4

CHAPTER SYNTHESIS AND PERSONAL REFLECTION

4.4. Chapter synthesis

This chapter has demonstrated that the feasibility of a student cooperative in Ghent depends on the interplay between urban conditions, the mechanisms that emerged from the case studies, and the practical requirements for implementation. The comparison with Heidelberg shows that similar structural pressures can lead to interest in non-speculative housing models, but that the preconditions for cooperative development remain highly context-specific. Applied to the Ghent context, the findings point to a model in which institutional support, organisational clarity, spatial intent, and cultural legitimacy must reinforce one another.

In a broader sense, the analysis encourages a critical re-evaluation of established approaches to student housing by demonstrating that affordability, shared responsibility, and long-term social sustainability can be structurally embedded.

Personal reflection

This thesis arose from a curiosity about why some living communities naturally enable collective care and responsibility, while others struggle even to maintain basic forms of cooperation. By engaging with this question, I was able to look beyond individual behaviour and understand how daily life in communal housing is shaped by deeper organisational and spatial structures. The research process revealed the complexity of collective living, the extent to which it depends on governance and design, and how vulnerable yet meaningful shared responsibility becomes when actively supported.

Throughout the research, I was guided by the conviction that students are entitled to housing that not only remains affordable but also enables autonomy, connectedness, and a sense of belonging. I hope that the insights developed here will help clarify how cooperative forms of student housing could be organised in Ghent and provide space for new ways of thinking about what student life might entail.

Researching this subject was a process I genuinely enjoyed. It has deepened my understanding of how students live together and strengthened my appreciation for the daily practices that enable shared responsibility.

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Figures

Most of the figures in this thesis were created by the author, including ethnographic sketches, field photographs, and axonometric drawings. The visual style – particularly the colour palette and graphic design – is inspired by the publication *Cooperative Conditions: A Primer on Architecture, Finance and Regulation in Zurich* by Anne Kockelkorn, Susanne Schindler and Rebekka Hirschberg.[1] However, a number of images originate from external sources or are based on information from published materials. These images, which originate from or are derived from external sources, are listed below.

Fig. A - Aerial photograph of the student residences in the Overpoort district. Google Earth. Overpoort, Ghent, Belgium. Digital map image. Screenshot by the author, converted to black and white. Accessed May 18, 2026.

Fig. E - Overpoort student restaurant with Home Fabiola in the background, 1972. UGentMemorie. "Studentenrestaurant." Accessed December 4, 2025. https://www.ugentmemorie.be/artikel/studentenrestaurant.

Fig. G - Overpoort student restaurant, 1972. UGentMemorie. "Studentenrestaurant." Accessed December 4, 2025. https://www.ugentmemorie.be/artikel/studentenrestaurant.

Fig. 3 – Digital map of Heidelberg (redevelopment areas and districts). City of Heidelberg. *Stadtplan*. Accessed March 17, 2026. https://www.heidelberg.de/HD/Stadtplan.html.

Fig. 5 – Digital map of US Hospital Site. City of Heidelberg. *Stadtplan.* Accessed March 17, 2026. https://www.heidelberg.de/HD/Stadtplan.html.

Fig. 7 – Aerial view of the Collegium Academicum in Heidelberg. Garschke, Philipp. *Drohnenaufnahme mit Garten.* Photograph, November 24, 2024.

Fig. 10 – Diagram of the solidarity contribution system within the MHS model. Redrawn and translated by the author from: Atanackovic, Petar, and Projekthaus Potsdam-Babelsberg. *Housing Model of the Mietshäuser Syndikat*. n.d. Page 10. https://www.projekthaus-potsdam.de/.

Fig. 11 – Financing of the new building. "Funding – Collegium Academicum." Accessed December 20, 2025. https://collegiumacademicum.de/en/funding/.

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Fig. 13 – Room model to generate press attention and direct loans (2018). Collegium Academicum. *Room Model for Press Attention and Direct Loans*. Photograph, 2018.

Fig. 15 – Aerial photograph of the former Collegium Academicum at Seminarstraße 2. Meier, Franziska, Gerd Koenen, Gerd Steffens, and Dorothea Quitmann. *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945–1985–2015*. Econotion, 2026. Page 11.

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Fig. 16 – Elections in the student assembly (Convention) of the former Collegium Academicum (1956). Meier, Franziska, Gerd Koenen, Gerd Steffens, and Dorothea Quitmann. *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945–1985–2015*. Econotion, 2026. Page 24.

Fig. 17 – Student demonstration in 1968. Meier, Franziska, Gerd Koenen, Gerd Steffens, and Dorothea Quitmann. *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945–1985–2015*. Econotion, 2026. Page 30.

Fig. 18 – Student demonstration in 1968. Meier, Franziska, Gerd Koenen, Gerd Steffens, and Dorothea Quitmann. *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945–1985–2015*. Econotion, 2026. Page 32.

Fig. 19 – Eviction of the Collegium Academicum in 1978. Meier, Franziska, Gerd Koenen, Gerd Steffens, and Dorothea Quitmann. *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945–1985–2015*. Econotion, 2026. Page 36.

Fig. 21 – Protest march of the 2009 education strike along the River Neckar. Meier, Franziska, Gerd Koenen, Gerd Steffens, and Dorothea Quitmann. *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945–1985–2015*. Econotion, 2026. Page 40.

Fig. 25 – Diagram of the Konsensfisch method. DFG-VK. "Arguing in a Grassroots Democratic and Peaceful Manner." September 1, 2021. https://zivilcourage.dfg-vk.de/basisdemokratisch-und-friedlich-streiten/.

Fig. 26 – AG Workshop Manual: "How to Repair Your Shower Curtains," p. 1. AG Workshop. *How to Repair Your Shower Curtains*. Unpublished internal manual, sent by email to the author, January 11, 2026.

Fig. 27 – AG Workshop Manual: "How to Repair Your Shower Curtains," p. 4. AG Workshop. *How to Repair Your Shower Curtains*. Unpublished internal manual, sent by email to the author, January 11, 2026.

Fig. 28 – Governance structure of the former CA (1956), reconstructed based on the statutes of Seminarstraße 2. Meier, Franziska, Gerd Koenen, Gerd Steffens, and Dorothea Quitmann. *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945–1985–2015*. Econotion, 2026. Pages 148–165.

Fig. 29 – Governance structure of the former CA (1970), reconstructed based on the statutes of Seminarstraße 2. Meier, Franziska, Gerd Koenen, Gerd Steffens, and Dorothea Quitmann. *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945–1985–2015*. Econotion, 2026. Pages 148–165.

Fig. 30 – Governance structure of the current CA (2013), reconstructed based on the latest statutes. Meier, Franziska, Gerd Koenen, Gerd Steffens, and Dorothea Quitmann. *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945–1985–2015*. Econotion, 2026. Pages 148–165.

Fig. 34 – Graph 1: showing the desired number of working hours per week (translated), p. 4. Collegium Academicum. *Survey Workload*. Heidelberg, 2024.

Fig. 35 – Graph 2: showing the actual number of working hours per week (translated), p. 1. Collegium Academicum. *Survey Workload*. Heidelberg, 2024.

Fig. 36 – Graph 3: showing the main barriers to participation (translated), p. 26. Collegium Academicum. *Survey Workload*. Heidelberg, 2024.

Fig. 37 – Graph 4: showing opinions on the even distribution of workload (translated), p. 10. Collegium Academicum. *Survey Workload*. Heidelberg, 2024.

Fig. 38 – Graph 5: showing opinions on maintaining a balance between obligations (translated), p. 38. Collegium Academicum. *Survey Workload*. Heidelberg, 2024.

Fig. 39 – Graph 6: showing opinions on what would facilitate participation in the CA (translated), p. 33. Collegium Academicum. *Survey Workload*. Heidelberg, 2024.

Fig. 41 – Aerial view of the Collegium Academicum in Heidelberg. Garschke, Philipp. *Drohnenaufnahme.* Photograph, November 24, 2024.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

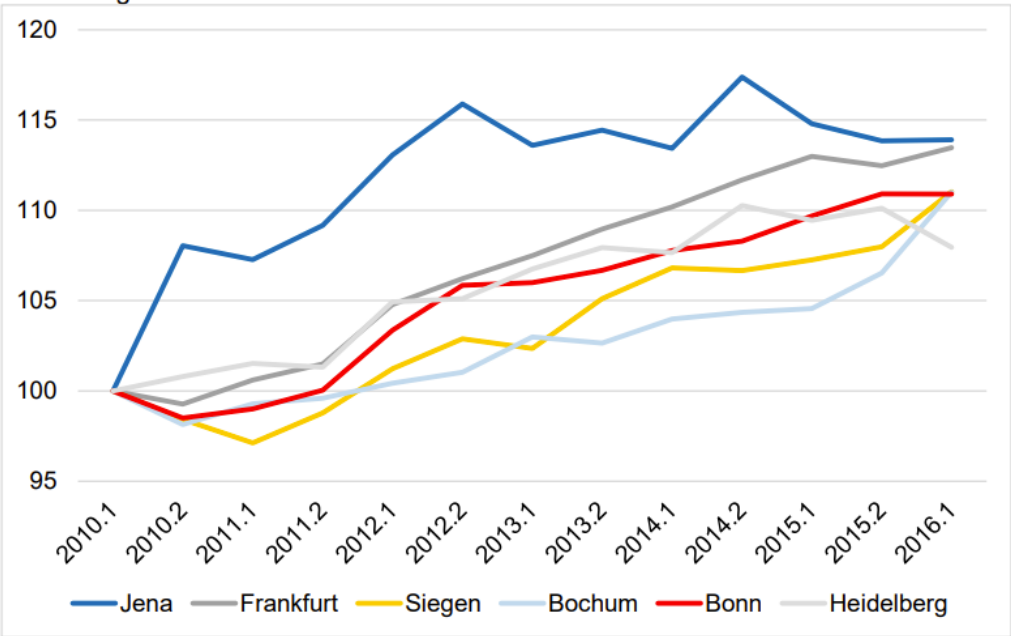
QUANTITATIVE DATA (CHAPTER 2)

Appendix

Appendix A: Quantitative data (chapter 2)

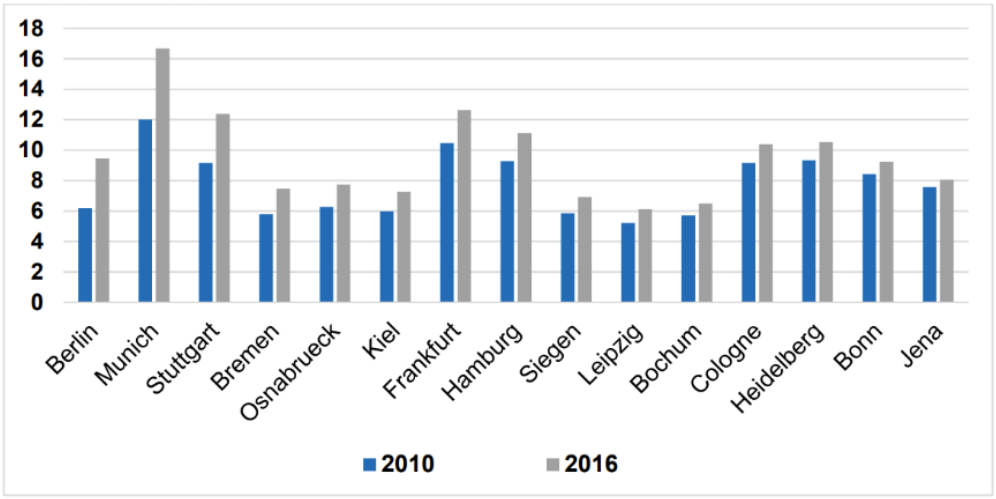
Appendix A1: Hedonic rent price index for Heidelberg[1]

Figure 4 – Hedonic rent price indices for Jena, Frankfurt, Siegen, Bochum, Bonn, and Heidelberg



Appendix A2: Average prices for student housing per m^2 in Heidelberg[2]

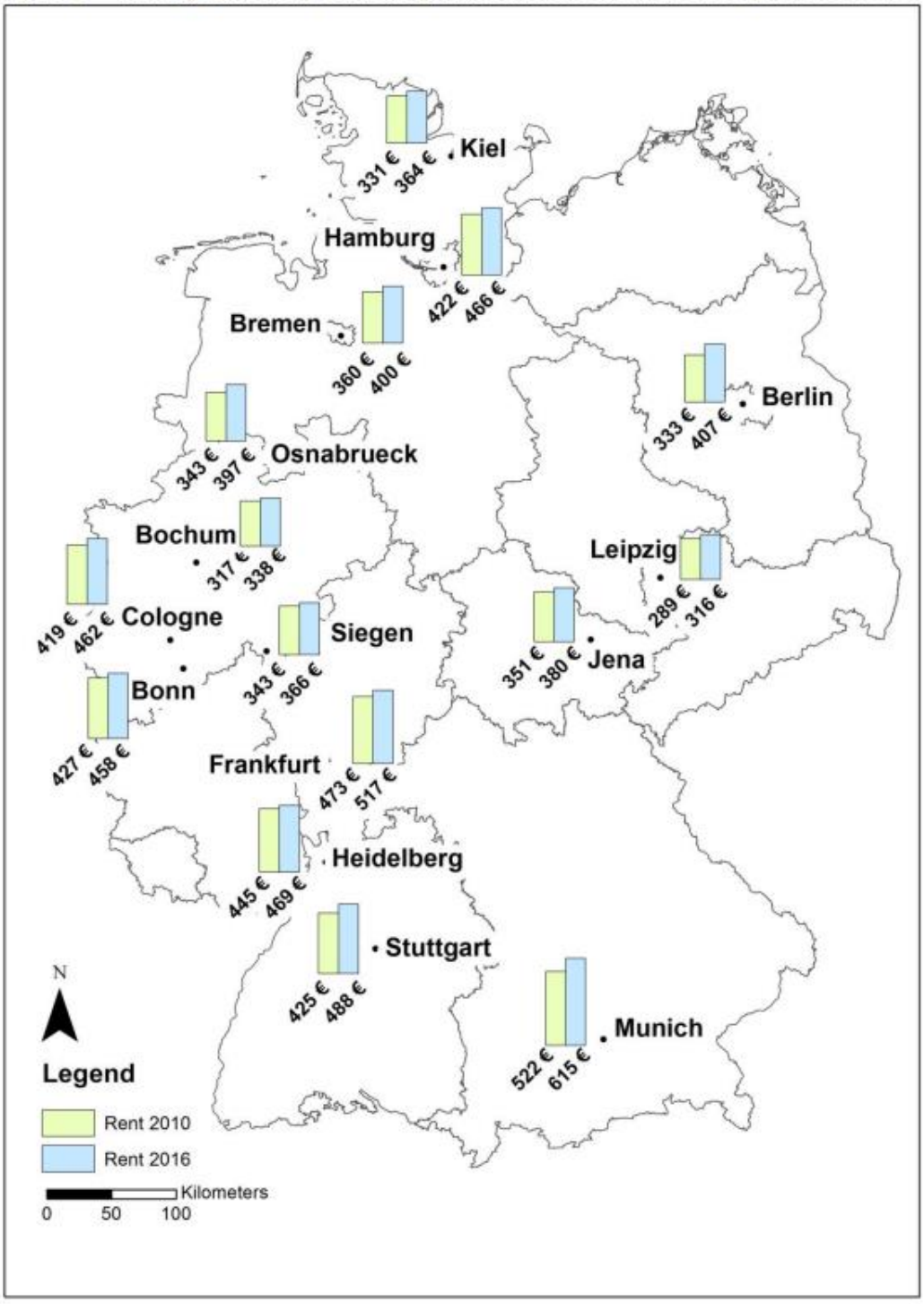
Figure 1 – Average prices for student housing per square metre in the first half-year of 2010 and 2016



[1] Deschermeier, *A Hedonic Rent Index for Student Housing in Germany*, 8.

[2] Deschermeier, *A Hedonic Rent Index for Student Housing in Germany*, 5,10.

Figure 5 – Monthly rents for a student apartment in the first half of 2010 and of 2016



Source: Cologne Institute for Economic Research

Appendix A3: Student housing price index in Heidelberg[1]

Monthly costs for a 30 m^2 student flat and median price per m^2

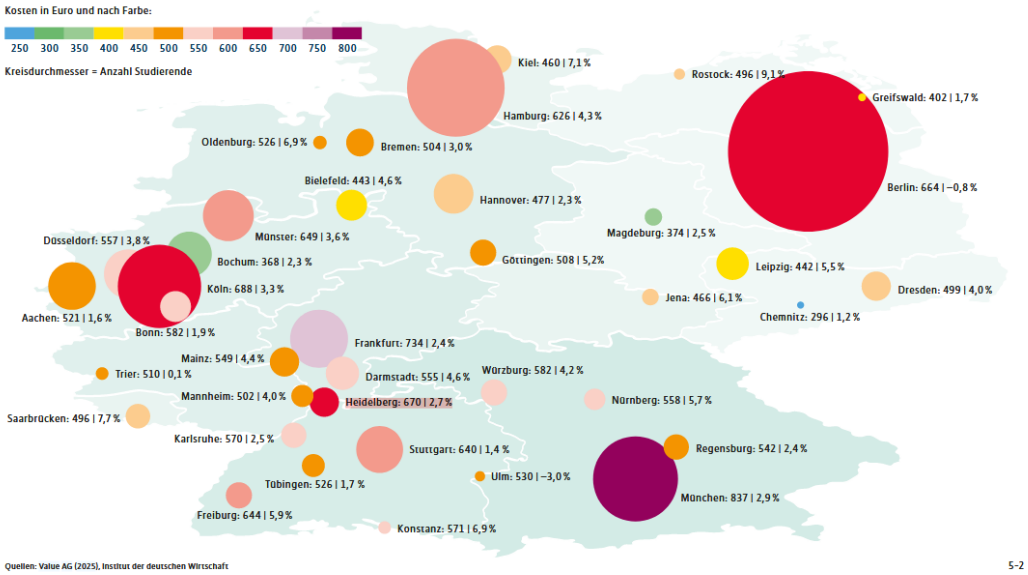
Wichtige Kennzahlen des studentischen Wohnungsmarkts im Überblick – I

Standort	Studentenwohnpreisindex		Musterwohnung 30 m²		Muster-WG 20 m²		Studierende	
	2025	Durchschnitt der letzten 3 Jahre	Warmmiete in Euro	Kaltmiete in Euro	Warmmiete in Euro	Kaltmiete in Euro	Insgesamt 2024	Quote je 100 Einwohner
Aachen	1,6	4,7	521	411	483	410	59.866	10,3
Berlin	−0,8	5,3	664	547	624	546	202.160	5,5
Bielefeld	4,6	4,8	443	342	398	331	38.667	11,7
Bochum	2,3	5,4	368	254	322	246	56.823	15,8
Bonn	1,9	4,8	582	461	540	459	38.625	11,9
Bremen	3,0	4,4	504	398	484	413	34.553	5,9
Chemnitz	1,2	2,3	296	215	274	220	9.113	3,7
Darmstadt	4,6	5,8	555	437	483	404	41.789	25,0
Dresden	4,0	5,5	499	384	435	359	36.780	6,5
Düsseldorf	3,8	6,0	557	445	517	443	62.291	10,1
Frankfurt	2,4	5,2	734	609	702	619	73.208	9,7
Freiburg	5,9	6,8	644	536	615	543	32.802	13,8
Göttingen	5,2	5,1	508	408	448	382	32.956	10,0
Greifswald	1,7	4,9	402	299	340	272	10.285	4,7
Hamburg	4,3	5,6	626	515	678	604	123.407	6,6
Hannover	2,3	4,8	477	366	451	377	49.610	4,3
Heidelberg	2,7	5,2	670	552	633	554	37.346	24,0
Jena	6,1	5,7	466	365	452	385	21.232	19,4
Karlsruhe	2,5	4,9	570	464	526	456	36.880	11,9

Quellen: HeyHugo, Regionaldatenbank der IW Consult GmbH (2025), eigene Berechnungen. Studierendenzahl und -quote 2024 auf Basis einer Trendfortschreibung der Einwohnerentwicklung, Value AG

Tabelle 5-1

Hypothetische monatliche Mietkosten für eine studentische Musterwohnung (30 m²) und Studentenwohnpreisindex



Quellen: Value AG (2025), Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft

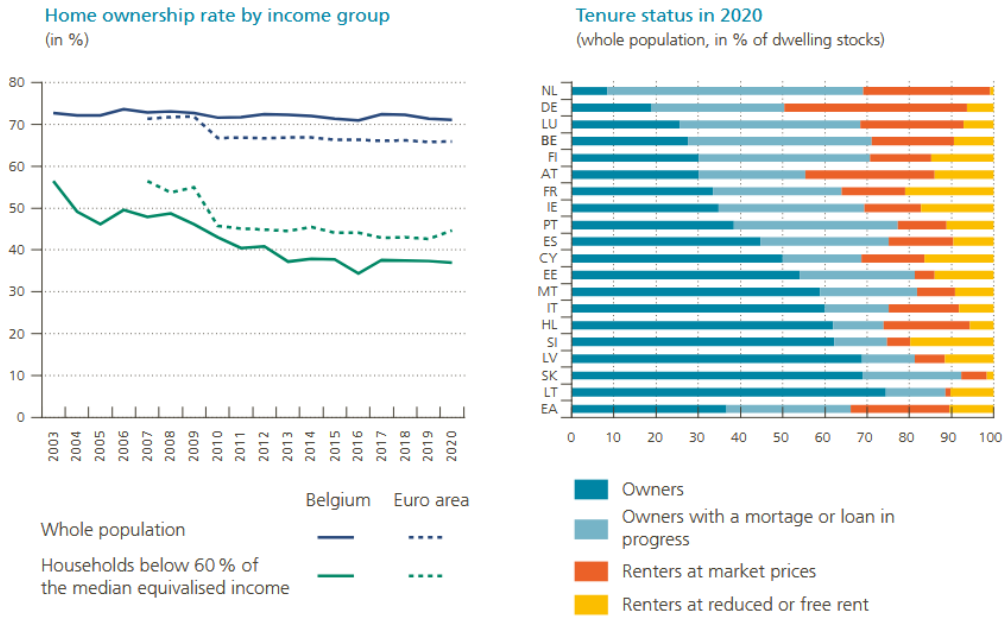
5-2

[1] *MLP Studentenwohnreport 2025*, 33, 45.

Appendix A4: Percentage of homeowners in Belgium[1]

Chart 11

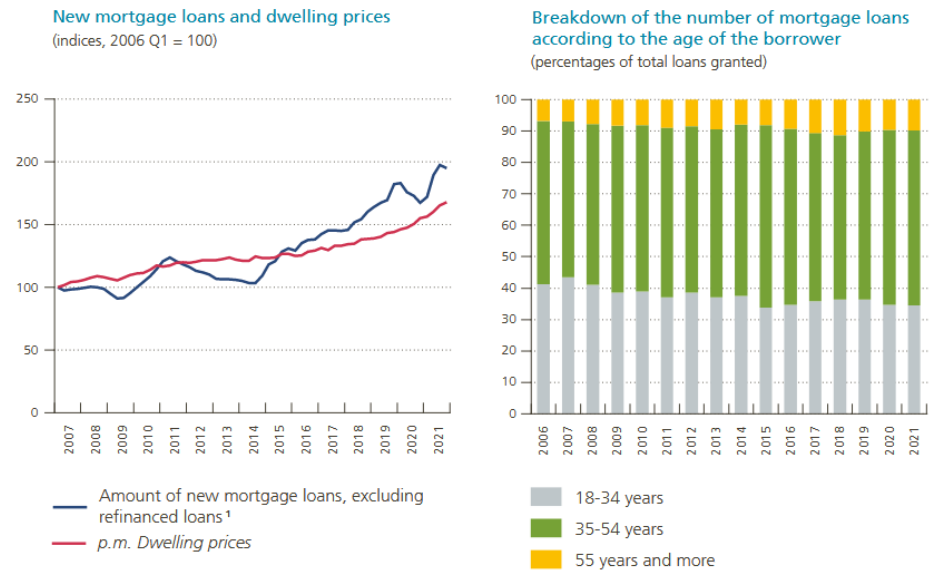
While the home ownership rate in Belgium is relatively stable over time, it has decreased in the case of the poorest households



Appendix A5: Decline in the share of young borrowers[2]

Chart 7

Mortgage lending has increased while the share of young borrowers has fallen slightly during the last 15 years



[1] Warisse, *Is Home Ownership Still Affordable in Belgium?*, 15.

[2] Warisse, *Is Home Ownership Still Affordable in Belgium?*, 10.

APPENDIX B

FIELDWORK DOCUMENTATION FROM HEIDELBERG (CHAPTER 3)

Appendix B: Fieldwork documentation from Heidelberg (Chapter 3)

Appendix B1: Inventory of a two-week field visit in Heidelberg

Policy and archival documents consulted

Statutes 1956: Old Collegium Academicum[1]
Statutes 1970: Reform of the old CA[2]
Statutes 2013: New Collegium Academicum[3]
Feasibility study 2015[4]

Interviews conducted

16/10: Nina, resident and member of the CA GmbH (online)
03/01: Jonas, resident and tour guide
06/01: Mira, resident and former organiser of the orientation week
06/01: Klara, vey involved CA resident
06/01: Sarah, minimally involved CA resident
07/01: Stefan Rees, Planning Office of Heidelberg, and Felix Wohlfart, IBA-architect
11/01: Lea, new CA member
12/01: Henrik Eckhardt, co-founder of the CA
13/01: Anonymous staff member of student service Studierendenwerk Heidelberg
Additional: Informal conversations with housemates in the new building (week 1) and in the renovated building (week 2)

Participation in weekly meetings and events

05/01, 10 AM: Weekly language course for refugees (Aula)
06/01, 7 PM: AG Was
07/01, 7 PM: Plenary meeting
08/01, 7 PM: AG Public Relations
08/01, 8 PM: Student Residence Board ("leaders" of the club CA)
11/01, 6 PM: AG Rental Management
11/01, 8 PM: AG Workshop
13/01, 7 PM: AG Was
14/01, 4 PM: Administration plenary
14/01, 7 PM: Plenary meeting

[1] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen*, 148–57.
[2] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen*, 165-67.
[3] *Statutes 2013*, internal document, January 7, 2026.
[4] *Feasibility study,* internal document, January 7, 2026.

Appendix B2: Policy and archival documents consulted

Statutes 1956[1]

Statutes of the Collegium Academicum of the university of Heidelberg

Approved by the Board of Trustees of the CA on June 24, 1956

I. General

Article 1: The Collegium Academicum of the University of Heidelberg, founded in 1945 by the Rector and the Senate, aims to be a new form of student community for living, working, and self-education. Its goal is to help students develop into cosmopolitan, independently thinking, and responsibly acting individuals.

Article 2: To achieve this goal, the community of the Collegium Academicum shapes the forms of its communal living and working together through self-governance.

Article 3: The Studium Generale of the Collegium Academicum serves the same goal. It is intended to protect students from the danger of intellectual isolation in purely specialized studies and to familiarize them with the fundamental problems of science and life, including those in government and society.

Article 4: A Board of Trustees is responsible to the University for the realization of this goal. It represents the interests of the Collegium Academicum within the University. The members are elected by the Senate. The Rector of the University is a member of the Board of Trustees. Another member is appointed by the "Association of Former Members of the Collegium Academicum of Heidelberg University, e. V." The Director, Senior, and Prefect are invited to the meetings of the Board of Trustees.

Article 5: The Director is the University's representative for the Collegium Academicum. He is responsible to the Board of Trustees for the realization of the Collegium Academicum's goals. He is proposed to the Senate by the Board of Trustees after consulting the Senate and appointed by the Ministry upon the Senate's recommendation. He resides at the Collegium Academicum

II. Membership

Article 6: Only students enrolled at the University of Heidelberg may be admitted to the Collegium Academicum. The Admissions Committee, chaired by the Director, decides on admission. Its composition and the admission procedure are regulated by the statutes of the Collegium Academicum.

Article 7: Membership includes the right to a place of residence in the Collegium Academicum. Each member pays a membership fee per semester, which contributes to the establishment of the Collegium Academicum. The amount of the membership fee is determined by the Board of Trustees after consulting the Director and the Assembly.

Article 8:

(I) If a member of the Collegium Academicum neglects duties and responsibilities arising from their membership in the community, their membership may be revoked by a committee. The composition of the committee is determined by the statutes. A decision by the Commission to revoke membership requires confirmation by the Director and takes effect at the end of the current semester.

[1] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015*, 148–57.

(II) If a member behaves dishonorably or if their conduct is likely to damage the reputation of the Collegium Academicum, an Council of honour may, in serious cases, revoke their membership. This council of honour consists of one member of the Board of Trustees, the Director, and three members of the Collegium Academicum.

(III) The procedure is determined by the statutes of the Collegium Academicum.

III. Final provisions

Article 9: Amendments to these statutes are decided by the Board of Trustees after consulting the Assembly.

Article 10: The statutes and any other necessary regulations of the Collegium Academicum are decided by the Assembly. They, as well as any motions to amend the statutes, must be submitted to the Chair of the Board of Trustees before the first reading

IV. The bodies of self-government

1. The convention

Article 20: (I) The Convention is the supreme body of self-governance of the Collegium Academicum. (II) The Convention deliberates and decides on all fundamental questions concerning the community. It adopts statutes and other regulations of the house, elects the officers and committees. It adopts rules of procedure.

Article 21: (I) All members residing in the house belong to the Convention. The headmaster, members of the Board of Trustees, and tutors are entitled to participate and discuss; guests only with the consent of the Convention. (II) Every member of the college is obliged to attend the meetings of the Convention

2. Group representation (gruppenvertretung)

Article 24: (I) The group representation deliberates and decides on all current matters concerning the CA, insofar as other bodies are not responsible for them, and performs all other tasks assigned to it. (II) These include: 1. Election of one member to the Admissions Committee, 2. Election of two Collegiate Members to the Expulsion 3. Election of examiners for the Student Fund.

3. Senior, Prefect, and Quaestor

Article 27: (I) The Senior is the representative of the Collegium Academicum's self-governance. He represents all the students to the Board of Trustees, the Director, and the public. (II) The Senior appoints advisors to assist him.

Article 28: The Prefect manages the Collegium Academicum's household affairs, insofar as these are left to the students self-governance.

Article 29: (I) The Senior and Prefect, as well as their deputies (Consenior and Co-Prefect), are each elected for one semester. All students who are at least in their first semester of active membership at the time of the election are eligible for election. (II) The Quaestor is elected by the Assembly-upon the recommendation of the Finance Committee. He manages the students funds.

4. Council of Elders (ältestenrat)

(I) The Council of Elders serves as an advisory body to the Director and the Senior (II) The Council of Elders decides, upon request, whether a resolution of the Convention or the Group Representatives is compatible with the Statutes or the Bylaws, Motions to amend the Bylaws must be submitted to it before the first reading. It decides on the conformity of elections with the Bylaws.

(I) The Council of elders consists of seven senior members of the Collegium Academicum: six elected by the Convention and the Senior of the previous semester. If the Senior leaves office at the end of their term, the Convention elects a seventh member.

(II) The Senior, the Prefect, the President of the Convention, their deputies, and the President of the Expulsion Committee may not be members of the Council of Elders.

(Ill) At the end of each semester, the members put a vote of confidence to the Convention.

5. Committees

There are standing committees whose members are elected by the convent:

1. the Studium Generale Committee, which, together with the Senior, decides on the Studium Generale program, with five members

2. the Finance and of Building Committee, which draws up the budget of the college's funds and advises the headmaster on matters of the building's design and interior furnishings. It consists of the Senior, the Prefect, the Quaestor, and two other members,

3. the Tutors' Committee, which consists of the Senior and four other members. It appoints the tutors and establishes guidelines for their work,

4. the Press Committee with three members.

6. The council of honour

(I) The Council of Honor of the Collegium Academicum has the task of punishing dishonorable conduct or conduct that is likely to damage the reputation of the Collegium Academicum by means of disciplinary penalties. (II) Dishonorable conduct within the meaning of this provision may also include conduct that constitutes a breach of the duties and responsibilities arising from membership in the community.

(I) The Council of Honor may impose the following disciplinary penalties: 1. Reprimand. 2. Severe reprimand 3. Severe reprimand to march with the Council, 4. Expulsion from the Collegium Academicum (II) In addition to the penalties in paragraph I, numbers 2 and 3, the loss of an ante or a position of trust, as well as the withdrawal of privileges, may be imposed.

(I) The Council of Honor consists of three members who have been members of the Collegium Academicum for at least three semesters.(II) If the Council of Honor decides that a "severe reprimand to march with the Council" is warranted, the head of the college shall be added as a fourth member. (III) Only the extended Council of Honor (Art. 8 III of the Statutes) may expel a student from the Collegium Academicum. (IV) The student members of the Council of Honor (three members and one alternate) are elected by the Assembly for the duration of their membership in the Collegium Academicum.

Statutes 1971[1]

A. Members

I. Membership

Article 1: (1) The Admissions Committee decides on applications for membership in CA(2) It consists of the chair and four members elected by the general assembly. (3) The committee meets in public and decides by simple majority. Publicity as defined in Article 1 of the statutes, means active publicity. The decisions of the committee members must be justified upon request. (4)The Admissions Committee meets every year after the end of the term.

II. Termination of membership

Article 5: The revocation of membership, according to the criteria of the statutes, is governed as follows: (1) The government and any member may appeal to the conciliation committee

[1] Meier et al., *Gemeinsam Leben und Lernen: Studentische Selbstverwaltung im Collegium Academicum 1945 - 1985 - 2015*, 165–67.

(arbitration committee) in any matter. (2) The conciliation committee consists of 5 members elected by the general assembly. (3) The Commission attempts to mediate in conflicts. If mediation is not possible, the Commission refers the case to the MAK. (4) The Membership Revocation Committee (MAK) is composed of 7 members elected by the IV. (5) It decides by simple majority. Its decisions must be submitted to the V. (6) The MV can overturn decisions on abortion by a two-thirds majority.

B. Organs of self-government

I. Members' Assembly (MV)

Article 6: (1) The MV is the supreme organ of the self-government of the CA. (2) It adopts the statutes, the bylaws, the rules of procedure, as well as all other regulations. (3) It advises and decides on all questions referred to it (4) The MV (General Assembly) includes all residents of the House. (5) The members of the GA (General Assembly) are entitled to nominate and vote. They have active and passive voting rights. (6) The leader and the tutor have the right to nominate and propose.

II. Executive body

Article 3: (1) The Senior and his two deputies are elected by the GA. (2) The Senior is the representative of the self-governance of the CA. He represents the members over the Leiter (Governor), the Board of Trustees, and the public. He implements the decisions of the GA (3) The 1st Deputy Governor is responsible for the technical management (residential areas, etc.) of the CA, as far as this is concerned, within the scope of self-government. (4) The 2nd Deputy Governor oversees the entire finances of the self-government (in accordance with the financial regulations). He must present the financial report to the National Assembly. (5) For individual departments, a deputy governor is elected.

III. Committees

Article 10: The Working Committee consists of the Director and 6 members elected by the General Assembly. It decides on the use of the funds made available to the CA for tutorial groups and Studium Generale.

Article 11: (1) The Finance and Building Committee advises the Director on matters of building design and interior furnishing of the building. (2) It consists of 3 members elected by the GA.

IV. Finances

Article 12: (1) The annual student contribution, which is to be paid by all members and guest students, flows into the student treasury like all other income. (2) The amount of the student contribution as well as the budget for the following semester are decided by the Executive Committee at the end of each term (3) Only the GA can decide on financial burdens for the college. (4) The funds acquired with the college's treasury, as well as the funds allocated to the college as a whole, are held in trust by the board of directors and the members of the College Academicum. (5) The NV elects two members at each level as auditors, who audit the college's accounts and the asset register. (6) The financial conduct of the self-governing bodies of the College Academicum is governed by the financial regulations. → financial

V. General Provisions

Article 13: (1) All bodies shall act and discuss the statutes publicly. (Public means active public). (2) Upon request of the accused, the public will be informed in accordance with Article 5 (AK). (3) Decisions will be made public in advance and must be justified upon request. (4) All bodies of the self-government are quorate when half of their members are present.

Extra: Administrative and networking regulations 1970

Article 1: (I) The CA is an institution of Heidelberg University administered by its members. (II) The members aim to develop and promote a critical awareness of science and society. (III) The members live and work together. The work is organised in public working groups and events. Living arrangements and the use of the CA's facilities are regulated by the members through democratic self-governance

Article 2: The primary body of self-governance is the Members' Assembly (ME). It adopts statutes binding for the CA and determines the bodies of self-governance and their working methods. The statutes are to be submitted to the Board of Directors for their information.

Article 3: (I) The Director of the CA advises and supports the bodies of self-governance in their work. The financial management of the house is also the responsibility of the director (II) The position of Leiter shall be advertised. (III) After presentation and discussion, the General Assembly elects the Leiter and proposes him to the Board of Trustees for confirmation. (IV) The Leiter is obligated to occupy the official residence located in the building.

Article 4: (I) Within the university,

a Board of Trustees oversees the activities of the CA. The Board of Trustees is composed as follows: a) Members ex officio. 1. The Rector 2. The Head of the Student Union 3. The Senior Member of the CA 4. The Chair of the Student Union (or an AStA member as deputy)

b) Elected members 1. Three members to be elected by the Grand Senate from among its members, who shall belong to different groups. 2. Twelve members of the CA to be elected by the General Assembly

c) One member appointed by the association of former members of the CA shall serve on the Board of Trustees in an advisory capacity

(II) The Board of Trustees shall adopt rules of procedure that regulate all matters

Article 5: Working Groups and Events (I) The work of the members of the CA is organised in public working groups and events. (II) The program of the working groups is determined in cooperation between the members and the body provided for this purpose in the statutes. The further details are governed by the statutes. (III) Any interested party within and outside the university has the right to participate in the working groups and events of the CA.

Article 6: (I) The tasks of the working groups and events of the CA are, in particular: to address topics of research and teaching at the university in order to critically examine and organise studies that are not or critically and practically pursue topics and methods within the insufficiently addressed within the university community; with regard to their social conditions and objectives, Scholarship conducted in this way should also facilitate collaboration between different disciplines (II) The working groups and events will be announced at the beginning of the semester in the GA. The leaders of the working groups submit a report at the end of the semester.

Article 7: Admission and Membership (I) Any student of the university can be admitted to the CA. The admissions committee decides on admission. The leader is a member of the admissions committee. Further details are regulated by the statutes.

(II) A prerequisite for admission is the acceptance of the statutes and the bylaws and the commitment to work in accordance with them.

(III) Social difficulties and socio-political engagement are to be taken into account during the admission process.

(IV) Membership and the associated right of residence are justified by participation in the working groups or in the student and fraternal self-government.

Article 9: Amendments to the statutes require a two-thirds majority of the votes cast in three readings and the approval of the Board of Directors.

Statutes 2013[1]

Heidelberg, April 12, 2013 (Version 2)

1) The new Collegium Academicum and Heidelberg University

What is new or different compared to existing student residences?

- Self-governance in the Collegium Academicum (CA) is both its purpose (learning democracy) and its foundation (free, independent sponsorship), and not an external requirement imposed by a large sponsor or institution.
- The entire educational concept of the new CA, with its preparatory course, supplementary studies, tutoring program, and practical learning, is unique in this form. The preparatory course, in particular, is a novelty for Heidelberg and is practiced in a similar form only in Tübingen.
- Another difference from other student residences is the CA's function as a student centre. In addition to the original 1945 concept of the student residence as an academic self-education community (re-education program), the CA has always had the task of extending its reach beyond its own walls to the wider university community (general studies, tutoring program, theatre, music, event spaces). The CA has always fulfilled this task, and the new CA aims to continue this tradition.
- The CA pursues a holistic educational approach, allowing students to practice, explore, and experience theoretical course content across disciplines.
- Moving in entails a commitment to participate in the CA.
- The students' motivation stems from extensive self-governance and a great deal of creative freedom. Therefore, they will make time to get involved in the CA.
- The new CA is personal and inclusive (short distances within the building, subsidiary decision-making, tutoring program).
- As before, the CA should be a place for international students where academic thinking transcends national borders.
- In addition to current students, the association also includes graduates and alumni, creating an enriching intergenerational continuity for today's students. The alumni, among whom are teachers, lawyers, doctors, psychotherapists, writers, politicians, scientists, journalists, etc., can provide students with knowledge resources and professional experience within the framework of the association.

How is the democratic constitution and self-governance of the CA structured?

- Self-government is organised according to the principles of grassroots democracy. The highest body is the General Assembly. Thanks to the size of this democratic institution, whose members participate in various committees and decision-making processes, democratic self-government is firmly anchored.
- The diverse character of the new CA will be vibrant and is already anchored in the planning and visible: Students with children, international students, as well as 25% new residents each year from the preparatory course, testify to great diversity and constant renewal.
- New residents are selected by the pluralistic admissions committee (8 people who are representative of the mix of residents) and admitted by a majority vote of the admissions committee. Since the general assembly is the highest body, it may, according to the statutes, reject the admission of individuals upon request.
- The admission or exclusion of cooperation partners or cooperation groups (who, for example, regularly use workspaces and materials at the CA) also takes place through a complex democratic process. These groups must be admitted/excluded by the general assembly and the board of the association (consisting of half residents and half alumni). The scientific advisory

[1] Statutes 2013 (unpublished internal document), provided to the author during an interview with urban planner Stefan Rees and IBA architect Felix Wohlfart, Heidelberg, January 7, 2026.

board is granted a suspensive veto, which obliges the association to hold a vote at a members' meeting, which must be convened within 12 weeks. This vote within the association is binding.
- The same procedure is possible for the exclusion of individuals if they violate the CA's mission statement or statutes.

What connects the CA to the university?

- The CA is part of the university's tradition; for example, the Studium Generale also originated at the CA.
- The CA was and is a place that aims to promote interdisciplinarity and young academics.
- A fundamental principle in the CA's self-understanding, as in all academic disciplines, is a constructively critical approach. At the institutional level, this is ensured by self-governance, the continuous influx of new groups and individuals (preparatory course), and critical input from the academic advisory board. At the content level, this is reflected in interdisciplinarity and a democratic culture of discussion.
- The new CA complements the university's offerings. For students, in addition to the existing Studium Generale and the more research-focused Marsiliuskolleg, project-based and interdisciplinary learning is emphasised (see Jürgen Kaube 2013).
- The CA provides an experimental field for the university in general, but especially for lecturers who wish to test new teaching methods or content. This is successfully practiced, for example, in Tübingen through the cooperation between the university there and the Leibniz Kolleg.

2) The old Collegium Academicum and Heidelberg University

Which students used to live in the Collegium Academicum?

- After 1945, many former soldiers and exclusively men initially lived in the Collegium Academicum, which was founded by Rector Bauer. In the early days, the focus was primarily on confronting the Nazi regime. The CA was part of the American re-education program. With the CA, the American occupying forces wanted to create an institution modelled on American colleges, where – especially in light of the recent wartime past – democracy and critical thinking could be learned and practiced.
- In the 1950s, all faculties were represented in the CA, still, only men lived there. The CA was a place where culture, interdisciplinary studies, discussion, as well as international friendships and exchange were cultivated
- Until the 1960s, some of the still exclusively male students addressed each other formally, and some still wore suits and ties (compare Hartmut Schweitzer 1967). The students followed the CA's own Studium Generale with great interest and commitment.
- The social, cultural, and political changes of the student movement at the end of the 1960s (after 1967) reached the CA later than the university as a whole (compare Gerd Steffens 1985).
- In the 1970s, the resident structure changed: From 1969 onwards, women also moved into the CA. The house was mixed and diverse: Spontis, Jusos, Liberals (Liberal Student Union of Germany), KBW (Communist League of West Germany), RCDS (Ring of Christian Democratic Students), ADH (Action for a Democratic University), Hopoko (University Policy Collective; see Katja Nagel 2004). Through the student movement, as in society at large, "left-wing" ideas increasingly found their way into the CA.
- In general, many international students were represented in the CA (some were refugees from countries with authoritarian regimes or from the Eastern Bloc states or South America).
- Many prominent figures have emerged from the CA, including three members of the Baden-Württemberg state parliament (Andreas Graf von Bernstorff, Georg Habs-Hoffschroer, Reinhard Bütikofer), writer and Chamisso Prize winner Rafik Schami, and numerous full professors and lecturers from various universities (e.g., Prof. Dr. Gerd Reinhart, Prof. Dr. Volker Lenhart, Prof. Dr. Micha Brumlik, and many more).
- The CA was conceived from the outset to disseminate its ideas externally and thus within the university. Its development into a student centre was therefore inevitable. In the 1970s, the

academic centre also evolved into a political centre. This was a consequence of the widespread and strong social politicization in Germany during the 1970s, including in Heidelberg.

- The CA has always been democratically structured. The highest body was the Convention, that is, the assembly of all residents. An admissions committee, elected by the Convention, decided on the admission of new members. This Convention also elected the leader of the CA.
- The old CA was not the now sometimes romanticised place of a left-wing student community that lived there among themselves and in isolation. Rather, it was a consistently open dormitory and a university institution at the same time, where a wide variety of opinions were discussed openly and critically, and which, as an institution, was active in creating culture. The management always worked against claims of exclusivity by treating groups equally (e.g., in room allocation).

What was the relationship between the university and the Collegium Academicum?

- The Collegium Academicum was a special institution of the university. The head of the CA simultaneously held a teaching position at the institute of their subject. The self-governing body had to manage a budget, which was approved by the university and the board of trustees.
- New statutes and bylaws required the approval of the respective rectorate, including the 1971 statute, which formulated the CA's task as developing a critical awareness of science and society.
- The collaboration between the university and the CA was always characterized by discourse; the relationship was not without tension. However, the structure and self-governance were never questioned by either side.
- The university has always been aware of the student population's demographics. Even before the dissolution decision, the university was informed of the student population's demographics ("diverse mix," "undogmatic leftists") through intensive discussions between the CA board and a Senate working group (Prof. Dr. Arndt, Prof. Dr. Gottlieb).
- After the university's dissolution decision in 1975, the relationship between the CA and the university deteriorated. A distance developed between the CA and the university, but the democratic structure was preserved. During this period (1975-1978), the CA worked to preserve itself (by maintaining student culture, self-governance, and democratic and interdisciplinary education).
- The residents of the CA always professed their commitment to non-violence. This also applied to the period of heightened political polarization following RAF terrorism in the Federal Republic of Germany at that time. The polarization also affected the CA when a resident was arrested as an alleged terrorist due to a false accusation (the Karaboran case), thereby casting suspicion on the entire CA. However, the residents of the CA always maintained an explicit and critical distance from the terrorist groups and were committed to non-violence out of conviction, which was also evident in their behavior during the eviction.
- To examine the relationship between the university and the Collegium Academicum, we propose a series of presentations (lectures and publications) about the CA in the 1970s. This series and its documentation could become part of the new CA. Topics could include, for example: How did the phase of anti-authoritarian rebellion in the 1960s and 70s in Germany manifest itself and how was it expressed at Heidelberg University? How is this radical societal change (from the Vietnam War to the gender controversy) reflected in the CA?

Appendix B3: Feasibility study, 2015[1]



[1] *Feasibility study* (unpublished internal document), provided to the author during an interview with urban planner Stefan Rees and IBA architect Felix Wohlfart, Heidelberg, January 7, 2026.

Appendix B4: Participation in weekly meetings and events

How2 – AG Workshop

How2: Aufbau Duschvorhang

Ich weiß das klingt mühselig, aber bevor ihr loslegt, lest bitte die Anleitung einmal sorgfältig durch. Viele Schritte lassen sich einfacher verstehen, wenn man weiß was danach passieren soll.

Vorbereitung

- **Material**(*Bild1*): 1x Duschvorhang, 12x Plastikhaken für Duschvorhang, 3x 80cm Alu-Stange, 1x Alu-Stange mit Haken, 2x Kurvenstück, 2x Verbindungsstück, 2x Wandbefestigung, 1x Deckenbefestigung, 2x Abdeckung Wandverkleidung, 5x Mutter, 2 1/2x Klebe Sets (bestehend aus: 2x Kleber, 5x Gewindeplatten)



Bild1

- **Werkzeuge:** Metallsäge (alternativ Flex, aber Säge ist besser), passende Nuss für Muttern, Metallfeile, Sekundenkleber

Aufbau

Schritt 1: Alustangen beschriften

- Die 80cm Alu-Stange ohne Loch (*s.h. Bild 2*), einmal 10cm vom linken-, und einmal 10cm vom rechten Ende aus markieren, wie in *Abbildung 1*.



Bild2

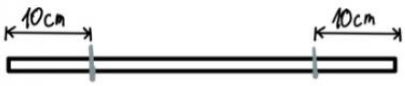


Abb.1



Bild 4

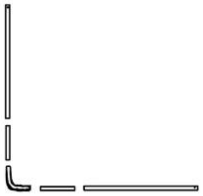


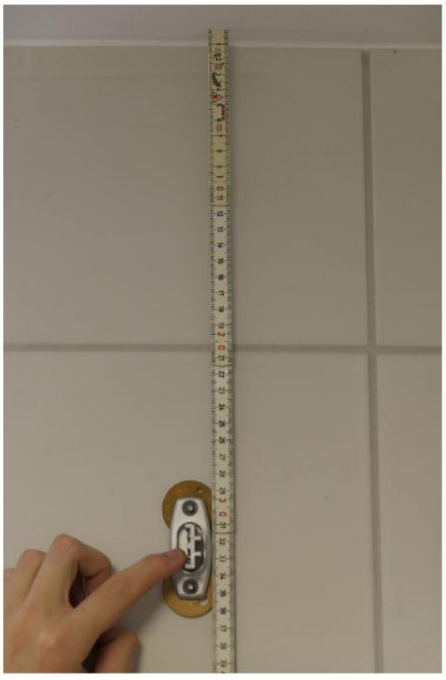
Abb. 3



Bild 5

Schritt 4: Vermessung und Positionierung

- Wenn die Vorrichtung auf dem Boden in Position gebracht wird, dann müsste die Kontaktstelle (gemessen von der Ecke der Dusche, zu den Löchern der Wandbefestigung) ziemlich genau bei 100cm *(im Folgenden: "Länge A")* liegen.
- Die Höhe der Wandbefestigung, von der Decke **zum oberen Loch** der Wandbefestigung, lag bei uns bei **30cm (ist Abhängig von der tatsächlichen Länge eurer Alu-Stange mit Haken + Deckenhalterung),** siehe *Bild 6*.
- Die Deckenbefestigung kann beliebig entlang der zwei Achsen (also quasi entlang der Alu-Stangen) an der Decke platziert werden. Wir empfehlen eine Positionierung, wie in *Bild 4*. Überprüft am besten, ob der Abstand, vom Loch der Deckenhalterung zur Wand ggü., der Länge A entspricht.



- Wenn die genauen Positionen gefunden wurden, die Wand markieren, damit die Gewindeplatten im nächsten Schritt an die entsprechenden Stellen geklebt werden können.

Schritt 5: Kleben

- Vor dem Kleben jegliches Fett von der Wand entfernen.
- Anschließend die Gewindeplatten, mit Hilfe der Klebestreifen(/-ringe) auf der Rückseite, an die markierten Stellen kleben.
- Mit der Klebespritze das Haftmittel durch das große Loch einspritzen, bis es beim kleinen Loch wieder austritt, siehe *Bild 7*. **!So wenig Haftmittel wie möglich „verschwenden", da nur zwei Spritzen für alle 5 Gewindestangen vorgesehen sind!**
- Das Ergebnis **12 Stunden** aushärten lassen!

  Ergebnis: *s.h. Bild 8*



Bild 7

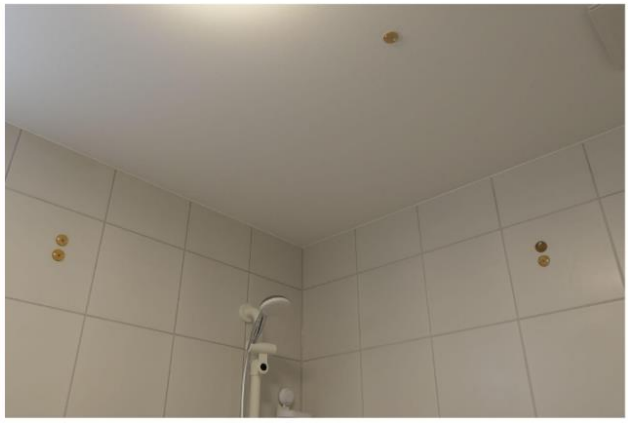


Bild 8

Schritt 6: Befestigung

- Sowohl Wandbefestigungen, als auch die Deckenbefestigung vom zusammengesteckten Gestell lösen, einzeln auf die geklebten Gewindeplatten stecken und anschließend mit einer Nuss die Muttern festziehen, siehe *Bild 9* (Schlüssel sind hierfür ungeeignet).
- Gestell nun vorsichtig **(!)** auf die Wandbefestigungen stecken, Alu-Stange mit Haken einhaken und anschließend alles mit Schrauben sichern (durch die kleinen, dafür vorgesehenen Löcher an den Alu-Stangen *Bild 2*), s.h. *Bild 10*. Schraube der Deckenbefestigung nicht vergessen!

  !Achtung: Seid bei diesem Schritt besonders vorsichtig. Das Aufstecken auf die Halterungen ist eine ziemliche Friemelei, sollte aber mit so wenig Gewalt wie möglicherfolgen. Aufgrund der Hebelwirkung, die ihr mit der Haken-Stange auf die Decke ausüben könnt, kann sich dabei die Tapete ablösen. Das ist schlecht und sollte absolut vermieden werden! Mit ein wenig Fingerspitzengefühl und Geduld aber leicht zu vermeiden ;)

- Zuletzt die Steckverbindungen mit Sekundenkleber versehen (siehe Bild 11), die Abdeckungen über die Muttern scheiben und Vorhang an die Plastikhaken hängen.

  Das Endergebnis sollte (hoffentlich) so aussehen wie Bild 12.

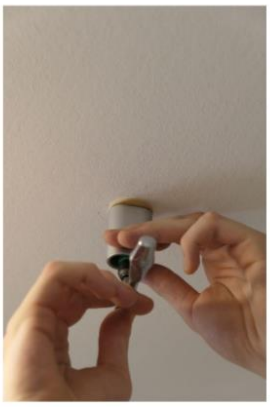


Bild 9



Bild 10



Bild 11



Bild 12

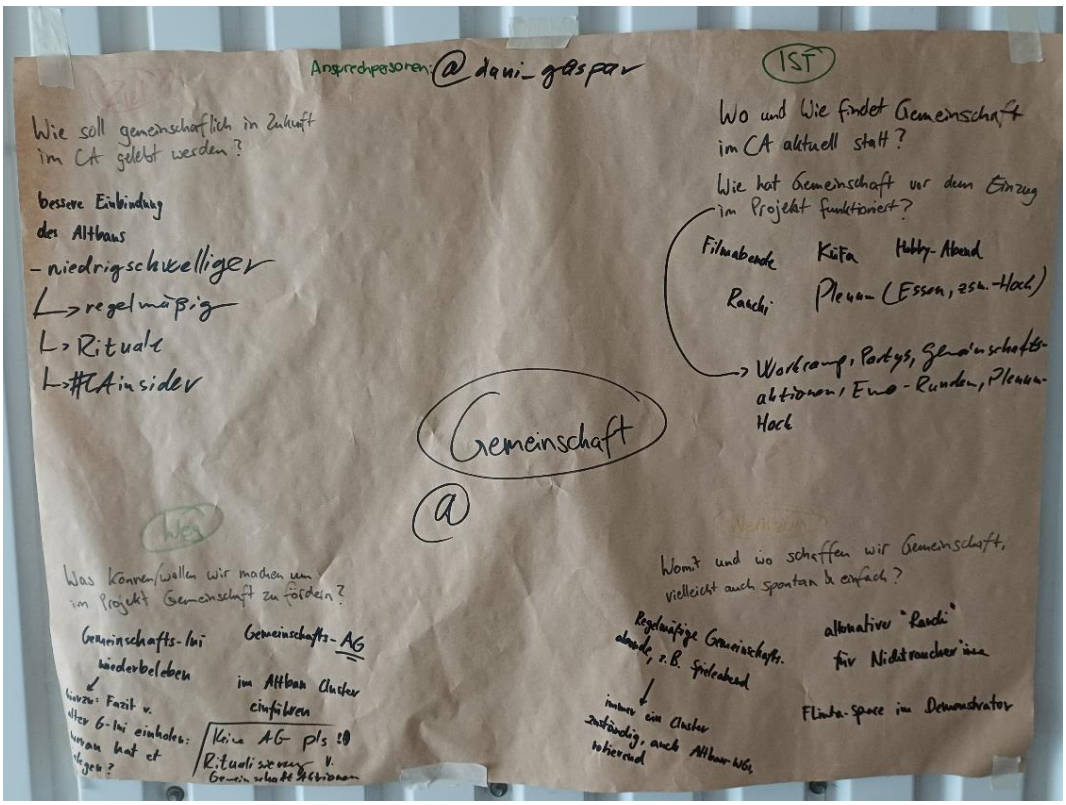
Wendet euch bei Fragen gerne an den öffentlichen Werkstatt-Channel!

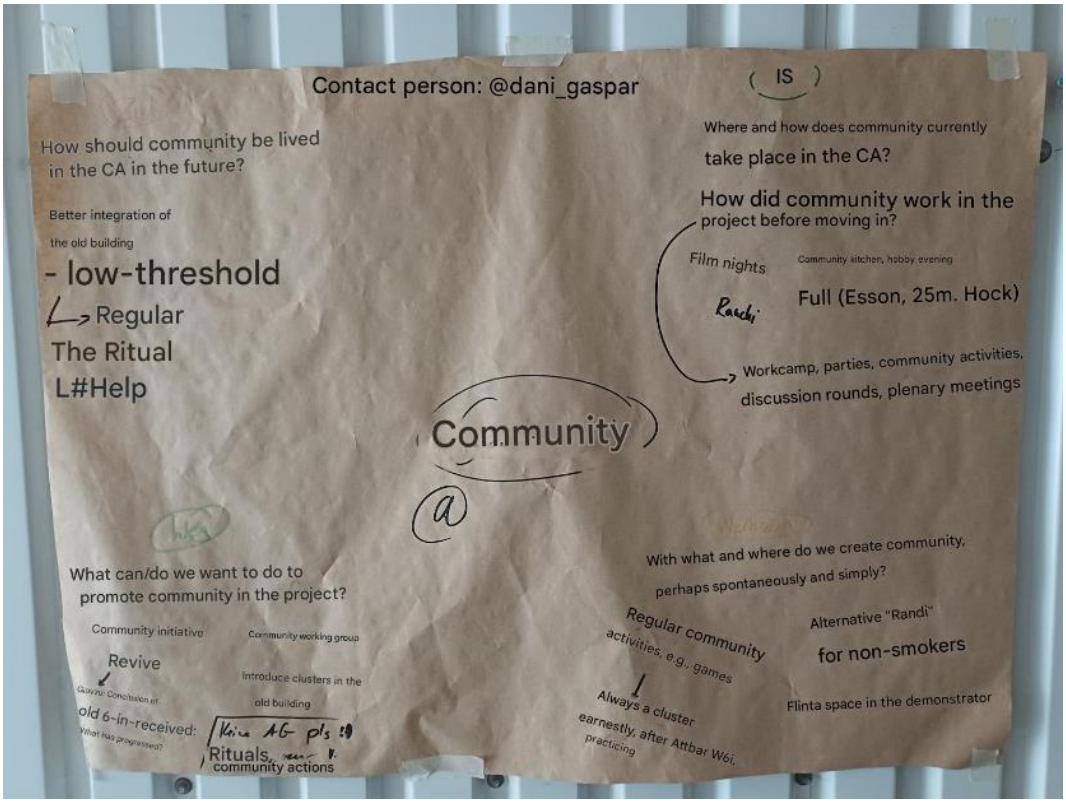
Bei besonders akuten Problemen, meldet euch per Telefon oder Whatsapp bei:

Leo: ***+49 176 47282215***
Lukas W: ***+49 176 91391563***

Mind maps General Assembly October 8, 2025[1]

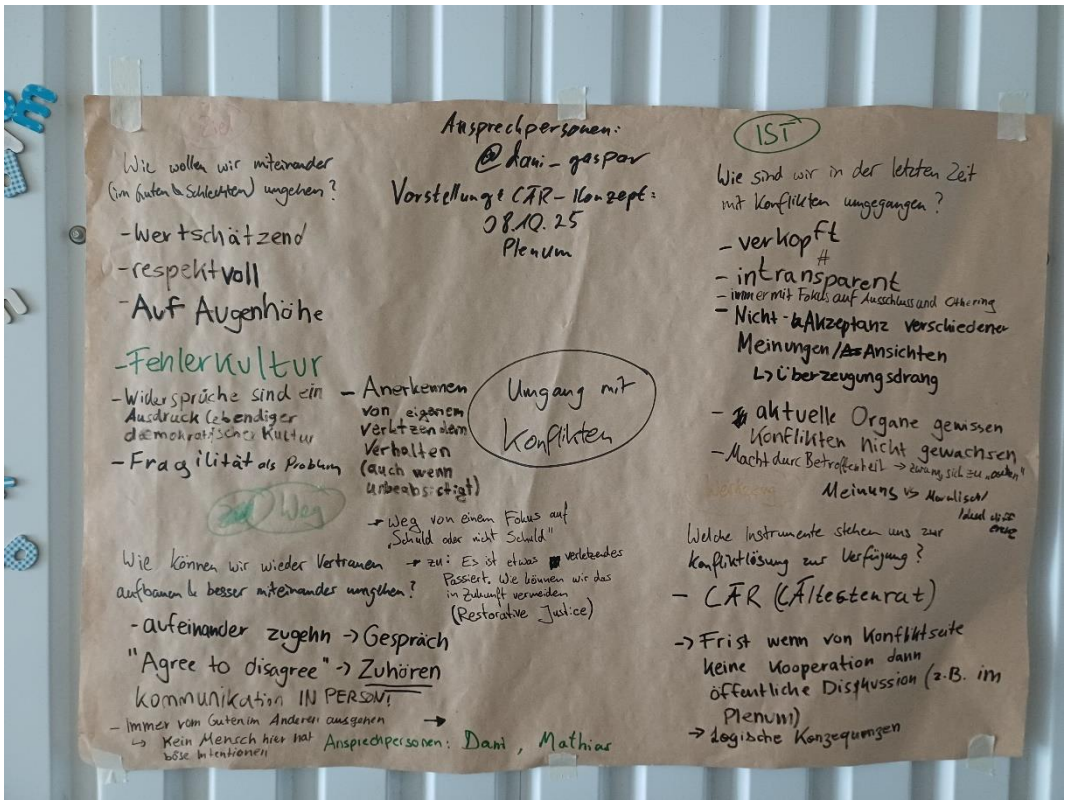
Gemeinschaft (Community)

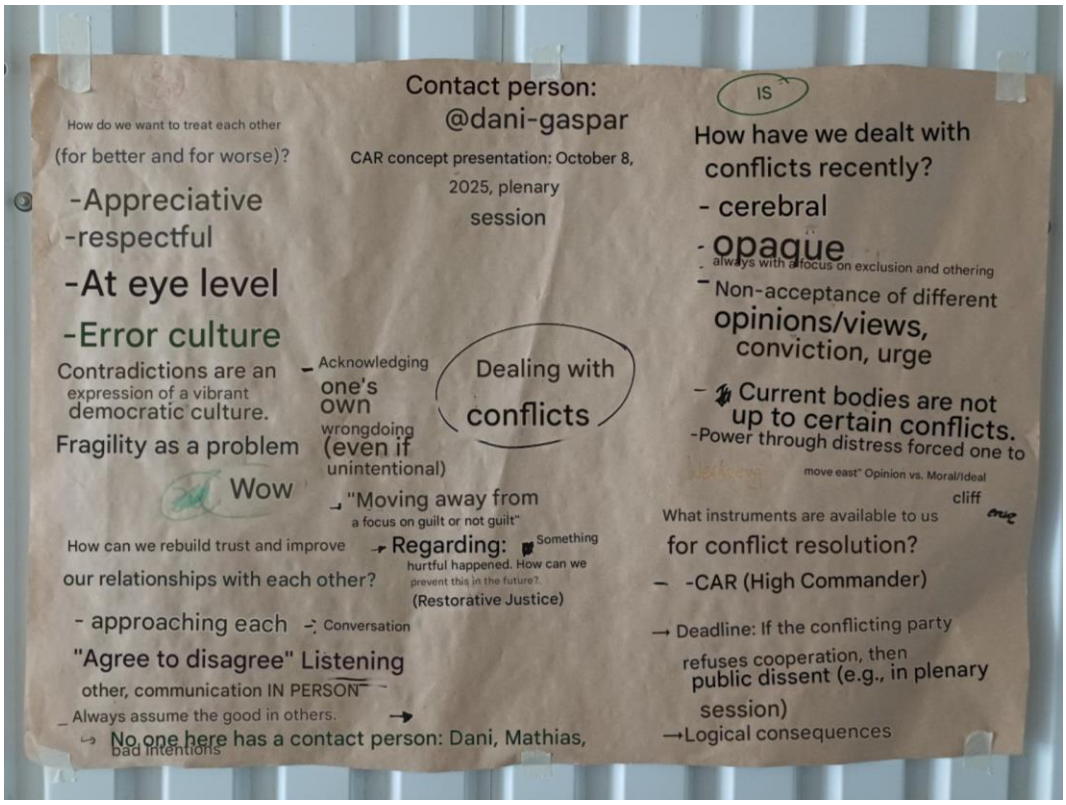




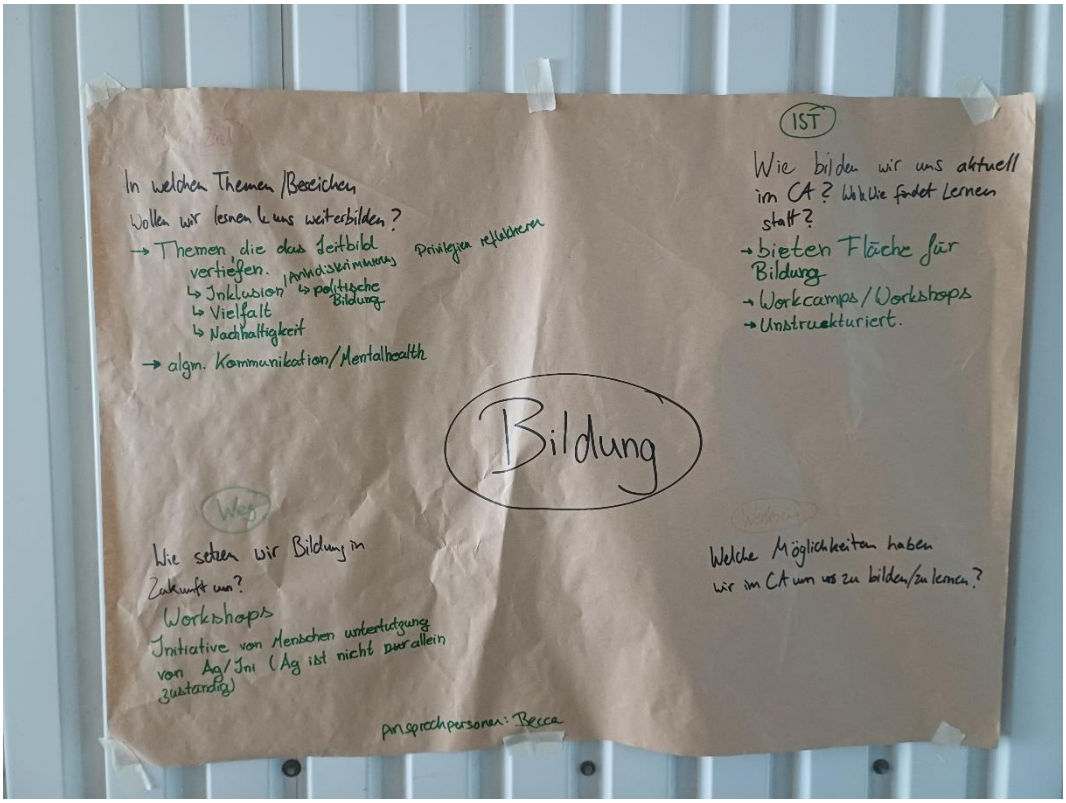
[1] "Internal ethics of the CA" papers created during the General Assembly (author's photograph; translated from German), October 8, 2025.

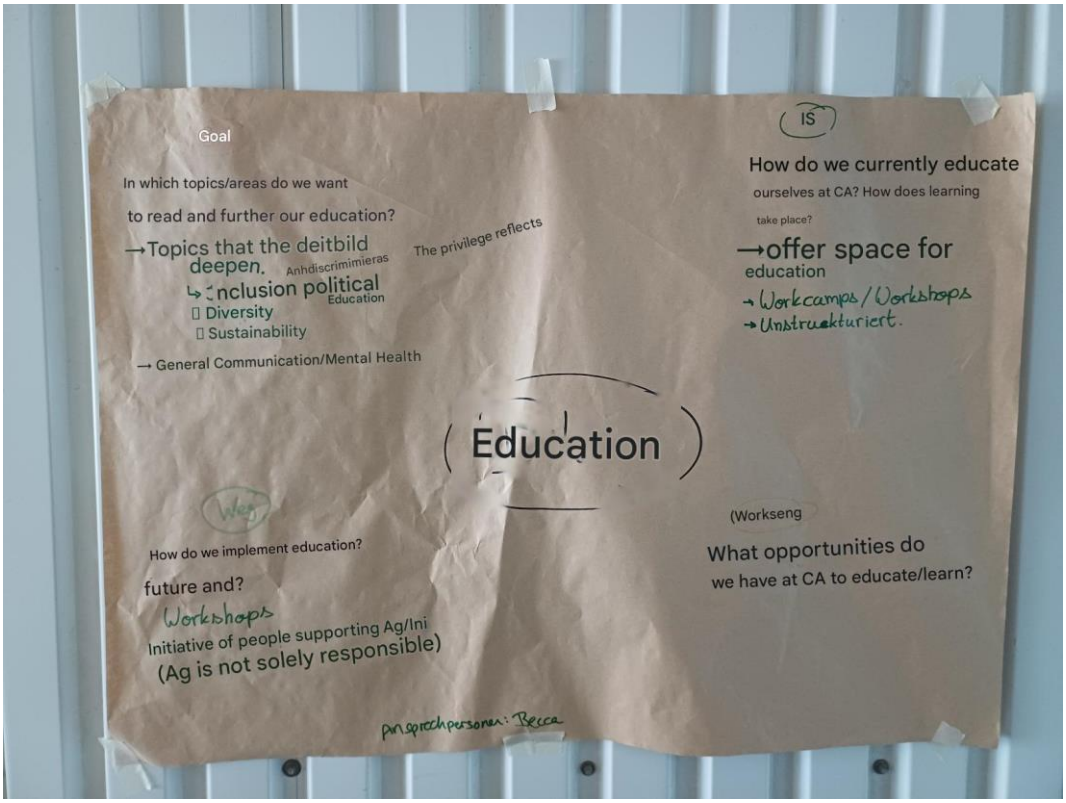
Umgang mit Konflikten (Conflict Management)



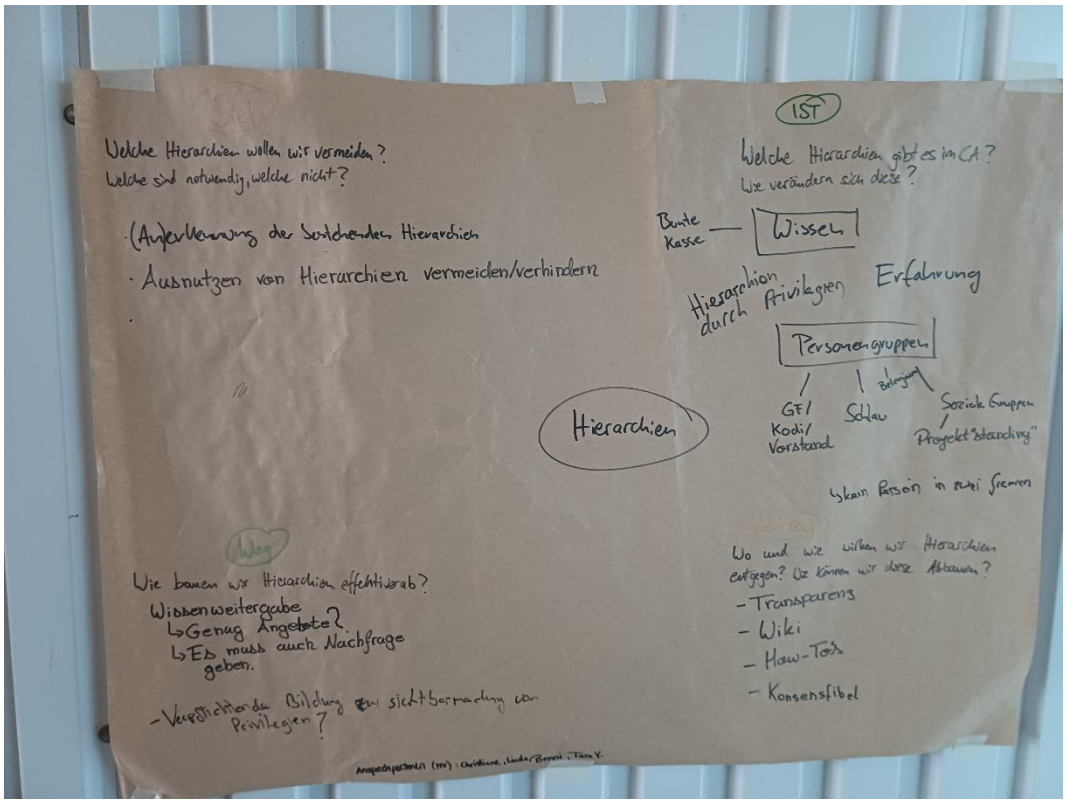


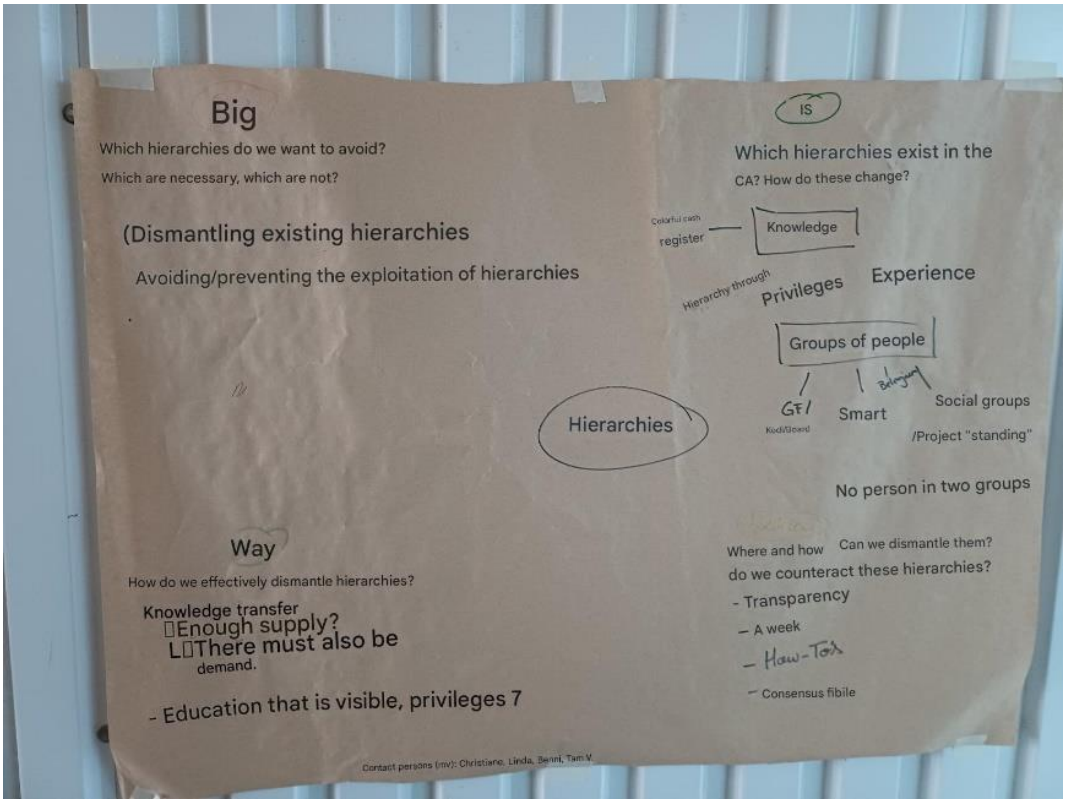
Bildung (Education)





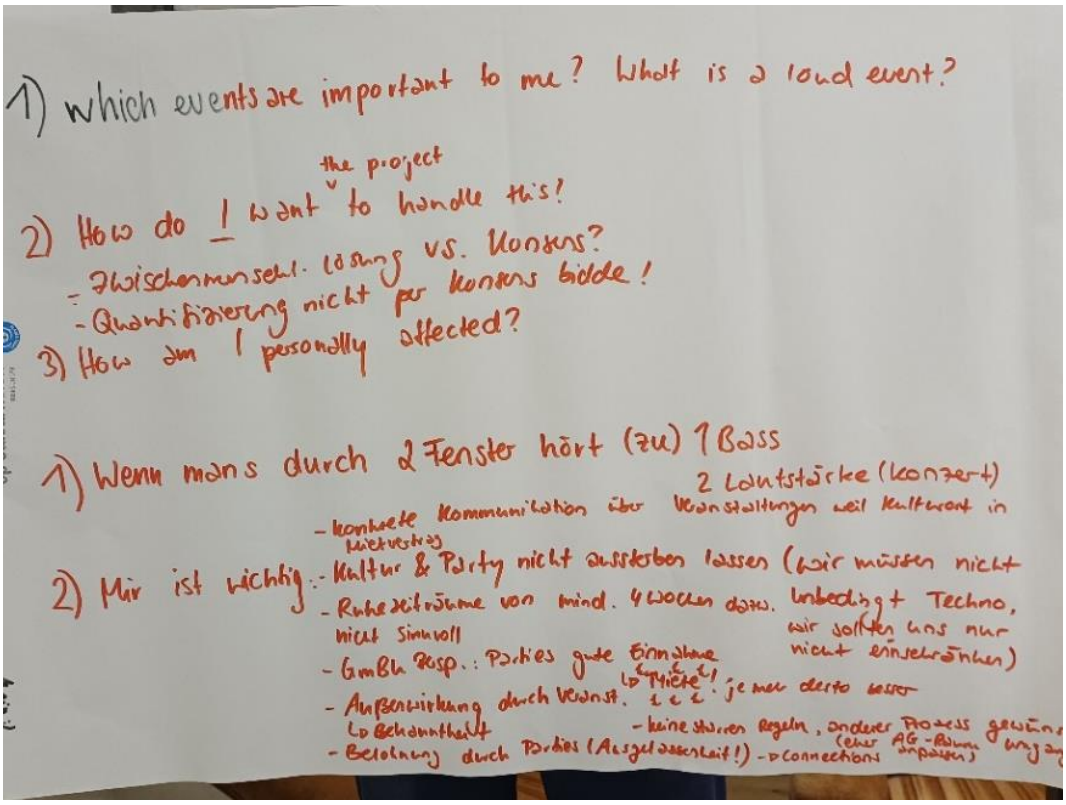
Hierarchien (Hierarchies)

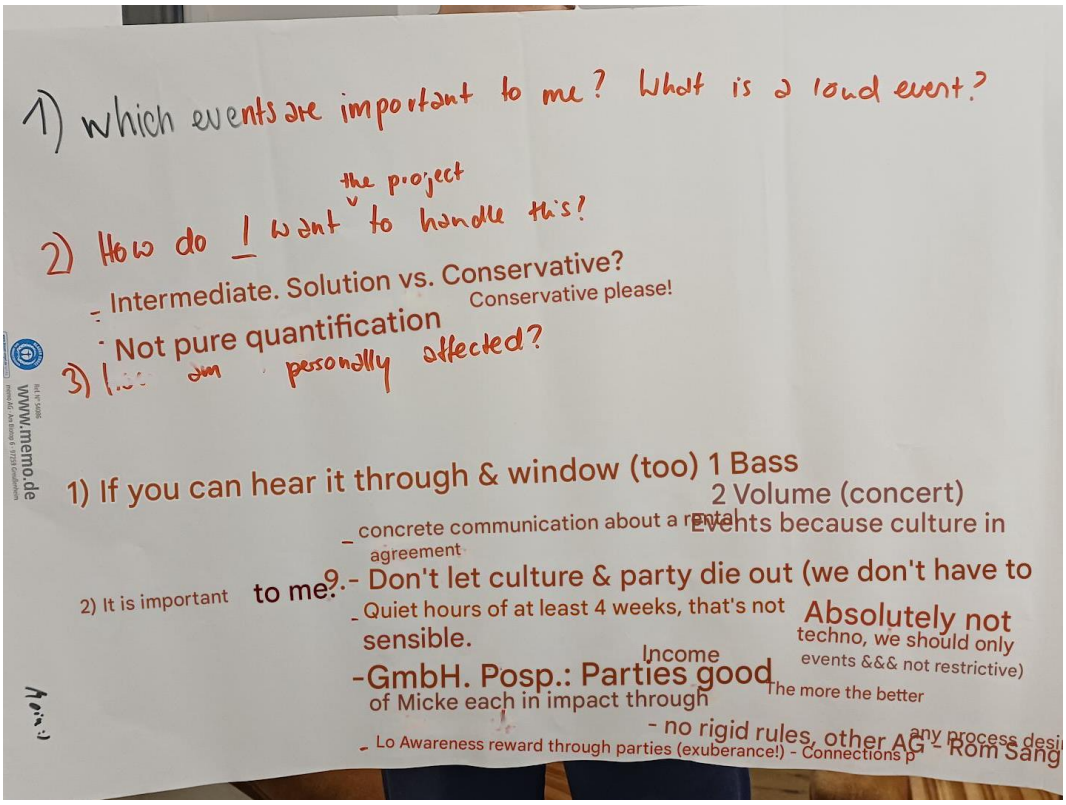




Plenary meeting, January 7, 2026[1]

Translation of the proponents' arguments regarding the proposal





[1] Arguments of the proponents regarding the proposal. Photo by the author, taken during the plenary session on 7 January 2026; text translated from German to Dutch by the author (using Google Translate).

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS – GHENT

Appendix C: Interview transcripts: Case study Home Vermeylen, Ghent

Appendix C1: Student resident of Home Vermeylen (November 11, 2025)

00:00:07 – Interviewer: Hallo, welkom! Eerst en vooral heel erg bedankt dat je wilt deelnemen aan dit interview. Mag ik ons gesprek opnemen en dan de info enkel gebruiken voor dit onderzoek?

00:00:20 – Student- bewoner: Ja, dat mag.

00:00:21 – Interview: Super! Kan je jezelf voorstellen en vertellen hoe lang dat je hier al op kot zit?

00:00:29 – Student- bewoner: Oké, ik ben x. Ik ben 22 jaar en studeer burgerlijk ingenieur aan de Universiteit van Gent. Ik zit in mijn tweede master. En, ik zit hier op kot sinds mijn tweede bachelor, dus nu is dat mijn vierde jaar.

00:00:47 – Interviewer: Oké, super. Heb je nog vragen over het interview proces?

00:00:54 – Student- bewoner: Nee, alles is duidelijk.

00:01:00 - Interviewer: Wat waren jouw belangrijkste redenen om in een universiteitskot te zitten? Was dat bijvoorbeeld dat je wou leven in een stad? Wou je leven in een grote community van studenten, was het eerder om een betaalbare optie te vinden of zijn er andere factoren dat u geleid hebt tot deze residentie?

00:01:20 – Student- bewoner: Dus ik zit vooral op kot omdat ik redelijk ver van school woon, dus niet op kot gaan was sowieso geen optie. Ik heb in mijn eerste jaar op een privékot gezeten, maar dat was echt geen leuke ervaring. En dan heb ik mij hiervoor ingeschreven, omdat dit ook gewoon goedkoper was. Dat was ook het jaar dat ineens die energieprijzen super hard stegen, waardoor de prijzen van alle koten ook ineens waren gestegen. Dus was dit een goed alternatief. Ik had dus het probleem dat in mijn vorige kot, door die energieprijzen, mijn huur ineens € 150 meer was van de ene op de andere dag. En dus hadden mijn ouders zoiets van bij een UGent kot ga je veel meer zekerheid hebben, want zijn gaan niet zomaar die prijzen kiezen en laten stijgen. In een privékot daarentegen doen ze wat zij willen en hier is gewoon meer zekerheid.

00:02:27 – Interviewer: Dat is heel duidelijk, een logische keuze. Je had dan beslist om naar een kot van de universiteit te gaan en hoe verliep dan de aanmeldingsprocedure voor jou?

00:02:42 – Student- bewoner: Elk jaar op 1 maart moet je dat aanvragen en dan word je gewoon op een lijst gezet. En dus dan ze zeggen wel niet op welke plek je staat, maar ze zeggen gewoon “Oké, we hebben jou nu op de lijst gezet en wij gaan nu jouw aanvraag behandelen”. Dan krijg je op een bepaald moment gewoon een mail, dus dat kan echt zijn dat je dat in het midden van het schooljaar krijgt. Ik kreeg dat de dag voor de start van het academiejaar. Ik had toen eigenlijk al een ander kot, want ik ging sowieso veranderen van kot. Ik heb toen zogezegd in juli, augustus en september op dat ander kot gezeten. Toen ik dan die mail kreeg, ben ik in de eerste week van het academiejaar verhuisd.

00:03:40 – Interviewer: Gebeurt het vaak dat studenten zo last minute maar een bevestigingsmail krijgen of was dat een foutje in het systeem? Want voor veel mensen is dat dan toch wel een heel onzekere periode.

00:03:51 – Student- bewoner: Ik denk wel dat dat normaal is dat veel mensen het zo last-minute krijgen, omdat er mensen na de herexamens beslissen om te stoppen of moeten stoppen. Daarom dat dat soms zo last minute is, maar ik denk niet dat dat de meerderheid is, maar dat kan wel gebeuren. Je kan dat ook bijvoorbeeld in het tweede semester pas krijgen als iemand beslist om dan te stoppen.

00:04:27 – Interviewer: En stel dus je appliqueert op 1 maart, moet je dan zo snel mogelijk proberen zijn? Sta jij op de wachtlijst naar de volgorde van hoe snel dat je inschrijft?

00:04:37 – Student- bewoner: Ja, Ik denk wel dat het om ter snelst is. En ik weet dat eerstejaars voorrang hebben en ik denk ook hoe jonger, hoe sneller dat je het krijgt.

00:04:51 – Interviewer: En je schrijft je gewoon in met de gedachte ik wil een universiteitskot of schrijf je in voor een specifieke home?

00:04:57 – Student- bewoner: Wel, dat is op Oasis en dan kan je een top 3 ingeven. Jij krijgt sowieso één van die drie. Maar ik weet wel dat bijna iedereen zijn eerste keus krijgt. En je moet dan ook zegen of je een standaard kamer of kamer plus of een appartement wilt.

00:05:22 – Interviewer: Oké, dus je kan uw kamertype wel zelf kiezen.

00:05:24 – Student- bewoner: Ja, want die prijzen verschillen ook.

00:05:29 – Interviewer: En als je een home toegewezen krijgt en je wilt die niet, kan je dat dan ook nog afzeggen?

00:05:36 – Student- bewoner: Je kan sowieso afzeggen zo lang dat je geen contract hebt getekend, maar jij kan dan niet zomaar een andere home krijgen. Of daar gaan ze u gewoon weer op de lijst zetten.

00:05:54 – Interviewer: Vind je dit een aangenaam applicatieproces? Het klinkt redelijk stressvol. Ik weet niet hoe dat je dat zelf hebt ervaren? Zou je iets veranderen aan dit proces?

00:06:02 – Student- bewoner: Ik vond dat toen echt niet leuk, toen ik moest verhuizen. Omdat ik mij toen al volledig had geïnstalleerd en meubels gekocht. En die kamer was ook veel groter. Maar mijn ouders waren gewoon zo van, er gaat niemand de privéeigenaar tegenhouden om de huurprijs te verhogen, de huur ging plots van 350 euro naar 550 euro voor een doodnormale kamer, en de rest deelde ik. Daarom waren mijn ouders zo van de prijzen zijn te instabiel, dus ben ik naar hier gekomen. Maar dat was tijdens de eerste week van het academiejaar, dus dat was gewoon echt vervelend. Toen zat ik hier en mijn kamer was leeg, ik had echt het gevoel dat ik in een cel zat. En ik moest veel dingen terug naar huis brengen, omdat er hier geen plek voor was. Ik vond dat gewoon echt niet leuk. Maar dat was gewoon omdat dat zo lastminute gebeurde. Ik denk als je dat gewoon in het begin van de zomer krijgt, dat het dan wel oké is.

00:07:30 – Interviewer: Dat kan ik begrijpen. En jij kreeg dan een kot toegewezen in de eerste week van het academiejaar. Was er dan toen jij hier toekwam, iemand die u rondleidde? En hoe kreeg je je sleutel en kwam je in contact met jouw kamer?

00:07:51 – Student- bewoner: Na elk semester zijn er rondleidingen waarbij je beneden uitleg krijgt. Ik heb zelf nooit deelgenomen, want toen had ik mijn kot nog niet. Wat er wel gebeurt, is dat er elk jaar, als het schooljaar begint, een soort uitlegmoment is. Dat is, denk ik, ongeveer twee weken voor de start. Tijdens de start van het academiejaar is het gebouw heel de dag open. Hiernaast, als je binnenkomt, is nog een schuifdeur naar het onthaal. Daar staan elke dag, van 8 uur tot 20 uur, mensen klaar aan de balie en kun je altijd met je vragen terecht. Op het moment dat je komt om je sleutel op te halen, is dat heel goed georganiseerd. Je geeft je naam, je krijgt de sleutel, en ze geven je uitleg. Ze zeggen bijvoorbeeld: 'Dit is je badge, dat is de sleutel', en ze leggen je uit hoe alles werkt of waar je instellingen kunt aanpassen. Daarna is het eigenlijk vrij simpel.

00:09:08 – Interviewer: Oké, ze stellen u wel op uw gemak. Dat was geen stresssituatie? En brengen ze u dan nog tot uw kamer?

00:09:14 – Student- bewoner: Ze brengen je niet echt naar je kamer, maar je voelt je wel op je gemak. Het was voor mij geen stresssituatie. Alle uitleg die je nodig had, en alle vragen die je maar kon bedenken, werden beantwoord door het personeel. Ze waren er altijd om te helpen.

00:09:23 – Interviewer: Voelde het genoeg aan als uw kot op dat moment? Want het klinkt een beetje alsof dat je gelijk ergens toekomt in een hostel en dat je sleutel krijgt naar uw kamer. Beïnvloedt het kader van personeel, jouw perceptie op jouw kot? Begrijp jij wat ik bedoel?

00:09:45 – Student- bewoner: Het voelde wel direct aan als wat het nu is, dus het kot. Omdat het wel gewoon studenten waren die u hielpen, studenten die hier ook gewoon zijn en al lang wonen.

00:10:00 – Interviewer: Oké, ik dacht dat het personeel was die u ontving?

00:10:03 – Student- bewoner: Er is ook wel personeel om echt zo de dingen te doen die studenten niet kunnen doen. Maar de mensen die de sleutels afgeven, die uitleg en rondleidingen geven, zijn studenten. Ze staan dan hier in de straat tussen alle homes (wijst naar de straat tussen Home Vermeylen en site Kantienberg). Hier staan er allemaal studenten met dan zo'n fluohesje aan en dan zeggen die waar je wel en niet mag parkeren bijvoorbeeld. Ik kom toe via de straat achter het gebouw, dus van de ring. Dat is zo de straat naast het water en dan moet je zo naar boven gaan en daar op de hoek staat er dan iemand. En dan vraagt die voor welke home je komt? En dan zegt die waar jij naartoe moet. En dat zijn dus ook allemaal studenten die hier wonen.

00:11:00 – Interviewer: Oké, dat is wel fijn. De volgende vraag sluit daar een beetje op aan. We zijn daarjuist al van de inkomhal naar jouw kamer gestapt. Ik zou graag nog eens die route overlopen en dan vooral letten op welke collectieve ruimtes we passeren en welke dat u uitnodigen om even stil te staan. Dus je komt meestal toe met de fiets, en dan de eerste stap is dan uw fiets waar stel je die?

00:11:28 – Student- bewoner: Ik kom toe met de fiets. Die parkeer ik in de fietsenstalling naast het gebouw; je gaat daar binnen met dezelfde badge. Daarna zet ik mijn fiets weg en ga weer naar buiten. Vervolgens neem ik de hoofdingang, want er is maar één ingang om het gebouw binnen te gaan.

00:11:51 – Interviewer: Er is geen zijingang van de fietsenstalling of een snelle toegang?

00:11:54 – Student- bewoner: Ik kan wel naar buiten via een zijingang, maar dat is eigenlijk door de keuken van het gelijkvloers. Dus dat is niet de bedoeling, want dat is eigenlijk een nooduitgang. Dat is gewoon een short cut die ik ook pas na twee jaar heb ontdekt.

00:12:13 – Interviewer: Wel interessant dat je zoekt naar shortcuts.

00:12:15 – Student- bewoner: Ja, dat is voor als ik te laat ben. Want zo kom jij direct in de fietsenstalling en moet je niet via buiten gaan. Oké, en dan komt je toe in de hal en dan heb je aan uw rechterkant de ontspanningszaal. Daar ga ik echt nooit naartoe.

00:12:37 – Interviewer: Wat is de reden dat je daar nooit naartoe gaat? Is het omdat je daar geen behoefte aan hebt, of omdat de ruimte zichzelf ook niet aanspreekt?

00:12:47 – Student- bewoner: De ruimte is niet wauw, maar op zich heb je daar wel een kickertafel, pooltafel en zetels. Maar ik denk dat dat eerder is één omdat ik al heel veel sociaal contact heb op school en dus geen nood heb als ik op kot kom. Dus dat is eerder een persoonlijke reden. En ook omdat daar elke dag iets wordt georganiseerd. In de lift, misschien heb je dat niet gezien, hangen er kalenders uit met alle evenementen die ze organiseren. Dus er is een vereniging en die organiseren dus elke dag iets, van maandag tot donderdag. Dus er is gewoon meestal iets gaande. Dat is niet altijd daar, want soms gaan zij ook gewoon uit. Of organiseren zij een bowlingavond. Maar studentenverenigingen zijn gewoon echt niet mijn ding.

00:13:59 – Interviewer: Oké, begrijp ik. Dus de ontspanningszaal is aan de rechterkant en dan heb je meerdere liften?

00:14:04 – Student- bewoner: Ja, jij hebt aan de rechterkant twee liften voor de oneven verdiepen (1, 3, 5, 7). En dan aan de linkerkant de liften van de even verdiepen (2, 4, 6, 8) dus dat zijn 8 verdiepen in totaal. Tussen die liften is er ook één trap. Maar dat is eigenlijk super onlogisch, als ik daar nu over nadenk. Want het gelijkvloers is het verdiep voor mensen met een beperking. Dus die kamers zijn daar ook aan aangepast: die zijn groter zodat iemand met een rolstoel daarin kan leven en ook de aanrechten van de keuken zijn lager. Maar er is dus wel gewoon een trap om daar naartoe te gaan. Dus, Ik weet niet hoe dat zij daar geraken. Heb jij die trapjes niet gezien?

00:15:20 – Interviewer: Nee, ik heb die niet gezien. Ik ga daar straks goed op letten.

00:15:20 – Student- bewoner: Ja, er zijn echt zo vier of vijf treden. Dus Ik denk dat er misschien zo'n traplift is. Of misschien kunnen zij via een andere ingang, want achteraan is er nog een ingang. Want het gebouw is zo een T: met hier de tuin, fietsenstalling en achteraan aan de T heb je nog een ingang. Maar dat lijkt me wel raar, want als in je een rolstoel zit weet ik niet hoe je naar boven geraakt.

00:15:46 – Interviewer: Oké, dat ga ik nog eens bekijken, want dat is wel belangrijk.

00:15:48 – Interviewer: En die de trap tussen de lift is gewoon een trap die alle verdiepen bedient?

00:15:52 – Student- bewoner: Nee, je hebt daar dus die paar trapjes en als je daar opgaat, kom je in de gang van het gelijkvloers. En op het einde van de gang, is er aan de linkerkant een deur en daar is de trap naar alle verdiepen. En dat is één trap.

00:16:08 – Interviewer: En dan komen we in de grote gang. En je passeert dan twee keukens?

00:16:18 – Student- bewoner: Één keuken passeer je niet, want die is op de hoek. Je hebt eigenlijk een T-vorm en in die oksel zijn de liften. En ik woon dan aan de rechterkant in de lange gang. Dus ik passeer wel de keuken van de lange gang, de trappenkoker, wc en de douches.

00:16:51 – Interviewer: Dus eigenlijk passeren we nergens een kleine living of ruimte waar je even wilt verblijven?

00:16:59 – Student- bewoner: Nee, er is geen één open ruimte waar je gewoon doorgaat. Je moet echt een ruimte in gaan, er is ook maar één open ruimte voor heel de home.

00:17:13 – Interviewer: En vind je het, want hier is een gang echt puur functioneel in dit ontwerp, het aangenaam dat je gewoon snel naar jouw kamer kan gaan? Of zou dat voor jou anders mogen? Bijvoorbeeld in het ontwerp dat ik in Duitsland ga bezichtigen, zijn alle gangen buiten. Met passerelles boven elkaar, waardoor dat je eigenlijk altijd je buren ook ziet binnen gaan en buiten gaan. Er is plaats om een stoeltje te zetten of om even stil te staan.

00:17:36 – Student- bewoner: Maar ik denk dat dat werkt, maar niet als je met zoveel bent, om eerlijk te zijn. Ik weet niet of ik naar die ruimte zou gaan, omdat je met 60 mensen samenwoont en er zijn sowieso mensen die graag in een living zouden zitten dus het zou daar altijd vol zijn. En het ding is dat ik hier sociaal contact vermijd.

00:18:06 – Interviewer: Ik ga daar straks nog een beetje dieper op in gaan om te weten in hoeverre je sociaal contact vermijd door deze architectuur of door persoonlijke redenen.

00:18:20 – Student-bewoner: Het is wel echt gewoon een combinatie van de twee.

00:18:24 – Interviewer: Ja, ik heb ook dat gevoel. En dan het type kamer dat je hebt, is een standaardkamer en je deelt het sanitair en de twee keukens met 60 kamers?

00:18:43 – Student- bewoner: Ja, tussen de 56 en 60 kamers.

00:18:52 – Interviewer: Ervaar je daar problemen mee? Met het delen van sanitair bijvoorbeeld.

00:18:59 – Student- bewoner: Nee, dat vind ik geen probleem.

00:19:03 – Interviewer: En dan de keuken, ik las dat elke bewoners een eigen kastje heeft, die je op slot kan doen?

00:19:18 – Student- bewoner: Ja, dus alle kasten zijn genummerd en jij hebt dan het kastje bij jouw kamernummer.

00:19:27 – Interviewer: En Iedereen doet het meestal wel op slot ook?

00:19:29 – Student- bewoner: Ik heb dat eigenlijk nog nooit gebruikt. Ik denk dat heel veel mensen dat niet gebruiken, dus dat systeem werkt eigenlijk niet zo goed.

00:19:39 – Interviewer: Dus niemand gebruikt de keukenkastjes. En is dit uit schrik dat mensen eten zouden pakken of voor het gemak om eten dichtbij jou te hebben?

00:19:44 – Student- bewoner: Het handiger inderdaad om je gerief gewoon dicht bij u te hebben. Want ik woon bijvoorbeeld op het einde van de gang. Dus als ik gewoon zin heb in bijvoorbeeld koekjes, dan ga ik niet elke keer naar daar wandelen om dat te gaan halen. Dus ik denk dat dat eerder gewoon niet praktisch is. Ik denk dat mensen daar misschien wel pannen in doen, dingen die je niet in uw kamer gebruikt. Die kast is eigenlijk ook niet zo groot, het is een klein kluisje waar een grote pan zelfs niet in past.

00:20:16 – Interviewer: Heb je dan voldoende opslagplaats in uw kamer zelf om jouw eten hier ook te bewaren?

00:20:19 – Student- bewoner: Ja, hier onderaan in de kast (wijst naar een extra kast waar borden, bestek en eten staat).

00:20:37 – Interviewer: Misschien zou het dan een beter systeem zijn om in de gang gewoon iets van lockersysteem te hebben?

00:20:40 – Student- bewoner: Ja, want er is veel ruimte in de gang. Het zou handiger zijn om een locker dichtbij te hebben dan in de keuken. Er is daar ook bijvoorbeeld een frigo, maar ik denk niet dat veel mensen die gebruiken. Ik heb bijvoorbeeld zelf een frigo op mijn kamer.

00:21:13 – Interviewer: Jij hebt die frigo zelf gekocht en hier gezet?

00:21:15 – Student- bewoner: Ja! En, Ik denk dat echt bijna iedereen dat doet, omdat die frigo meestal niet proper is en omdat mensen eten stelen. Omdat je echt gewoon met zijn zo veel bent en er staat geen naam op eten. En die frigo telt maar vijf vakjes, zoals een frigo in een standaard huis, maar je moet dat delen met zestig. Dat lijkt dus wel gewoon de bedoeling dat je een frigo in jouw kamer hebt.

00:21:52 – Interviewer: Dat is wel bijzonder, want het collectiviseren van middelen maakt een home energiezuinig. Maar als elke kamer daarboven nog een eigen frigo heeft, is dat net veel minder energiezuinig.

00:22:05 – Student- bewoner: Dit gebouw is alles behalve energiezuinig, maar echt alles behalve.

00:22:10 – Interviewer: Wat bedoel je daar precies mee?

00:22:11 – Student- bewoner: Maar dat is wel gewoon Home Vermeylen omdat dit oud is en niet gerenoveerd. Bijvoorbeeld, dit raam gaat niet dicht er is geen sluitingssysteem. Dus de koudebruggen die je hier hebt, want heel de wand is een raam, zijn niet normaal. Dus ik moet mijn verwarming eigenlijk wel nog redelijk hoog zetten. Maar mijn verwarming werkt heel goed, dus ik heb totaal geen koud. Maar als ik aan het raamprofiel voel, voelt dit superkoud.

Een paar weken geleden was hier bijvoorbeeld een bedrijf om te ruiten te kuisen. En ze hadden daar een mail voor gestuurd, maar ik had die niet gezien. Dus ik stond mij hier gewoon aan te kleden en ineens stonden die voor mijn raam. Maar die persoon kan gewoon mijn raam openschuiven en binnengaan. Maar ik ben daar niet bang voor, omdat ik op het zesde verdiep woon. Maar als je op het gelijkvloers woont, kunnen mensen gewoon binnenkomen. Dat is hier echt te oud. Ze moeten dit echt afbreken of renoveren.

00:23:38 – Interviewer: En jouw verwarming zet je voortdurend aan, zit dit allemaal inclusief in de prijs?

00:23:46 – Student- bewoner: Dat is het ding. Dat is niet met een voorschot, dus het is niet als ik meer verbruik dat ik meer moet betalen. Dus daarom dat ik niet heel de tijd koud zal hebben, door dat raam. Ik zal er dus niet opletten. (…). **Maar uiteindelijk heb ik er zelf geen last van, maar wij verbruiken denk ik gewoon niet normaal veel energie. En als home van de universiteit vind ik dat niet verantwoord.**

00:24:50 – Interviewer: Dat vind ik ook wel. En we kwamen daarjuist al in de keuken en nu zaten er wel mensen daar te eten. Jij leeft met 60 mensen samen, en je zei daarjuist al dat je niet het gevoel hebt dat alle 60 mensen koken. Is het een gewoonte dat mensen daar koken en dan eten in de kamer? Of is er ook wel een gezamenlijk eetmoment in de keuken?

00:25:02 – Student- bewoner: Dat wel echt. Maar dat zijn gewoon een paar mensen die dat doen, die gewoon zo wat vrienden zijn geworden en dan regelmatig samen eten in de keuken of als iemand een keer vrienden mee heeft. Dat dan heb ik ook al gedaan, maar niet vaak. Dus er zijn er wel regelmatig groepen die daar eten, maar er zijn ook wel heel veel mensen die gewoon op hun kamer eten.

00:25:51 – Interviewer: Als mensen dan koken in de keuken, is dat dan met koptelefoon aan?

00:25:56 – Student- bewoner: Ik doe dat wel, maar andere soms niet. Maar ik ben wel een beetje extreem daar in, omdat ik gewoon echt moe ben na een hele dag ontwerpen en geen nood heb aan smalltalk.

00:26:08 – Interviewer: En de mensen met wie je op de gang bent en met wie je alles deelt, sta je met hen in contact?

00:26:21 – Student- bewoner: Er is wel een groepschat op Messenger, dus je kan wel gewoon altijd sturen en wordt ook regelmatig ingestuurd. Bijvoorbeeld: heeft er iemand zout of een pan? Dus het is wel super toegankelijk en iedereen is heel vriendelijk. Dus als er een probleem is, dan kan ik wel altijd aankloppen bij iemand.

00:26:44 – Interviewer: Er zijn ook aan een begin van het academiejaar altijd gangfeestjes, las ik.

00:26:52 – Student- bewoner: Dat is gewoon een introductieavond om elkaar te leren kennen. Maar dat is niet zo speciaal. Dat zijn meestal een paar mensen die in de keuken zitten. Tenzij in mijn eerste jaar: dan zette iedereen zijn stoel in de gang en dan was dat bijna speeddaten. Dat was superleuk om mensen te leren kennen. Maar nu is dat niet meer zo. Nu zijn er een paar mensen die elkaar kennen en zeggen “er is een kotfeestje in de keuken en iedereen is welkom”.

00:27:40 – Interviewer: En dan nog één vraag over de gedeelte ruimtes. Moest er iets zijn dat je zou kunnen aanpassen wat zou dat zijn? Bijvoorbeeld het sanitair, de keuken, de gang, circulatie…

00:28:03 – Student- bewoner: Ik denk gewoon het opsplitsen. Ik denk dat dat het veel huiselijker zou maken. Nu ben je echt precies in een hostel of een hotel. Iedereen op dezelfde gang en iedereen gebruikt dezelfde keuken.

Ik weet bijvoorbeeld in home Fabiola zijn er kortere, kleinere gangen. Ik denk dat mijn zus met 16 op hun gang zat en dan deelde zij twee of drie douches. Zij kende dan wel gewoon al die 16 mensen en dat waren dan wel gewoon haar kotgenoten. Terwijl ik ken hier niemand. Dus Ik denk het feit dat alles hier niet is opgesplitst,

dus dat we echt alles met 60 doen, maakt het ook minder huiselijk. Anderzijds heb je wel meerdere natte kokers nodig, wat niet handig is.

00:29:10 – Interviewer: Of de plaats van de circulatie veranderen, zou ook al kunnen veranderen wie wat gebruikt

00:29:21 – Student- bewoner: Ja, ook gewoon soms moet je lang wachten op de lift, omdat iedereen dezelfde lift moet pakken. Ik denk dat ik een andere routine heb, maar ik denk als je om 8u30 les hebt, dan moet je wel gewoon even wachten op de lift. Dus dat is ook niet aangenaam.

00:29:49 – Interviewer: Oké, het volgende luikje gaat over het onderhoud en de organisatie. En hoeverre dan bewoners een verantwoordelijkheidsgevoel daarvoor dragen? Dus de ruimtes die we daarjuist hebben besproken, zoals het sanitair en de keuken, door wie worden die schoongemaakt? Is het vooral door het personeel of zijn er ook onderling tussen de bewoners afspraken, regels, structuren en wie dat wat zo doet?

00:30:20 – Student- bewoner: Awel, het schoonmaken is wel echt niet bij de studenten. De regel is als je kookt of iets vuil maakt dan laat je het proper achter. Maar mensen doen dat vaak niet, het is er niet altijd even proper. Je merkt wel echt dat iedereen gewoon weet, dat er een poestteam komt. En die komen wel regelmatig, dus het is hier uiteindelijk wel proper, maar ik ga zelf ook echt niet de keuken poetsen bijvoorbeeld. Zelfs de vuilnisbakken legen moeten wij ook niet doen.

00:31:01 – Interviewer: Heb je het gevoel dat mensen, doordat ze weten dat er iemand komt, dat ze een minder zorg voor dragen? Moest er geen poetsploeg zijn, denk je dat er dan meer zorg zou gedragen worden van deze ruimtes?

00:31:14 – Student- bewoner: Denk het wel, want je wilt ook geen vuile keuken hebben. Er zouden sowieso mensen zijn die het niet doen, maar 60 mensen is wel gewoon veel. Maar ik denk dat dat in principe wel zou kunnen werken als je dat gewoon organiseert. En uiteindelijk als er niemand komt, dan moet je het wel gewoon zelf doen. Ik zou het alleszins wel gewoon doen. Maar nu is dat wel echt niet omdat ze weten dat mensen het gaan poetsen.

00:31:55 – Interviewer: Dus je kookt uw dingen, dan ruim je jouw eigen afwas op en je neemt dan mee naar je kot?

00:32:03 – Student-bewoner: Ja, zo werkt het.

00:32:10 – Interviewer: En voor bijvoorbeeld het onderhoud van de gangen, is er een regel dat iemand die het afval moet buitenzetten of de gang moet vegen? Of moet je eigenlijk echt niks doen van huishoudelijke taken?

00:32:20 – Student-bewoner: Je moet hier echt niets doen. Je moet enkel afval sorteren en zelfs dat doen, mensen niet. Je moet hier echt niks niks niks doen. Enkel uw kamer en dat is persoonlijk. Maar voor de gemeenschappelijke ruimtes moeten wij niets doen.

00:32:36 – Interviewer: En heb je het gevoel dat je daar een iets van volwassenheid in mist? Of ervaar je daar enkel voordelen aan?

00:32:52 – Student- bewoner: Op zich vind ik dat wel leuk, omdat ik gewoon weet dat als we het zelf zouden moeten doen, zou ik ook gewoon de vuiligheid van anderen moeten opruimen. En dat wil ik wel gewoon echt niet doen. Maar het is niet dat ik het niet kan,

want toen ik op Erasmus was had ik wel gewoon een studio en dat lukte wel helemaal perfect. Daar moest ik wel zelf mijn vuilbakken legen en alleen voor alles zorgen.

00:33:26 – Interviewer: Dus het huidige onderhoud systeem vind je het wel oké?

00:33:39 – Student- bewoner**: Ik vind niet dat het systeem perse werkt, maar dat ligt meer aan de studenten.** Ik vind dat het poetsteam wel gewoon heel goed hun werkt doet, die komen echt regelmatig en die poetsen wel echt gewoon goed.

00:34:04 – Interviewer: En je hebt het gevoel dat het systeem in het algemeen niet werkt? Hoe zie je dat of voel je dat?

00:34:11 – Student- bewoner: Ik heb gewoon het gevoel dat de studenten daar echt gewoon super nonchalant in zijn. Ik denk dat ze misschien iets meer verantwoordelijkheid bij de studenten zouden kunnen doen. Ik heb het gevoel als je hier als eerste jaar komt, dat je niet leert of zelfstandig te wonen. En dat zij gewoon vuil blijven en de afwas niet doen.

Bijvoorbeeld, mensen doen vaak de afwas niet en dan moet het poetsteam uw afwas afwassen. En dan sturen ze daar wel een mail voor om te zeggen dat dit niet de bedoeling is en dat dit echt niet kan omdat dit niet hun job is. En in het begin deden ze dat, maar nu doen ze dat niet meer. Nu hebben ze in elke keuken bakken gezet en alle vuile afwas doen zijn daarin op het einde van de week. En als je uw ding niet hebt afgewassen, moet je dat daaruit halen. Dus zulke systemen vind ik wel goed omdat studenten dan wel gewoon hun afwas gaan doen**. Maar ik snap wel dat dat het systeem is, want 60 man is gewoon teveel. Ik denk dat zijn 60 verschillende mensen die elkaar niet kennen, met verschillende opvoeding en huishouding gewoontes. Dus ik denk dat het echt moeilijk is om daar één harmonieuze familie van te maken. Dus ik vind het niet realistisch om te zeggen dat de studenten onderling allemaal afspraken moeten maken, dat zou niet werken.**

00:35:45 – Interviewer: Dus op de schaal van dit gebouw, meer specifiek op de schaal van dit verdiep, is iets van institutioneel kader nodig. Maar ook dat is niet voldoende, door het gebrek aan verantwoordelijkheidsgevoel bij de studenten doordat ze niets moeten doen. Het is dan echt een cyclus eigenlijk?

00:36:00 – Student- bewoner: Het probleem is dat dingen pas werken als ze er echt gezag of autoriteit achter zetten. Dus als ze zeggen: als je dat niet doet dan kan je een boete krijgen of bestraft worden. Terwijl als je op een privaat kot zit zal jouw kotbaas jou nooit straffen als je de afwas niet doet. Maar hier wordt dat wel gedaan, ook bijvoorbeeld als je te veel lawaai maakt.

00:36:32 – Interviewer: Dat vind ik ook interessant. Die sancties, die je net even hebt besproken, legt het personeel jullie die regels op? Of zijn het eerder de bewoners onderling die tegen elkaar zeggen: als jij nu niet jouw afwas doet, dan zeg ik het tegen de homebeheerder?

00:36:53 – Student- bewoner: Over de afwas, daar zijn er geen regels over. Omdat dat niet te controleren valt, niemand zal weten of dat mijn pan is of niet. Mensen gaan dat hoogstens in de groepschat sturen: 'de keuken is echt vuil, was eens jullie gerief af'. En daar wordt wel naar geluisterd, omdat de mensen elkaar onderling wel nog kennen. Maar er zijn niet van regels of officiële dingen daarover.

Het enigste is wel als je lawaai maakt na 23u, dan wordt het bestraft. Zelfs praten kan te veel zijn, want die muren zijn flinterdun. Bijvoorbeeld, tijdens examens studeer ik hier en ik studeer luidop. En mijn buur hoorde dat en die dacht dat ik was aan het bellen. En mijn buur heeft dan de PPD gebeld. Dat is een nummer waarnaar je kan bellen als er te veel lawaai is, dus als iemand een feestje hier naast geeft en het is na 23u dan kan ik die bellen. En dan komt die naar jouw kamer en vraagt die jouw studentenkaart en zal je een boete van 21 euro krijgen (dit is verrekend in jouw huur). Dus daar zijn ze wel heel serieus over, maar dat vind ik wel echt goed. Maar in mijn geval, heeft de PPD mij enkel een waarschuwing gegeven omdat het tijdens de examens was en ik hier alleen was. En dus uiteindelijk was er dan niks gebeurd. Maar we hebben dat wel al eens gehad dat ik met twee vriendinnen in mijn kamer was aan het praten. En toen moesten wij wel gewoon een boete betalen. Het was in de kamer van één van hen, de boete kwam dan op haar rekening en wij hebben dit dan onderling verdeeld.

00:39:23 – Interviewer: Ik heb daar twee vragen over. Ik begrijp dat er een regel moet zijn omtrent nachtlawaai, want je moet de rust kunnen bewaken in zo een groot gebouw. En nu werk het zo dat als je een klacht hebt over iemand en dat gaat dan via een instelling die dan het conflict gaat aanbrengen bij iemand. Mis je niet een persoonlijke aanpak? Bijvoorbeeld, kan jouw buur niet komen kloppen en vragen of het iets stiller kan?

00:39:59 – Student- bewoner: Jawel, ik doe dat altijd. Ik ga nooit direct bellen. Hij heeft ook eerst geklopt, maar aangezien ik aan het studeren was, bleef ik wel doorpraten. Dus de meeste mensen zullen wel eerst één, twee of zelfs drie keer vragen of het stiller mag.

00:40:24 – Interviewer: En die regel van 23 uur? Vind je dat oké dat die er is? Want ik kan mij voorstellen als er regels worden opgelegd dat je soms misschien jouw vrijheid of autonomie in sommige dingen wat verliest.

00:40:43 – Student- bewoner; Dat vind ik wel echt niet. Want anders zou dat hier echt een chaos zijn, want je leeft hier met 60 mensen zo dicht op elkaar. Ik hoor zelfs als jij een feestje heeft in de kamer tegenover mij of zelfs twee kamers verder. Dus als er geen regels zouden zijn, zou dat echt niet lukken. En uiteindelijk, je kan ook gewoon naar buiten gaan, want de Overpoort is zo dichtbij. Ik vind niet dat je daardoor minder verantwoordelijkheid hebt. Ik vind dat goed om zulke dingen te vermijden.

00:41:28 – Interviewer: Dat begrijp ik. En nog even verder over welke functies er zijn. In zover ik weet is er in Home Vermeylen geen wassalon?

00:41:43 – Student- bewoner: Er is geen wassalon, maar er zijn wel wasmachines. In elke home heb je wasmachines.

00:41:48 – Interviewer: Ik had gelezen dat jullie er hier geen hadden, maar dat jullie die van home Fabiola mochten gebruiken. Maar, jij hebt die nog niet gebruikt?

00:41:56 – Student- bewoner: Nee, want ik was gewoon altijd thuis. Het ding is dat je niet zomaar binnen kan in home Fabiola, want elke home heeft een andere badge.

00:42:05 – Interviewer: Oh, je kan niet in elkaars home?

00:42:07 – Student- bewoner: Nee, ik kan niet binnen. Ik kan zelfs niet binnen in een fietsenstalling van andere homes. Dus als mensen daar zouden wassen, zouden zij moeten wachten totdat er iemand toevallig naar buiten gaat om dan binnen te kunnen glippen. Dus ik denk wel dat elke home zijn eigen wasmachine heeft. Ik denk dat de wasmachines beneden in de studiezaal zijn. Maar, ik heb die nog zelf gezien.

00:42:41 – Interviewer: Dus die wassalons zijn niet open voor publiek? Ik kan daar niet mijn was komen doen?

00:42:45 – Student- bewoner: Nee nee, alles is achter gesloten door d.m.v. die badge. Dus zonder badge kan je nergens binnen.

00:42:52 – Interviewer: Naar mijn gevoel, kan dit een systeem zijn dat open is voor het publiek. Dus dat dit publieke wassalons kunnen zijn waarnaar de buurt zou kunnen komen. Of denk je dat dat ook niet mogelijk is?

00:43:03 – Student- bewoner: Ik denk dat wel, maar ik denk dat zij wassen aan studentenprijzen.

00:43:06 – Interviewer: Ja, klopt maar er zijn veel studenten die wassalons zoeken. Dus misschien is het jammer dat dat zo afgesloten is.

00:43:16 – Student- bewoner: Ja dat is waar. Op zich, denk ik dat zij er van uitgaan dat alle studenten wekelijks naar huis gaan en daar hun was doen.

00:43:46 – Interviewer: En dan als je een probleem hebt met bijvoorbeeld de verwarming die kapot is of uw kraan lekt, hoe gaat dat in zijn werk?

00:43:55 – Student- bewoner: Dan moet je iemand, ik weet niet hoe die heet, bellen of een mail sturen. En dan komen die heel snel, soms zelfs de volgende dag.

00:44:11 – Interviewer: En als iets kapot is, mag je het dan zelf repareren?

00:44:16 – Student- bewoner: Op zich mag dat wel, maar ik weet niet hoe dat moet. Er is ook een speciaal systeem van lampen, dus dat is niet de bedoeling

00:44:29 – Interviewer: En als die persoon komt en die repareert dan jouw probleem. Volgt er dan een rekening op het einde van de maand?

00:44:39 – Student- bewoner: Nee, dat is gratis. Als er iets kapot is, dan is dat gratis. Tenzij je heel de boel hebt afgebroken. Dus daarom dat mensen het ook gewoon via dat doen, want anders moet je zelf betalen voor jouw gerief.

00:45:00 – Interviewer: Gebruik jij de studiezaal regelmatig? En is er één studiezaal voor iedereen?

00:45:15 – Student- bewoner: Vroeger gebruikte is die regelmatig. En er zijn twee studiezalen voor de volledige home.

00:45:18 – Interviewer: En dat is ook enkel voor studenten van deze home?

00:45:21 – Student- bewoner: Ja, klopt!

00:45:30 – Interviewer: En regels over het bezoek, klopt het dat het bezoek na 22u weg moet?

00:45:39 – Student- bewoner: Nee, dat denk ik wel echt niet. Of misschien is dat regel, maar dat wordt alleszins niet gecontroleerd. Ik heb die regels zelf ook nog nooit gelezen. Dus het ding is dat is misschien een regel, maar dat wordt totaal niet nageleefd.

00:46:20 – Interviewer: Nu iets meer over de rollen die studenten en het personeel hebben. Eerst beginnen met de homeraad, komt hun dagelijkse werking regelmatig terug in jouw leven?

00:46:43 – Student- bewoner: Wacht, wat is de homeraad?

00:46:46 – Interviewer: Oké, dat beantwoord al een deel van de vraag. Eerst en vooral ben je bewust van welke structuren hier allemaal zijn?

00:46:55 – Student- bewoner: Nee helemaal niet. Ik weet dat je homebeheer kan sturen voor al jouw vragen, bijvoorbeeld als je jouw badge kwijt bent. Maar dat is wel echt personeel, dat zijn geen studenten. Dan heb je ook de security mensen, de PPD. En je hebt ook een gangverantwoordelijke, zij stellen zich in het begin van het jaar voor. Maar ik heb geen idee wie zij zijn.

00:47:43 – Interviewer: Ik bestudeerde gisteren het institutioneel kader dat te maken heeft met de huisvesting van de UGent. En dat is een groot netwerk aan personeel.

00:47:53 – Student- bewoner: Dat is misschien zo, maar dat lijkt wel echt niet.

00:47:55 – Interviewer: Dat vind ik wel heel interessant. Er zijn hier een groot kader aan personeel, maar ik heb het gevoel dat studenten niet in contact komen met hen. Ik heb het gevoel dat studenten hier duidelijk iets huren en geen eigenaar zijn van iets.

(Toont de structuur). Dus je hebt de rector, de afdeling studentenvoorzieningen en daarin heb je een afdeling huisvesting. Je hebt het hoofd van deze afdeling en dan heb je een homebeheerder, een kotcoach, onthaalmedewerkers, onderhoudsmedewerkers en de permanentiedienst. Dan heb je nog de Sociale Raad en bij sancties komen er nog 3 verschillende commissies op. En dan heb je nog eens binnenin uw eigen home verschillende studentenfuncties (vertrouwenspersonen, preventiestudenten, omkaderingsstudenten). Misschien heb je van deze laatste, wel als iets gehoord?

00:49:23 – Student- bewoner: In het begin van jouw eerste jaar, als je hier net nieuw bent, is er een verplichte infosessie. Dit gaat door in een auditorium en leggen ze alles uit. Maar dat is al vier jaar geleden, dus ik weet daar niet meer van. En je krijgt ook zo'n boekje waar alle uitleg in staat, maar dat is echt een dik boek dus ik heb die nooit gelezen. Enkel op het moment dat er iets kapot is, dan ben ik er wel in gaan kijken om te weten wie ik moet bellen. Maar van een kotcoach of mensen die jouw mentaal welzijn ondersteunen, heb ik nog nooit gehoord.

00:50:04 – Interviewer: Dat is wel gek, want ik heb het gevoel dat al die functies er zijn, maar niet komen tot de mensen die ze nodig hebben.

00:50:12 – Student- bewoner: Nee inderdaad, totaal niet. Er staan ook gewoon nergens flyers. Of misschien wel, maar ik heb die nog nergens gezien.

00:50:18 – Interviewer: Heb je het gevoel dat doordat een externe groep van mensen die organiseert, dat dit daarom niet tot bij de studenten komt? Zou het anders zijn moesten dit studenten zijn?

00:50:33 – Student- bewoner: Ja, maar dat zijn wel gewoon dingen die als student niet kan doen. Als je geen diploma psychologie hebt, kun je geen psycholoog zijn.

00:50:41 – Interviewer: Er zijn ook vertrouwenscontacten die student zijn. Per home is er één student die instaat voor het mentale welzijn. Online vind je wie dit is en in welke kamer die woont.

00:50:55 – Student- bewoner: Ah, jawel dat wist ik wel. Maar ik weet niet wie dat is in deze home. Een vriendin van mij had ooit eens iets nodig en is dan langsgegaan bij de

vertrouwenspersoon. Maar ik heb zelf nog nooit iets nodig gehad, dus ik weet niet wie dat is.

00:51:19 – Interviewer: Ik weet ook niet in hoeverre het een toegankelijk systeem is om bij iemand op de deur te kloppen en te zeggen wat er scheelt.

00:51:23 – Student- bewoner: Ja inderdaad, want ik ken die niet en heb die nog nooit ontmoet. Er zijn heel vaak dat ik mensen gewoon zie voor de eerste keer, terwijl die hier al drie jaar wonen.

00:51:36 – Interviewer: Er is hier groot aanbod aan verschillende personen en functies, maar als ik de ervaring van jou, een student, hoor dan heb jij enkel het homebeheer en de PPD nodig?

00:51:49 – Student- bewoner: Ja, het ding is dat ik niet meer nodig heb, dus ik heb daar wel echt gewoon geen last van. Maar iedereen is anders, dus misschien dat anderen dat wel nodig hebben en weten zij daar ook meer over. Ik vind wel dat we in het algemeen dat allemaal zouden moeten weten. Ik wist niet dat dat hier allemaal zo georganiseerd was.

00:52:32 – Interviewer: Ja, je hebt hier bijvoorbeeld ook omkaderingsstudenten. Ik weet niet of je dit kent?

00:52:34 – Student- bewoner: Neen.

00:52:34 – Interviewer: Dat zijn studenten die op het zelfde verdiep wonen als mensen met een beperking. Zij krijgen elke maand een vergoeding om voor die mensen boodschappen te doen en om hun aan te kleden.

00:53:01 – Student- bewoner: Amai, daar wist ik niet van.

00:53:02 – Interviewer: Wat wel opmerkelijk is, als je iets van verantwoordelijkheden opneemt dan krijg je iets. Bij de omkaderingsstudenten begrijp ik dit. Maar bij de preventiestudenten, eigenlijk zou iedereen moeten kunnen evacueren bij brand. De gangverantwoordelijken zullen volgens een nieuwe regel ook vergoed worden.

00:53:18 – Student- bewoner: Echt, want zij doen niets.

00:53:20 – Interviewer: Ze gaan volgens de nieuwe regel, meer moeten toezien op de hygiëne in de keuken en afvalsortering.

00:53:29 – Student- bewoner: Dat is echt omdat mensen dat anders niet zouden doen. Zij moeten echt met geld smijten omdat anders mensen dat niet zouden doen.

00:53:35 – Interviewer: Ligt dat aan daar aan de Belgische mentaliteit of aan wat licht dat?

00:53:39 – Student- bewoner; Dat ligt echt aan kapitalisme. (…)

00:54: 10 – Student- bewoner; Dat is echt al iets anders, want met vier of tien personen kan je wel regels hebben. Maar met 60 verschillende mensen die je nog nooit hebt ontmoet, van verschillende leeftijden van 18 tot 23-24 jaar. Dat werkt gewoon niet. Dus het ligt eerder aan de woonvorm. Ze hebben alle voorzieningen aangepast aan hoe wij hier wonen. Het probleem ligt eerder aan de manier hoe wij hier wonen dan aan de voorzieningen. Want ik weet niet of het anders zou werken. Want ik kan zelfs geen 60 personen kennen, dus als er daar afwas ligt dan weet ik niet eens van wie dat is of wie ik moet aanspreken.

00:55:16 – Interviewer: Ja, het is een heel andere woonvorm. Maar het is interessant om te weten hoe deze woonvorm wel of niet werkt op sommige vlakken

00:55:25 – Student- bewoner: Het is bare minimum. Nee, nu ben ik geprivilegieerd aan het praten. Het is niet "the bare minimum", want ik zit hier wel goed en mijn kamer is echt goed. Maar het is gewoon geen manier van wonen dat je voor de rest van uw leven zou kunnen doen. Maar voor vijf jaar zie ik daar geen probleem in.

00:55:58 – Interviewer: Misschien iets meer over de buurt zelf. De locatie tot stad is hier wel echt een pluspunt. Ervaar je veel lawaai van deze studentenbuurt?

00:56:28 – Student- bewoner: Nee dat echt niet, omdat ik hoog zit, denk ik. Ja, dus de mensen die lager zitten misschien wel van Overpoort. Ik denk dat home Fabiola wel last heeft van Overpoort. Enige dag dat ik last heb van het lawaai is van de student kick-off.

00:56:45 – Interviewer: Als je zou mogen kiezen van locatie, dus je behoudt deze kamer, zou je dan het liefst op deze locatie zitten of 1 a 2 km uit de studentenbuurt. Wat zou je verkiezen? Dus zou je graag in een wijk wonen bijvoorbeeld met andere families.

00:57:20 – Student- bewoner: De woonvorm vind ik niet zo leuk, maar dan denk ik "ik heb tenminste nog de locatie". Mocht ik ver wonen, zou ik denken "ik woon ver en ik woon niet aangenaam". Hier is het letterlijk drie minuten fietsen naar school of vijf minuten wandelen naar school. Als ik nog verder zou zitten zou ik ook zoiets hebben van en ik woon ook nog een keer ver, maar anderzijds is dat wel een leukere buurt maar je zou dat niet ervaren in zo een gebouw. Mocht ik in een privékot zitten dan zou ik sowieso liever buiten de stad wonen. Ik ga volgend jaar ook sowieso niet meer in de studenten buurt wonen en nu dat ik hier zit heb ik al zoiets van "ik wel tenminste het voordeel van alles dichtbij te hebben".

00:58:21 – Interviewer: Het laatste deel gaat iets meer over een nieuwere woonvorm waarover mijn thesis gaat, coöperatief wonen. Ben je daar al mee in contact gekomen of weet je wat dat precies inhoudt die woonvorm?

00:58:39 – Student- bewoner; Nee, niet echt.

(uitleg over het coöperatief model…)

01:00:16 – Student- bewoner: Maar hoe werkt dat investeren voor studenten? Voor mensen die werken begrijp ik dat dat werkt, maar voor studenten zijn dat dan toch enkel rijke studenten die dat kunnen doen?

01:00:20 – Interviewer: Nee, want je hebt ook externe investeerders, dus de familie van de studenten moeten niet de volledige investering doen. De stad kan daar bijvoorbeeld ook in investeren, omdat dat een meer ecologische woonvorm is. De studenten leiden het project, dus dat is een heel andere manier van wonen. Bijvoorbeeld de studentencoöperatie in Duitsland is aan het kijken om samen te werken met voedselcoöperaties in de buurt en zij hebben ook een houtworkshop waar zij hun eigen meubels maken en dan de buurt komt daar ook die machines gebruiken. Dus het coöperatief idee is echt op buurtniveau, dus dat is iets waar de stad mee in kan investeren, omdat dat buurten kan verbeteren.

01:01:13 – Student- bewoner: Maar dat bestaat hier toch niet? Ik heb daar nog nooit van gehoord.

01:01:16 – Interviewer: Het is wel aan het opkomen. Bijvoorbeeld Wooncoop is een organisatie die daar volledig mee bezig is. Die hebben ondertussen al 130 gebouwen.

01:01:23 – Student- bewoner: Waar? En is dat niet voor studenten?

01:01:24 – Interviewer: In Leuven bijvoorbeeld ook. Nee, dat is allemaal voor volwassen mensen. En nu zijn we aan het kijken of een studenten coöperatie zou kunnen werken in Gent.

Zou je u kunnen voorstellen dat jij al student, los van de investering, daar zou wonen in zo een coöperatie? En zou jij zien zitten om dan deel te nemen aan het project, dus om de twee weken een vergadering om de taken te overlopen en herstellingen door te voeren? Zou jij voor zo een nieuwe woonvorm open staan?

01:02:06 – Student- bewoner: Ik zou er sowieso wel voor open staan, maar dat hangt er wel van af wat de verantwoordelijkheid is en wat er bij komt kijken. Het onderhoud en als iets defect is repareren, dat zie ik zeker zitten, want ik denk dat iemand die in een normaal kot zit, heeft dat sowieso ook al. Maar het hangt af van hoeveel vergaderingen daarbij komen kijken, ik heb zelf niet zo veel tijd. Dus ik weet niet in welke mate ik mij daar in wil engageren.

01:02:47 – Interviewer: Dat begrijp ik. Daar is dat ook dat je in zo'n werkgroep zit en dan is elke werkgroep is verantwoordelijk voor iets. Sommige mensen zitten in de werkgroep voor het onderhoud van de tuin, andere mensen hebben de houtworkshop. Dan is er ook een eventruimte en dat is een bron van inkomen, want de buurt kan die huren. Dus je kiest zelf in wat je je wilt engageren, en jij bent dan verantwoordelijk voor dat taakje.

01:03:12 – Student- bewoner: Awel, bijvoorbeeld bij die houtbewerking. Moet je dan shiften draaien daar?

01:03:18 – Interviewer: Nee, dat is bijvoorbeeld als er een meubel kapot is dan moet jij dat repareren.

01:03:33 – Student- bewoner: Maar ik denk wel dat het zou werken, want het lijkt dat daar wel redelijk veel mensen zijn.

01:03:42 – Interviewer: Ja inderdaad, want iedereen die daar woont is eigenaar en moet een taak doen.

01:03:44 – Student- bewoner: Maar dat zorgt er ook gewoon dat mensen meer zorg gaan dragen voor wat er is.

01:03:50 – Interviewer: Ja, dat maakt het veel duurzamer.

01:03:55 – Student- bewoner: Het is zoals dat dat uw eigen huis is. Je gaat niet de keuken vies achterlaten of de meubels toeslaan. Omdat je weet dat die persoon of ik dat moet repareren, want het is van ons allemaal. Terwijl hier is dat echt niet.

Bijvoorbeeld, boven de lavabo heb je drie spiegeltjes. En andere mensen hebben zo een nieuwere versie met een grotere spiegel en een grotere kast. Want de kast voor mijn toiletgerief die ik nu heb is echt klein. Maar dus aangezien alles repareren gratis is, zijn er veel mensen die dat bewust kapot maken zodat ze een nieuw model kunnen krijgen met een grotere kast en spiegel. Dus ik ken echt mensen die dat echt gewoon bewust kapot hebben gemaakt, omdat dat gratis is. En dan krijg je toch een nieuwe, dat zit in de prijs. Dus zo'n dingen gebeuren door deze woonvorm.

01:05:11 – Interviewer: Zo kan dat echt niet verder.

01:05:15 – Student- bewoner: Nee, maar het is wel zo. En daar gaat dat niet gebeuren.

01:05:17 – Interviewer: Er is daar ook een werkgroep ICT. Mensen die daarover willen leren zitten daarin en zijn hebben nu een systeem gemaakt wanneer je je was kan doen. Ze hebben vijf wasmachines voor 250 mensen en ze hebben zo een tijdsloten app gemaakt waarin iedereen gewoon kan aantikken wanneer zij willen wassen. Dat is puur door studenten gemaakt en dat werkt daar heel goed. Dus ik denk dat het soms wel goed is om eens buiten onze grenzen te gaan.

01:05:54 – Student- bewoner: Ja zeker, maar weet je soms denk ik ook dat een beetje licht aan hoe dat Vlamingen zijn. Wij zijn gewoon super individualistisch.

01:05:59 – Interviewer: Awel, dat probeer ik te achterhalen.

01:06:02 – Student- bewoner: Sorry in Burundi als ik geen zout heb ga ik naar de buren, als ik naar de winkel moet dan breng ik mijn kind naar de overburen. Terwijl hier, ik ken mijn buren zelfs niet. Sommige buren ken ik wel. Dus ik heb het gevoel dat dat in Vlamingen, of in Belgen in algemeen zit, dus het verbaast mij niet dat mensen zo leven en dat oké vinden.

01:06:43 – Interviewer: Ik vind het een moeilijk om te achterhalen of dit aan een persoon ligt of aan de woonvorm**. Of is het een combinatie, versterkt de woonvorm het gedrag dat inherent al aanwezig is in de persoon?**

01:06:55 – Student- bewoner: Ik denk dat zij ons dit kunnen opleggen omdat wij al zo zijn.

01:07:03 – Interviewer: Denk je dat zo een out of the box concept in België zou kunnen werken? Stel je voor dat deze studenten vanop één verdiep in zo een woonvorm zouden zitten.

01:07:15 – Student- bewoner: Misschien wel, als je het hen oplegt, zouden ze het wel doen. Zij komen daar gewoon niet mee in contact.

Ik weet het niet, want ik stelde eens ons ontwerpen uit het tweede jaar voor aan mensen van mijn familie of gewoon vrienden, en vroeg of zij ooit zo collectief wouden wonen en zij antwoorden: “Nooit van mijn leven, dat is dat je doet als je student bent, maar als je een gezin hebt, zou je dat toch nooit doen.” Dus dat zit echt in ons. Ik denk dat jongere mensen daar wel nog meer voor open staan.

01:08:06 – Interviewer: Ik denk ook als je het studenten nu oplegt dat ze er meer voor gaan openstaan voor later. Maar hier worden ze gewoon gevoed met individualisme, dus ze gaan dat gewoon meenemen.

01:08:22 – Student- bewoner: Ja, als jij hier 5 jaar hebt geleefd, ga je niet nooit samen gaan worden.

Maar eerlijk gezegd, ik weet ook niet wat dat per se waar is. Want ik weet ook niet of mensen dit een goede woonvorm vinden. Als jij vraagt aan mensen vind jij dit goed, dan gaat echt bijna niemand zeggen dat ze dit goed vinden. Ik denk echt niet dat veel mensen gaan zeggen: “dit is echt een leuke woonvorm, die heel duurzaam is en waar ik voor de rest van mijn leven in zou willen leven”. Ik denk dat mensen het oké vinden als student, maar het is ook maar voor vijf jaar en daarom is het oké. Dus ik denk op het einde van de dag dat het wel zou werken maar mensen doen het gewoon niet.

01:09:03 – Interviewer: Denk je dat het duurzame concept iets belangrijk is voor mensen? Denk je dat nog studenten zouden opmerken dat dit niet duurzaam is?

01:09:10 – Student- bewoner: Bedoel je op vlak van sorteren of dat deze woonvorm niet kan blijven duren?

01:09:16 – Interviewer: Eigenlijk beide, ten eerste het energieverbruik, maar ook ten tweede deze woonvorm is niet toekomstgericht.

01:09:28 – Student- bewoner: Ik denk duurzaamheid in de zin van energieverbruik en sorteren, dat mensen er echt niet om geven omdat het niet hun verantwoordelijkheid is en omdat er geen boetes aanhangen. Als je zou weten dat je een voorschot zou betalen en dat je meer geld zou moeten betalen als je meer verbruikt, zouden mensen daar wel op letten. En dat is wel gewoon als je ergens alleen woont of in een privékot of in zo'n wooncoöperatie is dat waarschijnlijk wel het geval.

Als ik hier heel de dag mijn radiator laat aanstaan en mijn buur doet dat nooit, dan betalen we evenveel (zit al in de huurprijs). Dit is niet realistisch, dit is niet de echt wereld. Mijn ouders zeggen ook vaak "Je zit hier niet op kot, doe de chauffage uit". Omdat ik dat zodanig gewoon ben. In Parijs moest ik daar ook de eerste twee weken op letten van, oh ja, ik zit er niet in mijn kot, maar je leert dat supersnel.

01:10:36 – Interviewer: Nee inderdaad, dat is een kwestie van gewoonte.

01:10:38 – Student- bewoner: Gewoon omdat we dat niet moeten doen, gaan mensen dat ook niet doen.

01:10:41 – Interviewer: Ik las ook dat ze op vlak van voedsel meer duurzaam wouden worden. Ze werken met weggeefkasten en weggeefboxen. Ben je daar al mee in aanraking gekomen?

01:10:58 – Student- bewoner: Ja, maar dat is echt niet aantrekkelijk. Dat is een kast die oftewel in de ontspanningszaal of in de studiezaal beneden staat.

Maar ook gewoon die studiezaal, is niet ontworpen als een studiezaal. Dat is echt gewoon een restruimte waar zij stoelen en tafels in hebben gezet. Er is een overmaatse gang waar één printer staat, waar je wc's hebt die niet proper zijn en waar je de stofzuiger kan halen.

01:11:29 – Interviewer: Klinkt als een gang waar alles is.

01:11:31 – Student- bewoner: Nee, nee, nee, die gang is gigantisch en daar zijn we twee kasten, één printer. En voor de rest is hij leeg. Dat is echt niet ontworpen. Je kan echt meer doen met die ruimte. Je kan restruimte ook ontwerpen of indelen. Alles wat daar nodig is, wordt daar gewoon geplaats zonder ontwerp, 'the bare minimum'. Omdat wij 'the bare minimum' krijgen, gaan wij ook 'the bare minimum' geven. De studiezaal is letterlijk in de kelder en aan de overkant heb je de crèche van home Heymans.

01:12:21 – Interviewer: Ah ja de crèche van home Heymans?

01:12:23 – Student- bewoner; Ja, dat is die met de crèche. Maar die kinderen spelen buiten in de zomer. Het was één keer super warm en die kinderen zitten daar te wenen. Maar ik zat in de studiezaal te studeren voor de examens, maar je hoort die kinderen keihard. Dat is ook het kelderverdiep, dus je hebt één wand met ramen, maar helemaal achteraan heb je geen licht. Je merkt dat de ruimte daar niet voor ontworpen is. Dat is ook gewoon de kelder. Dus ik denk ook gewoon omdat dit gebouw echt in slechte staat is en omdat zij niet

willen renoveren of dingen aanpassen, want mensen dienen wel klachten, maar daar wordt gewoon niets aan gedaan. Dus dan gaan studenten daar ook geen moeite doen.

01:13:27 – Interviewer: Er zijn heel veel verschillende dingen die een invloed op dit hebben. Enerzijds heb je door het gebrek aan degelijke infrastructuur, dat er weinig zorg voor wordt gedragen. Anderzijds, is er geen verantwoordelijkheidsgevoel dus als er geen boetes zijn dan heb je nalatenschap.

01:13:48 – Student- bewoner: Ja, dat is het ding. Zij moeten er echt boetes aan verbinden. Want anders doen mensen het niet.

01:13:53 – Interviewer: Dat is zo jammer. En eigenlijk komt het ook door de schaal, dat informele regels, geen regels zijn.

01:14:01 – Student- bewoner: Ja inderdaad, de schaal en het feit dat je niemand kent. Dus je weet ook niet wie dat je zou moeten aanspreken als er iets gebeurt of als er iets niet gedaan wordt. Ik weet niet van wie wat is. Dat is niet zoals bij jou thuis.

01:14:22 – Interviewer: Nog een paar laatste vraagjes. Na alles wat we besproken hebben, wat is voor jou het grootste struikelpunt, uitdaging of frustratie van hier te leven? En andersom, wat is iets dat je zeer aangenaam vindt?

01:14:48 – Student- bewoner: Ik denk het gebouw zelf, dus de staat van het gebouw en het ontwerp ervan, is gewoon niet goed. Bijvoorbeeld het feit raam letterlijk niet kan dichtdoen. Het feit dat de studiezaal In de kelder zit en dat er tegenover die crèche is. En de weg naar de studiezaal is ook gewoon echt niet aangenaam. Heb je gelet op de deur aan de linkerkant van de lift?

01:15:35 – Interviewer: Nee, ik heb er niet opgelet. Ik moet daar straks nog eens goed naar kijken.

01:15:36 – Student- bewoner: Er is daar dus een deur die je moet open doen en dan is daar een trapje naar beneden. Daarnaast heb je een fietsenstalling met allemaal brol en daar kom je op het gelijkvloers toe. En daar is eigenlijk een parking, ouders die hun kinderen komen halen, die staan daar. Je moet dus ook gewoon langs buiten passeren. Bijvoorbeeld als het regent, moet ik met mijn pc door de regen langs buiten om in de studiezaal te geraken.

01:16:05 – Interviewer: Er is geen weg langs binnen naar de studiezaal?

01:16:07 – Student- bewoner: Nee, je moet langs buiten om in de studiezaal te geraken. Maar dat is wel echt gewoon home Vermeylen. Want in andere homes is dat niet. Maar hier moet je langs buiten?!

Die ontspanningszaal, je hebt slechts ene. En dat is niet zo toegankelijk. Dat is echt gewoon voor die studentenvereniging (de homeraad).

01:16:39 – Interviewer: Dus die is niet toegankelijk omdat die bezet wordt door de homeraad?

01:16:41 – Student- bewoner: Ik ga daar nooit zitten, behalve in het weekend misschien ooit eens als daar niemand is.

01:16:53 – Interviewer: Wat ik mij afvraag, is dat de enige ontspanningsruimte?

01:16:57 – Student- bewoner: Dat is de enigste ontspanningsruimte. Dat is de enige collectieve ruimte die geen functionele ruimte is. En dat voor bijna 500 man.

01:17:05 – Interviewer: De ruimte sprak mijzelf ook minder aan door het lage plafond en felle lichten.

01:17:21 – Student- bewoner: Dus ik denk dat dat aangenamer zou zijn als je dat per verdiep hebt. 60 man blijft veel, maar het is al beter dan 500 man. Zeker omdat het dan ook gewoon niet zo ver van mijn kamer is. Ik moet nu helemaal van mijn kamer, de lift nemen naar het gelijkvloers om te gaan ontspannen. Dus ik ga dat ook wel gewoon niet doen. **Dus ik leef wel echt op mijn kamer, en enkel en alleen op mijn kamer. En, ik denk dat bijna iedereen, behalve mensen die in die vereniging zitten, dat doen.**

01:17:55 – Interviewer: Je merkt dat ook wel als je door de gangen loopt.

01:17:57 – Student- bewoner: Ja, je komt hier niemand tegen. Het zijn hier echt een beetje ziekenhuisgangen. Mijn mama zei oprecht dat de gevangenis van Gent beter is dan deze woningen. En zij werkt in de gevangenis van Gent, dus zij weet hoe die kamers er daar uitzien. En ze zegt oprecht dat zij daar beter/comfortabeler leven, buiten dat zij geen vrijheid hebben, dan home Vermeylen.

01:18:42 – Interviewer: Ik heb ook het gevoel dat iedereen het gewoon accepteert, omdat er een tekort aan koten is. En dit is het enige bijna dat nog betaalbaar is, dus je neemt gewoon wat er te krijgen valt. Denk jij dat als er andere mogelijkheden zouden zijn, dat deze dan leeg zouden staan?

01:18:55 – Student- bewoner: Dat weet ik niet. Of ja, als er een andere mogelijkheid is die even goedkoop is, dan zou ik die wel verkiezen inderdaad. Maar anderzijds, ik heb ook in een privékot gewoond en dat was echt verschrikkelijk. Ik had echt mijn slechtste jaar ooit.

01:19:14 – Interviewer: En door wat kwam dat dan?

01:19:15 – Student- bewoner: Door de mensen, die hielden zich helemaal niet aan de regels. Die waren echt loco, die maakten zot veel lawaai, keuken was altijd super vuil omdat zij super zat waren.

01:19:29 – Interviewer: En dan mis je wel dat institutioneel kader?

01:19:33 – Student- bewoner: En toen ik hier kwam en wist dat ik iemand mocht bellen vanaf 23u vond ik dat wel super leuk.

01:19:40 – Interviewer: Jouw visie is dus ook gevormd door een eerdere slechte ervaring.

01:19:43 – Student- bewoner: Dus uiteindelijk, zijn er hier wel echt wel veel voordelen die ik niet heb op private markt. Maar je hebt overal voor-en nadelen.

01:20:01 – Interviewer: De allerlaatste vraag, is er nog iets dat jij wilt delen over collectief wonen of studentenhuisvesting in het algemeen?

01:20:11 – Student- bewoner: Ik denk dat ik het wel gewoon goed en duurzaam vind, maar dan moet het ook wel gewoon goed gedaan worden. Als dat niet is, dan is het effect zelfs slechter. Want ik denk dat wij als home superveel verbruiken. Het gaat zelf zo ver dat er dingen worden georganiseerd als wedstrijden tussen homes. De home die het minst verbruikt, gedurende een bepaalde tijd, krijgt een prijs. Zij merken zelf ook wel dat die kinderen superveel verbruiken, dus we moeten er een spelletje rond maken. **En er moet alweer een prijs of iets aan vasthangen, want anders doen mensen het gewoon niet.**

01:21:08 – Interviewer: Op zich al goed dat er iets rond gedaan wordt en dat het opgemerkt wordt.

01:21:13 – Student- bewoner: Maar dat is ook gewoon vrijwillig, het is niet dat mensen daar echt aan meedoen. In het algemeen, wordt er echt nog veel te veel verbruikt.

01:21:31 – Interviewer: Wat bedoel je precies met 'het' moet goed gedaan worden, bedoel je de architectuur moet goed gaan worden, het moet goed begeleid worden door het personeel of het moet goed geleefd worden door studenten? Op welke manier?

01:21:42 – Student- bewoner; Het gebouw moet goed ontworpen worden en meer gericht naar een duurzame manier van wonen. Dus niet het idee van een student die niets moet doen en jij moet enkel studeren. Want dat is niet hoe de wereld werkt, dus dat heeft niet veel nut.

01:22:16 – Interviewer: Nee inderdaad, je moet eigenlijk beter mede-eigenaar zijn.

01:22:20 – Student- bewoner: Ja, inderdaad. Ook een studiezaal die aangenaam is en langs binnen bereikbaar is, een fietsenstalling die overdekt is...

01:22:31 – Interviewer: Dingen die een student gewoon echt nodig heeft.

01:22:33 – Student- bewoner: **Ze hebben hier alles maar het is gewoon niet deftig ontworpen of onderhouden.** Bijvoorbeeld, de tuin kan je echt beter ontwerpen i.p.v. een volledig ijzeren hekken er rond. Er staan daar een paar bomen en er staat daar maar één bank, studenten hebben zelf met een paar paletten een bank erbij gezet. Er staan twee tafels.

01:23:06 – Interviewer: Gaat dat dan ook niet hand in hand met de zorg? Als je het goed ontwerpt en er wordt geen zorg van gedragen, dan gaat het er ook niet goed uitzien, toch?

01:23:15 – Student-bewoner: Dat is echt gewoon omdat wij "the bare minimum" krijgen, gaan mensen daar ook gewoon geen zorg voor dragen. Ik zou denken in bijvoorbeeld een UPkot dat mensen daar meer zorg voor gaan dragen, omdat zij veel meer krijgen. Dat lijkt zo, maar misschien is dat niet waar. Ook bijvoorbeeld de keuken, die is super oud en is volledig afgebladerd. De UGent heeft ook wel gewoon geld, dus ze kunnen daar wel eens een nieuwe keuken in plaatsen. **Studenten gaan daar dan veel beter zorg voor dragen als zij zien dat er ook moeite wordt gestoken in ons.**

01:24:02 – Interviewer: De keuken is bijvoorbeeld ook niet gemaakt om gezamenlijk te koken met die muur in het midden.

01:24:07 - Student- bewoner: Het is allemaal gewoon super functioneel alles. Zij denken echt gewoon heel functioneel. Het is gewoon zo veel mogelijk, zo makkelijk mogelijk. Niet nadenken over wat het aangenaam zouden maken. Zij denken echt als ingenieurs.

01:24:20 – Interviewer: En er zijn ook wachtlijsten voor deze koten, dus hoe dan ook deze zullen ook vol zitten.

01:24:23 – Student- bewoner: Ja, vooral dat.

01:24:26 – Interviewer: Oké, dat was het. Super bedankt voor je medewerking!

Appendix C2: Home manager of Home Vermeylen (November 17, 2025)

00:00:00 – Interviewer: Goedemorgen, welkom! Heel erg bedankt dat u hier wilt zijn. Eerst en vooral, kan ik ons gesprek opnemen en gebruiken enkel voor het onderzoek?

00:00:13 – Home manager: Ja.

00:00:15 – Interviewer: Oké, super! Ik u als eerste willen vragen om u kort voor te stellen en wat uw functie precies is binnen home Vermeylen.

00:00:25 – Home manager: Ik ben homebeheerder en niet enkel in home Vermeylen, ik heb drie homes: Vermeylen, Heymans en Fabiola. Twee daarvan hebben een kamerinfrastructuur en home Heymans bestaat uit flats. De flats waren oorspronkelijk alleen voor koppels, maar dit is nu ook uitgebreid, dus gelijk wie kan daar nu met twee personen wonen: boer en zus, twee vrienden….

Wat doen we eigenlijk als homebeheerder? Wij houden in eerste plaats een oogje in het zeil op de infrastructuur. We hebben heel veel units in de drie gebouwen samen. Dat is een grote infrastructuur en ook een oude. Dus er kan altijd van alles defect gaan: van kleine naar grote problemen. Kleine zaken zijn: een lamp die defect is, een gootsteen die verstopt zit. En grotere zaken zijn: grotere verstoppingen of algemene pannes. Dat zijn zaken die wij in eerste plaats zullen beschermen en opvolgen. Heel noodzakelijk, want als we dit uit handen zouden geven en dit niet zouden opvolgen, dan zouden we binnen een paar weken of binnen een paar maanden over een situatie spreken waarin het comfort serieus achteruit zou gaan. Het lijkt simpel, het lijkt eenvoudig, maar iemand moet zich er wel mee bezighouden.

We hebben nog zaken waarbij wij oogje in het zeil houden, bijvoorbeeld het vuilnis. Ik heb ongeveer 880 bewoners onder mij, dus die creëren heel veel vuilnis. Als je de hoeveelheid afval per huis zou rekenen en dan maal 800 doet, dan is het iets om in de gaten te houden. Ook omdat we hier toch wel staan voor recyclage. Recyclage bieden we de standaard recyclage aan: zoals PMD, restafval, papier, glas en GFT. En we zien er ook op toe dat er zoveel mogelijk gerecycleerd wordt. Naast dat hebben we ook een paar aparte afvalstromen, zoals de batterij ophaling, elektro waste, want er worden hier zeer veel elektrische apparaten achtergelaten. En matrassen worden ook apart opgehaald.

Een andere pijler is, is de schoonmaak. Niet tegenstaande dat dat bij een privé firma zit, is het toch zo dat als er zich problemen voordoen aangaande schoonmaak, dan gaat men bij ons komen om dit op te lossen. Bijvoorbeeld als studenten het te bond hebben gemaakt en de keuken vuil is, de gang besmeurd, of men heeft met brandblusapparaten gespeeld.

Waar we ook een zeer dichte opvolging in hebben, is de kamerwissel. Mensen zitten niet eeuwig in een kamer. Bij het Belgische contingent gaat dat over minimaal één jaar tot vier, vijf of zes jaar. Voor de buitenlandse studenten is dat dan weer een stuk korter. Maar bij elke wissel moeten wij erop toezien dat dat de kamer voor de volgende huurder opnieuw verhuur klaar is. Dus dat die proper en technisch in orde staat. Deze opvolging is ook een kerntaak van ons.

Zijn er nog taken? De opvolging van de rapporten van de bewaking zat vroeger meer bij ons, maar nu is dat meer bij de kotcoach. Dat is wel verschoven. Want zoals ik daarnet al

een aantal zaken aanhaalde, heeft het homebeheer al een goed gevulde rugzak. Maar tocht zitten we er nog altijd bij, mocht de kotcoach vragen hebben of zaken waar wij meer van zouden kunnen afweten. Dan worden wij als een soort van informatietank gebruikt voor advies. Maar de directe opvolging zit daarvoor niet meer bij ons.

Naast deze taken hebben we ook rondgangen. We gaan rond in onze homes. We checken onze infrastructuur actief en proactief. We checken of de branddeuren nog goed dichtvallen en de evacuatiewegen vrij zijn. Dan komen we op het gebied van de veiligheid, wat heel belangrijk is. Het zijn grote gebouwen, als er iets misgaat dan gaat er een veiligheidsprocedure in gang. En één van de pijlers daarvan is een evacuatie. Het gebouw moet geëvacueerd gewoon. Dat moet zo vlot mogelijk kunnen gebeuren zonder enige obstakels. Dat is iets wat wij in de gaten moeten houden.

En tussendoor komen we eens hier en daar, spreken we eens met de mensen. We staan ook in contact met de technische diensten, als zij vragen hebben dan komen die ook onze richting uit. Bijvoorbeeld, weet je dat lokaal zijn of waar moet het prikbord komen? Dus wij gaan daar ook informatief tussenkomen.

00:07:39 – Interviewer: En u zei “ons”, hoeveel homebeheerders zijn er?

00:07:44 – Home manager: Op dit moment zijn er vier. Drie daarvan hebben een vaste home en één daarvan is een vlinder. Dat gaat verhogen, denk ik. Binnenkort zou dit aangevuld worden met een team facility. Die zal het homebeheer aansturen en organiseren. Die zou meespelen op een hoger niveau, ook op beleidsniveau. Maar aan de andere kant gaat die persoon ook heel dicht bij de werkvloer zelf moeten staan.

Wat we zeker kunnen zeggen over homebeheer, is dat het een zeer realistische job is. Als je er middenin in zit, dan voel je veel dingen. Als je daarvoor openstaat, dan weet je ook direct wat er speelt in het gebouw: hoe dat het gebouw er voor staat op technisch vlak, maar ook wie dat er zich in dat gebouw bevindt. Dat is iets dat ook verwacht wordt van team facility, dus bezig zijn op beleidsniveau, maar ook op de werkvloer/leefwereld. Dus dat gaat een vijfde persoon zijn in het verhaal van homebeheer.

Waarom doet men dat allemaal? Omdat het aantal kamers onder het beheer van de UGent zal opgetrokken worden. Nu zijn er ongeveer 2200 kamers, anno 2025-2026. Naar 2030 toe en verder, zal dit gaan naar 6000. Maal drie betekent ook meer werk en dat moet je verdelen over meer personeel, dus daar gaat men in investeren. Niet alleen in homebeheer, er komt ook een kotcoach bij en iemand die de accommodatie zal versterken. Dus huisvesting in het algemeen zal versterkt worden met extra personeel en extra (financiële) middelen.

00:10:37 – Interviewer: En “afdeling huisvesting” is een afdeling binnen de UGent? En jullie zijn daar allemaal deel van? En er is ook een afdelingshoofd?

00:10:46 – Home manager: Ja, dat klopt!

00:10:54 – Interviewer: Sinds wanneer bent u ongeveer al actief als homebeheerder?

00:10:57 – Home manager: Ik werk hier al sinds 2007, dus ik ga mijn 19de jaar in.

00:11:08 – Interviewer: U heeft het al kort aangehaald, maar nu zou ik graag iets dieper ingaan op de samenwerkingen. Met wie van het UGent personeel komt u het meest in contact?

00:11:22 – Home manager: Dat is campus en gebouwen. Vroeger was dit DGFB, dienst gebouwen en facilitair beheer. Je hebt daar binnen verschillende secties: elektriciteit, schrijnwerk, mechanica, schilderwerken, HVAC, loodgieterij… Het zijn allemaal verschillende technische diensten die hun eigen verantwoordelijke hebben. Ze hebben allemaal hun eigen aanspreekpunt voor ons. Bewoners denken soms, dat wij alles aansturen, maar dat is niet zo. Als er defect is, dan zulle wij iets aanvragen. Wij zijn aanvragers, wij sturen niet aan. Wij sturen defect meldingen door, dat komt binnen bij ons op de homeserver. Wij kunnen ook zelf defect meldingen aangeven. En die worden dan doorgestuurd naar de juiste technische dienst. Wij moeten er ook over waken dat als er een melding binnenkomt dat die dan ook naar de juiste dienst zal gaan. Het technisch inzicht van bewoners mag je niet overschatten. Men probeert soms met handen en voeten uit te leggen wat er fout is, maar zij schatten het dan verkeerd in of het voor de elektrieker is of voor de loodgieter. Wij moeten er wel over waken dat dat bij de juiste dienst terecht komt, want anders krijg je zwevende meldingen en geraken zaken niet opgelost. Alle verantwoordelijken melden dit dan aan hun eigen team. Campus en gebouwen werkt met onderaannemers. (…) Dat zijn dus allemaal privébedrijven.

(…) 00:14:10 – 00:15:32

00:15:32 – Interviewer: En u zei daarnaast dat we het technisch inzicht van de student/bewoner niet mogen overschatten. Heeft u een idee hoe dat we dat zouden kunnen verbeteren? Bijvoorbeeld dat studenten voordat ze hier intrekken, een kleine infosessie krijgen over welke infrastructuur er in hun kamer is.

00:15:53 – Home manager: Zij krijgen infosessies, maar die zijn zeer beperkt. In het begin van het jaar is er een infosessie voor nieuwe bewoners. Daar wordt het aspect van defect meldingen meegegeven en wat ze precies moeten doen. Wat we daar vooral meegeven: beschrijf het probleem goed, hou het kort en bondig en beschrijf waar. Maar het hele technische aspect kunnen we niet meegeven, want de tijd is beperkt. Op één uur moet je alles vertellen over de veiligheid, de homeraad, ondertekenen van het huurcontract… Als je de vraag stelt, hoe kan je dit verbeteren, dan ligt het antwoord eerder. Volgens mij zit dat bij de middelbare school. Ik weet niet hoe dat het nu zit in de middelbare scholen, of dat daar nog twee uur per week technische activiteiten worden georganiseerd? Zo zou je eventueel wat meer inzicht kunnen geven in het technische aspect. Dat is het minimum, maar dit zou mensen wel in staat stellen om het probleem zelf te kunnen omschrijven.

Ik ben zelf ook geen technieker, maar ik heb al veel verschillende jobs gedaan in mijn leven. Ik ga het niet altijd zelf kunnen repareren, maar dat is ook niet mijn taak. Maar door er mee bezig te zijn heb ik een brede algemeen technische context of bagage verkregen.

00:18:22 – Interviewer: Ik heb ook al met een studente gesproken die hier woont, zij vertelde mij over het concept “gangverantwoordelijken”. Omvat hun functie ook het aspect van een aanspreekpunt bij meldingen in hun kamers bijvoorbeeld?

00:18:42 – Home manager: Ik denk dat we moeten aanmoedigen dat studenten dat zelf doen, zeker als het over hun eigen infrastructuur gaat. Het aspect gangverantwoordelijk gaat trouwens komend jaar ook veel meer uitgebouwd worden. En ik vind het goed dat je het aanhaalt. Een gangverantwoordelijke zou ook de verantwoordelijkheid kunnen hebben over de gemeenschappelijke delen, bijvoorbeeld noteren als er een kookvuur kapot is, een gootsteen verstopt of de dampkap niet werkt. Dit zou een

gangverantwoordelijke op zich kunnen nemen en openstaan voor input van de bewoners. Die zou alles kunnen bundelen en doorgeven aan ons.

Maar het individuele aspect, in uw unit, dat zouden de bewoners toch zelf moeten kunnen, want anders zou het wel een beetje te gemakkelijk worden. Dan lijkt het wel dat we te veel eieren onder hun gaan leggen, dan wordt er niemand meer zelfredzaam. Ik geloof wel in zelfredzaamheid.

00:20:11 – Interviewer: U heeft hier dus wel het gevoel dat bewoners nog veel voor zichzelf moeten doen, want nu klinkt het wel dat ze altijd bij jullie terecht kunnen? En dat ze ook niets zelf moeten repareren of herstellen?

00:20:22 – Home manager: Nee nee dat zelf repareren raden we af, daar hebben we technische diensten voor. Zij kunnen anders in een onveilige situatie terecht komen. Het is niet de eerste keer dat er iemand begint te prutsen aan de lampen en dat een hele lus uitvalt. Of dat ze zelf proberen de gootsteen te ontstoppen en dan gieten ze daar producten in die nadelig zijn voor de buizen en dergelijke. Zij hoeven zelf niet aan de slag te gaan, niet op dat vlak. Andere vlakken dan weer wel. Omdat dat dat toch wel iets is voor de mensen die ervoor geschoold zijn.

Maar weten wat er aan de hand is en kunnen uitleggen wat het probleem is. Bijvoorbeeld, dat is iets voor de metaalwerker of schrijnwerker. Dat is belangrijk. Bijvoorbeeld, het verschil tussen een metalen deur en een houten deur. De klink van een metalen deur is mechanica, de klink van een houten deur is schrijnwerk. En daarom is het belangrijk dat zij zich daarvan bewust zijn, maar zelf moeten ze er zeker niet mee aan de slag gaan. Dat raden we af.

00:22:10 – Interviewer: Dat is ook iets dat voor later belangrijk zal zijn.

00:22:12 – Home manager: Dat klopt, het is een deel van volwassen worden. Je staat hier voor de eerste maal op semi-eigen voeten en dan kan je maar best van alles leren. Ik heb de indruk dat als er nu een probleem is, dat men denkt: ik stuur wel een mailtje of ik vraag het even aan AI, en dan zal het wel opgelost geraken. Maar in realiteit gaat dat minder vlot.

00:23:03 – Interviewer: En daarjuist haalde u al andere personeelsleden aan. Bijvoorbeeld de kotcoach, kan u die rol iets meer toelichten en hoe jullie samenwerking verloopt?

00:23:14 – Home manager: De kotcoach staat eigenlijk het dichtste bij homebeheer. Ik verklaar mij nader, tot enkele jaren geleden bestond de kotcoach niet. Veel zaken die de kotcoach nu doet, zaten versplinterd bij homebeheer. Bijvoorbeeld algemene communicatie, bijvoorbeeld berichtgeving van een rondgang, van een ongedierte bestrijding, een algemene panne... Alle zaken die de bewoners in het algemeen moeten weten.

Ook bijvoorbeeld bij sensibiliseringsacties, dan moet je de vinger aan de pols houden. Wat loopt er niet lekker in de home, waar is de tijdgeest volledig aan het veranderen of waar moeten we ingrijpen? Dit kan je dan sturen met sensibiliseringsacties. Vroeger was dit ook allemaal nog de taak van homebeheer en daar begon het schoentje te wringen. Want als homebeheerder heb je al een serieuze rugzak en dan komt daar nog van alles bij. Na een tijd ben je vooral met die zaken bezig, omdat die enorm veel tijd vergen. Want de communicatie moet juist zitten en die is ook nog eens tweetalig: Nederlands en Engels. Je zit op universitair niveau, dus de communicatie moet ook op een degelijk niveau gebeuren. Toen wij dit er nog moesten bij nemen, dan was er veel kritiek. Wij konden ons daar niet

genoeg op focussen, daarom was het belangrijk dat iemand het wegnam en op een hoger niveau kon tillen. En dan komen we bij de kotcoach.

Maar dat is niet het enige dat de kotcoach doet. Ik heb al verteld dat de kotcoach de rapporten van de bewaking dagelijks opvolgt. Typische zaken waar de kotcoach mee bezig is: gaat er iets mis in de homes, is er een conflict, loopt er iets verkeerd, is er vandalisme geweest, is het nodig om te bemiddelen tussen bewoners, is er geluidsoverlast? Dat zijn allemaal zaken die zij op zich zal nemen en ten harte zal nemen. Ook met een menselijk gezicht op de situatie. Een kotcoach is iemand die niet zwart wit denkt, maar in kleuren. Je kan snel zeggen: die heeft geprutst met de brandslang en direct overgaan naar een sanctionerende maatregel. Maar je kijkt best even naar het volledige plaatje en hoe alles in elkaar zit.

00:26:58 – Home manager: Wij staan hen soms bij want bepaalde zaken kunnen zeer gevoelig zijn of onveilig aanvoelen. We zitten hier in een minimaatschappij en niet iedereen is lief en braaf. Als je ergens een verdacht of onveilig gevoel bij hebt, dan is het beter om daar met twee naar toe te gaan. Want je weet nooit als de deur opengaat wat er kan gebeuren, iemand kan volledig over zijn/haar toeren zijn. Daar kan ze altijd hulp vragen bij ons of bij de bewaking. (…) Als je met twee bent dan is er ook geen discussie en dan zal de bewoner zich ook meer inhouden.

00:27:53 - 00:28:54: (…)

00:28:54 – Interviewer: Nu richten we ons iets meer op de studenten zelf. Daarjuist haalde u de homeraad aan, kan u die iets meer toelichten en wat jullie verhouding is ten opzichte van elkaar?

00:29:09 – Home manager: Wij als huisvesting vinden dat een zeer belangrijke vereniging. We hebben acht keer in een jaar onze gezamenlijke vergadering, vier in het najaar vier in het voorjaar. De homeraden houden de vinger op de pols. Zij hebben ook hun eigen kanalen om informatie te verzamelen van bijvoorbeeld mensen die zaken voorstellen of vragen stellen. Er zijn zaken die via de homeraad bij ons terecht komen.

Zij organiseren ook veel activiteiten die sociaal bevorderend zijn. Dat kan gaan van baravonden, cantussen, feestjes tot allerlei andere activiteiten. Die moeten ze aanvragen, want die zijn wel gebonden aan een protocol overeenkomst. Daarin wordt beschreven: wie verantwoordelijk is, wat het einduur is... Alles moet juist aangevraagd zijn en wij bekijken of alles er in orde uit ziet. Als er iets niet klopt aan de aanvraag dan zeggen wij wat er niet klopt, bijvoorbeeld het einduur, en dan sturen wij dit terug met "dit klopt niet, kan je dit aanpassen". Dus er is wel veel wisselwerking tussen homebeheer, kotcoach, homeraad.

De homeraad is voor de afdeling huisvesting ook een informatiebron. Je moet die ook wel filteren want er komt soms heel veel binnen. Er zijn meer dan 800 hoofden, als al die hoofden iets denken dat zijn dat heel veel gedachten bij elkaar. Je moet er af en toe wel een filter op zetten, want wij kunnen niet zomaar iedereen op zijn wenken bedienen. Maar daarvoor is de homeraad handig, zij kunnen de eerste filter vormen. En ik voel ook wel dat de ene homevoorzitter al meer filtert dan de andere, en vooraleer iets voor te stellen op de grote vergadering eerst vraagt aan ons of dat mogelijk is en of wij daar al eens hebben over nagedacht.

Daar hebben we al een eerste aftoetsen. Samen met de homeraad nemen we het op ons om van de home een aangename verblijfplaats te maken. Ook hun activiteiten, zoals ik al zei,

zijn zeer sociaal bevorderend. Mensen worden vrienden voor het leven en er ontstaan hier relaties die standhouden tot in de eeuwigheid. Het is wel heel belangrijk dat je een homeraad heb. Ik heb eens een jaar meegemaakt hier zonder homeraad, maar dan merk je dat er niets meer doorkomt en dat er niets meer gebeurt.

Maar zij hebben wel een imagoprobleem en dat ligt aan de tijdsgeest. Nu is er veel meer individualisme, mensen zijn meer bezig met sociale media en met zichzelf, en niet met gemeenschappelijke zaken. De mensen van de homeraad zetten zich belangeloos is, zij verdienen daar niets aan. Zij willen dat graag doen en een community stichten, een liefst zo groot mogelijke community. Maar dat wordt niet door al de bewoners zo gezien. Sommige bewoners zijn meer op zichzelf en denken laat mij gerust. En ergens is dat wel te begrijpen, jonge mensen zetten zich soms graag af tegen zaken. Want als ik eerlijk ben, had ik dat vroeger ook, bijvoorbeeld de scouts vond ik helemaal niets, ik liep liever met mijn vrienden gewoon op straat. Ik denk dat dat een beetje hetzelfde gevoel is. Maar ik vind het zelf zeer belangrijk dan ze er zijn en ze hebben zeker een positieve impact op de leef- en woonbeleving hier in de homes.

00:35:19 – Interviewer: En het protocol, dat u daarjuist zei in verband met het einduur van feestjes en dergelijke, is dat besproken samen met de studenten? En zijn jullie dan zo tot een consensus gekomen?

00:35:30 Home manager – Ja dat klopt. Heel veel zaken worden afgetoetst met de bewoners, zoveel mogelijk. En er wordt ook rekening gehouden, tot op zekere hoogte, wat zij te vertellen hebben. Die feedback is heel belangrijk om te weten wat er leeft in de homes en te bepalen wat wij met afdeling huisvesting kunnen doen. Wat is financieel en technisch haalbaar? Ook zaken die uitgaan van het beleid zelf, zullen wij aftoetsen bij de bewoners, bijvoorbeeld, prijsverhoging of andere beleidsingrepen. Het is belangrijk dat dit gebeurt, omdat zo een open maatschappij en discussiesfeer gecreëerd wordt, waarin iedereen zich gehoord voelt zelfs als die persoon of groepering niet bereikt heeft wat ze wou bereiken. Dus de communicatie of het overleg daarbij is een heel belangrijk punt.

00:37:03 – Interviewer: En, hoe werkt dat aftoetsen precies? Stel dat jullie beslissen om een prijsverhoging van € 20 in de maand in te voeren, hoe werkt dat?

00:37:10 – Home manager: Dat zit bij de sociale raad, daar zijn afgevaardigde studenten. We hebben acht keer per jaar de algemene vergadering. Ook heb je nog het afdelingshoofd die regelmatig samenzit met het home konvent en de kotcoach, dus dat gebeurt meer op dat niveau.

Op het niveau van het dagelijkse leven gaan ze dan meer bij ons komen. Als homebeheerder wil je vooral tonen, we zijn er voor jullie en we willen naar jullie luisteren. Na het luisteren, vragen we dan wat we kunnen doen voor hen en hoe we dat zullen doen.

00:38:08 – Interviewer: Ik vind het interessant wat u daarjuist zei over het imagoprobleem van de homeraad en de link met de individualistisch tijdgeest. Denkt u dat de schaal van het gebouw daar ook iets mee te maken heeft?

00:38:37 – Home manager: Ja, klopt! Dat is een zeer goede opmerking. Ik heb drie homes en alle drie zijn ze verschillend. Ik heb flats, daar is iedereen redelijk individualistisch. Zij hebben een eigen keuken, badkamer en toilet. Je leeft daar meestal als koppeltje samen.

Home Vermeylen heeft een T-vorm en er zijn 56 bewoners per verdiep die twee keukens, één toiletblok en één doucheblok delen. Home Fabiola daarentegen heeft

eerder een rechthoekige vorm en heeft twee keer 16 kamers per verdiep en per gang heb je een keuken en een sanitaire blok. Home Fabiola, in vergelijking met home Vermeylen, is veel huiselijker. Hier is het iets onpersoonlijker. Er zit een verschil in van aanvoelen. De studenten leven daar precies dichter bij elkaar en koken meer samen, doodgewoon omdat de aantallen beperkter zijn.

00:40:21 – Interviewer: Naast het aantal dat beperkter is, speelt de lay-out van de ruimtes misschien ook wel een rol?

00:40:30 – Home manager: Als het gaat op vlak van de kamers, in home Vermeylen zijn de kamers 10 m^2 en in Fabiola 12 m^2. Je zou kunnen zeggen dat is maar 2 m^2, maar in werkelijkheid is dat wel 20% meer. Dat voel je dus echt wel aan, het voelt niet zo benauwd. 10 m^2 mag in werkelijkheid niet meer. Wij hebben, met een conformiteitsattest, een uitzondering tot aan een algehele renovatie kunnen aanvragen. Dus deze situatie zal je binnen vijf jaar niet meer zien. 10 m^2 kamers gaan niet meer bestaan, want 12 m^2 is het minimum.

Over de indeling, de aantallen zeggen al genoeg. Je hebt hier 56 bewoners voor twee keukens. Dat zijn 28 bewoners per keuken, die qua oppervlakte nog kleiner zijn dan Fabiola. Dus dan weet je ook wel dat het krap wordt en dat het niet aanmoedigt om in de keuken te zitten. Je kan daar niet met 20 personen zitten, er is daar niet genoeg plaats voor.

00:42:08 – Interviewer: Ja, het aantal stoelen vond ik ook heel opmerkelijk.

00:42:15 – Home manager: Er zijn maximaal 12 zitplaatsen in de keuken, dus 12 stoelen voor 28 man. Dus wat ga je doen in de keuken? Mensen verkiezen het niet om daar te eten of bezig te zijn. En daarom dat deze keukens, vind ik persoonlijk, hoogst ongeschikt om een buitenlands contingent op te zetten. Die gaan immers niet naar huis, zij blijven hier over het weekend en zij zullen ook 's avonds veel koken. Het buitenlands contingent zal meer samen koken dan het nationaal contingent. De meeste studenten gaan in het weekend naar huis en brengen iets mee uit de diepvries van mama. Terwijl het buitenlands contingent veel meer iets samen doet.

Wij zijn hier veel te klein, deze home is daar niet op voorzien. Dit gebouw is uit 1970 is, en vroeger waren de maaltijdvoorzieningen veel meer uitgebouwd. Je had hier op de hoek, waar nu de Albert Heijn en fitness is, een universiteitsrestaurant dat ook 's avonds open was. Daar kon je voor een appel en een ei van alles eten: spaghetti, hamburgers, frieten, stoverij… Maar dat is allemaal afgebouwd. Je hebt nu enkel nog de Brug die 's avonds open is en veel volk trekt, maar dat is ook de enige die er nog is. En ik denk dat dat er mee te maken heeft, toen waren er weinig studenten die hier kookten en ze kregen extra zakgeld van de ouders om naar het studentenrestaurant te gaan. We hebben het hier wel over 40 jaar terug.

00:44:30 – Interviewer: Wel heel interessant om het te linken aan het studentenrestaurant. En u zei dat het gebouw binnen 4 a 5 jaar zal veranderen. Bedoelt u dan eerder renovatie gericht of zal het in de toekomst eerder niet meer gerenoveerd worden?

00:44:48 – Home manager: Home Boudewijn wordt nu gerenoveerd. Men noemt dat een casco renovatie, dus een volledige strip van het gebouw. Dat betekent ook dat er op dat moment geen bewoners kunnen wonen wegens de intensiteit van die werken. Dat gaat normaal terug open in september 2026. Wat er ook zeker gerenoveerd zal worden is Home Fabiola. Waarom neem ik die twee als voorbeeld van diegene die zeker (zullen)

gerenoveerd zijn? In beide homes zijn de kamers 12 m^2 groot, dus daar hoeft niets aan veranderd te worden.

We zitten met een probleem bij home Astrid en home Vermeylen, omdat de kamers daar 10m^2 groot zijn en dat mag eigenlijk niet. Maar alle kokers en heel de inrichting zijn gebaseerd op 10 m^2. Want het is heel moeilijk om van drie kamers twee kamers te maken. Je zou van vier naar twee moeten gaan, maar dan verlies je de helft van de capaciteit. Als je van vier naar twee zou gaan, dan zou er telkens één koker met leidingen kunnen uitgeschakeld worden. Dus ik weet het niet, want ik zit niet in het overleg van eventuele renovaties. (…) Het enige dat ik zeker ben is de renovatie van home Boudewijn en home Fabiola.

00:47:10 – Interviewer: Je zou al naar buiten moeten uitbreiden.

00:47:12 – Home manager: Ja inderdaad, een schil toevoegen. Maar stel je eens een schil voor. Naar binnen uitbreiden kan niet omdat de gang te klein is. Dus je zou over de volledige lengte van het gebouw één meter naar buiten moeten komen, dan kan je de kamers vergroten met 2 m^2. Want de kamers zijn exact vier op twee meter, dus als je één meter naar buiten gaat dan heb je exact 2 m^2 extra. Maar ik heb geen idee hoe dat bouwkundig in elkaar zit.

00:47:59 – Interviewer: Oké, heel interessant, maar dat is een ander onderwerp.

00:48:02 – Home manager: Ja inderdaad, een onderwerp waar ik zelf niet veel van af weet.

00:48:21 – Interviewer: Het volgende puntje gaat iets meer over de schoonmaak in het algemeen. In hoeverre zijn studenten verantwoordelijk voor de schoonmaak? Dus ja, van hun individuele unit spreekt voor zich, maar van de collectieve ruimtes?

00:48:34 – Home manager: Niet. Er wordt natuurlijk gevraagd om er geen bende van te maken. De keuken hoeft niet te blinken, maar voor de volgende gebruiker moet het aangenaam zijn. Hetzelfde geldt voor het toiletgebruik, bijvoorbeeld toiletborstels worden snel genegeerd. Daar is dus ook nog werk aan, veel werk.

In de toekomst toe, in schoonmaak 2.0, zal er veel meer gevraagd worden aan de student om zelf dingen te realiseren. In elke gerenoveerde home of nieuwe home die in gebruik zal genomen worden door de UGent zullen wij met de gangverantwoordelijken een beurtrolsysteem opstarten. In die rol, zal je bijvoorbeeld moeten zorgen dat de keuken proper is of dat het huisvuil wordt opgehaald. We moeten nog verder overleggen welke zaken de bewoners precies zelf kunnen doen. Als je redelijk kleine entiteiten hebt, zoals Fabiola met 16 man, dan gaat dat nog meevallen. Bij grote entiteiten zal dat niet zo makkelijk worden. Maar de nieuwe homes die wij zullen innemen, zullen nog kleinere entiteiten hebben van vijf tot tien personen per collectieve ruimte, dan moet dat zeker haalbaar zijn. Maar daar gaat veel werk aan zijn, omdat je iedereen moet motiveren. Je moet duidelijk zeggen: deze week is het aan jou en jij moet er voor zorgen dat alles in orde is. Dat is een ideaal scenario, maar dat zal niet altijd zo zijn. De ene ziet dat zitten, de andere denkt daar anders over of heeft geen tijd. En zo zullen we tot de constatatie komen dat het in realiteit niet zo makkelijk is als dat we het ons nu voorstellen. Er zal daar vrij veel opvolging voor nodig zijn, vandaar dat er ook een kotcoach bijkomt om dit in goede banen te leiden. Er zal veel over moeten gebabbeld en gemonitord worden.

00:52:00 – Interviewer: Ja zeker, en het is een ook een kwestie van gewoonte denk ik. Als je hier al een paar jaar als student zit met een schoonmaakteam en plots wordt de verantwoordelijkheid bij jou gelegd, dan is dat ook wel aanpassen.

00:52:08 – Home manager: Ja, dat is wel waar, maar generaties verversen zich. Er komen nieuwe generaties aan. Je zal merken dat er een paar overgangsjaren zijn, waar de oude garde het gewoon is om verzorgd te worden door de welvaartstaat, bij wijze van spreken.

Ik ben persoonlijk een voorstander van deze evolutie, omdat het de zelfredzaamheid en de competentie van samenwerken verhoogt. Het versterkt ook het idee van de mens als groepsdier. Je kan zelf heel individualistisch zijn, maar uiteindelijk ben je alleen niet zo veel. Als je goed met anderen kan samenwerken, daar leer je ook veel uit.

Je leert ook veel zaken, zoals schoonmaken. Iets waar je misschien later, als je veel geld verdient, iemand voor inhuurt. Maar nu komen we terug naar de realiteit: soms verdien je niet zo veel geld en dan denk je “ik doe het wel zelf”. En op dat moment kan je dan terug denken aan hoe het moest. Dat is een heel leerproces, je zit hier in de laatste fase van jouw jeugd en als je hier naar buiten komt dan ga je misschien alleen of met je partner wonen, en dan sta je er alleen voor. Je kan er voor kiezen om dan zaken over te laten aan iemand anders, maar je moet wel voor jezelf kunnen zorgen. Zelfredzaamheid is wel mijn stokpaardje.

Ook sociaal corrigeren is belangrijk, bijvoorbeeld iemand die de douche niet uitkuist of eten in de gootsteen gooit. Want zo’n zaken, ik denk al aan de volgende stap, kunnen ook leiden tot conflicten. En daar zal de kotcoach moeten tussenkomen.

00:55:11 – Interviewer: En ook regels op voorhand maken zal belangrijk zijn.

00:55:14 – Home manager: Ja, regels zijn heel belangrijk. Om af te spreken: dit wordt van jou verwacht en als je u daar niet aan houdt dan zal dit volgen.

00:55:32 – Interviewer: Misschien dat het samen schoonmaken de homeraad kan helpen in het bouwen van een community, op verdiepniveau weliswaar?

00:55:40 – Home manager: Ja, want die gangverantwoordelijken zullen zelf buiten de grenzen van de homeraad zitten. Deze personen zullen geworven worden, zij zullen een korting krijgen. Net zoals nu van de preventiestudenten verwacht wordt dat zij de evacuatieoefeningen leiden en een opleiding volgen, wordt er van de gangverantwoordelijken ook wel veel verwacht. Als er iets niet goed verloopt, wordt er verwacht dat zij er iets aan doen. Dus dat is wel een redelijke verantwoordelijkheid voor zo'n jong persoon. Het kan moeilijk worden als mensen niet luisteren naar een andere medebewoner, maar iemand zal het voortouw moeten nemen en ons moeten berichten over zaken die niet goed lopen. Ook als zaken wel goed lopen natuurlijk, maar meestal zullen de problemen naar ons toekomen. Bijvoorbeeld, als de verantwoordelijke al een paar keer iemand gewezen heeft op zijn/haar taken, maar dat die persoon er nog steeds zijn/haar voeten aan veegt. Het is een verantwoordelijkheid die iemand zal moeten opnemen.

00:57:42 – Interviewer: Ik geloof wel dat dit systeem de verdiepen misschien meer naar elkaar zal brengen, vooral de bewoners per verdiep.

00:57:48 – Home manager: Ik denk wel dat de verantwoordelijke bepaalde competenties zal moeten hebben. Iemand die het in goede banen kan leiden, empathisch is en die het

goed kan uitleggen. En iedereen ziet daar het voordeel van. Daarna kan men zeggen dit hebben wij als groep voor elkaar gekregen.

00:58:24 – Interviewer: En de korting waarover u daarjuist sprak, denkt u dat dit nodig is om studenten te motiveren om taken op te nemen?

00:58:35 – Home manager: Ik denk het wel. Nu hebben we ook gangverantwoordelijken, maar dat is zeer vrijblijvend. Ik heb in totaal 30 gangen en ik hoor regelmatig misschien twee of drie gangverantwoordelijken, dus dat is slechts 10%.

00:59:00 – Interviewer: Per verdiep zijn er telkens twee gangverantwoordelijken?

00:59:02 – Home manager: Ja, maar zelfs niet overal. Dit is nog niet systematisch ingepland, het is nog vrijblijvend. En dan komen we op het punt van uw vraag: is het nodig om hen een geldig voordeel te geven? Ja, want anders blijven we in deze vrijblijvende situatie.

00:59:32 – Interviewer: Iets dat ik ook interessant vind om over na te denken, is of het nalatenschap van collectieve ruimtes gecreëerd wordt omdat er niemand verantwoordelijk voor is. Maar ik weet niet in hoeverre dat het correct is om dat zo te stellen.

00:59:51 – Home manager: Er zijn verschillen tussen de twee homes. Ik merk dat in home Fabiola, waar bewoners de keuken zien als hun keuken, dan zullen ze het op hun eigen manier inrichten. Ze willen het eigen maken. En dan merk ik dat zij hun best doen om het net te houden.

Als er uitspattingen zouden gebeuren, dan is de kans groot dat het niet van de bewoners zelf is, maar eerder van externen. Als iets van jou is of als je het beschouwd als iets van jou, dan is het een natuurlijke reflex om daar zorg van te dragen.

Aan de andere kant natuurlijk hangt het soms ook van de bewoners af. Als ik in sommige kamers binnenkom verschiet ik dat zij zo kunnen leven of andersom ben ik verbaasd van wat ze met 10 m^2 hebben gedaan. (…)

01:01:22 – Home manager: Je zit hier met een minimaatschappij met mensen die meedraaien of niet meedraaien, mensen die proper zijn of niet. Je zit hier met van alles.

01:01:36 – Interviewer: Het sanctieproces van hoe conflicten of overtredingen worden opgevolgd. Heeft u daar een kenmerkende rol in?

01:01:57 – Home manager: Dat zit nu vooral bij de kotcoach. De rapporten van de bewaking komen bij haar terecht en als wij met iets zouden kunnen helpen, dan stuurt ze die door naar ons. Zij bekijkt de zaak in zijn geheel en zal het grootste deel zelf oplossen. Ik vind dat wel een goed systeem, want zo worden wij ook niet overladen met allerlei zaken, maar wordt er wel beroep gedaan op onze eventuele expertise of intuïtie. Homebeheerders zijn vrij oplossingsgericht, jij krijgt allerlei kleine en grote problemen verspreid over de dag en dan is het belangrijk om logisch te kunnen denken hoe je het best te werk gaat. En daarin kunnen wij de kotcoach bijstaan.

Als iemand zware overtredingen begaat, zoals vandalisme, dan moet die voor de tuchtcommissie komen. De tuchtcommissie komt dan bij elkaar en daar zitten soms enkele weken of maanden tussen. Soms moeten we de aanstootgever/geefster in tussentijd uit de home verwijderen.

01:04:39 – Interviewer: Is dit jullie taak?

01:04:44 – Home manager: Nee, dat is in samenwerking met de kotcoach. Wij zoeken mee uit wie daar achter zit en of mensen iets gehoord of vernomen hebben. De beslissing om dit naar de commissie te brengen, wordt soms afgetoetst aan ons, maar de uiteindelijke beslissing ligt op het niveau van de kotcoach.

01:05:30 – Interviewer: Voor het laatste deel van het interview, zou ik het graag hebben over de duurzaamheid van de home. Kan u een paar strategieën op vlak van duurzaamheid, in de zin van materiaalgebruik en energieverbruik, toelichten?

01:05:47 – Home manager: Wel, ik zit hier met heel oude infrastructuur, dus de EPC-waardes van de gebouwen zijn ondermaats. Dat zal veranderen met de renovaties en de cascostrippen van de gebouwen.

Zijn er andere zaken? Ja, we zetten in op energiebesparing. Een paar jaar geleden hadden we de energiecrisis en toen was er heel veel sensibilisering om uw verwarming minder hoog te zetten en wij schakelden zelf lampen in de gangen uit. Maar we merken dat daar ook nog heel veel werk aan is. Het is een open veld. Er zijn initiatieven vanuit de bewoners zelf, maar bij sommige bewoners is daar totaal lak aan. We hebben over duurzaamheid en ecologie de mond vol, maar de handen zijn leeg.

01:07:00 – Interviewer: Want ik las ook dat er een standaard prijs is, inclusief al het verbruik. Denkt u dat er iets zou veranderen, mocht je het verbruik apart berekenen?

01:07:07 – Home manager: Dat kan zeker een impact hebben, maar dat is ondoenbaar. Er zijn geen meettoestellen per individuele unit, alles zit in één centrale meter.

Op vlak van sensibilisering, proberen we wel soms zaken te organiseren zoals “welke home is het duurzaamst?” En dan volgen we het verbruik op van de homes in haar totaliteit, bijvoorbeeld qua water, elektriciteit, verwarming… We maken daar een wedstrijd van en zo kunnen we de bewoners sensibiliseren en motiveren om anders tegenover energieverbruik te staan. Het sluipt langzaam in onze maatschappij om er meer over na te denken, omdat we worden geconfronteerd met klimaatopwarming. Maar ik heb het gevoel dat het bij veel mensen is “zolang het ons niet raakt en het blijft nog tal van kilometers verderop, ligt men er alleen maar wakker van met woorden”. En terwijl dat wij, en zeker de jonge generatie, moet overschakelen naar daden.

01:09:16 – Interviewer: Ja, inderdaad. En zeker in een universiteitsgebouw verwacht je wel dat dit in orde is.

01:09:26 – Home manager: Ja, je verwacht dat wel, maar je merkt dat daar nog heel veel werk aan is. We zijn daar nog niet helemaal van doordrongen.

01:09:32 – Interviewer: Het ligt natuurlijk ook wel aan de infrastructuur, als het slecht geïsoleerd is en dergelijke.

01:09:35 – Home manager: Zeker, in de eerste plaats ligt dat daar aan, maar ook aan het nationaal beleid.

01:09:44 – 01:13:29: (…)

01:13:29 – Home manager: Ik ben ondertussen 61 jaar oud, toen ik klein was en de televisie was kapot dan belden wij een technieker en die kwam dat herstellen. Maar nu als jouw televisie of laptop kapot is, dan gooit men dit weg. Ook bijvoorbeeld voor een

koelkast, als je daar een technieker voor laat komen dan is het vaak duurder dan een nieuwe te kopen. En zo creëer je een wegwerpmaatschappij, als iets kapot is wordt het weggesmeten. En waar het naartoe gaat, doet er dan niet toe, want het is weg naar het containerpark. We zijn nu eigenlijk op heel breed maatschappelijk vak bezig.

01:14:41 – Interviewer: Over de koelkast gesproken, toen ik door het gebouw liep, zag ik dat er één gemeenschappelijke frigo is en dat alle studenten hun eigen frigo op de kamer hebben. Dat vind ik ook opmerkelijk.

01:14:46 – Home manager: Er zijn veel studenten die een eigen frigo hebben, maar niet iedereen. Voor 56 mensen zijn er twee koelkasten, dus stel dat slechts 10 mensen die gebruiken dan is dat nog veel. Maar dat toont ook weer dat de keukens niet voldoen aan de noden. (…) Voor 30 personen is er één koelkast? Ik weet niet of ze daar ooit goed naar gekeken hebben, maar ik denk eigenlijk van niet. De bewoners moeten het hier echt doen met het minimum, tenzij dat ze zelf dingen in hun kamer voorzien. (…)

01:16:50 – 01:17:04: (…)

01:17:04 – Home manager: Bewoners kunnen hier, via de onderaannemer, een koelkast aankopen aan een verminderde prijs. En dan hebben zij een koelkast van de laatste serie, die het minst verbruikt. (…)

01:17:49 – Interviewer: En tot slot, wat zijn volgens u de belangrijkste uitdagingen dat u ervaart in het beheer van de homes?

01:18:06 – Home manager: Je moet als homebeheerder meewerken aan het uitbouwen van een leefbare home voor iedereen. Dat bevindt zich op alle vlakken: op vlak van hygiëne, technisch onderhoud, hoe het er sociaal aan toe gaat. Dat zijn allemaal verschillende pijlers, die je in de gaten moet houden. En daar moet je u op focussen en proberen oplossen. En dat is eigenlijk de uitdaging van elke dag. Je hebt jouw kerntaken, dat zijn mijn flikkerlichten. Die laten zien waar iets fout loopt en waar ik moet ingrijpen omdat er iets niet aangenaam is voor de bewoners, bijvoorbeeld het vuilnis dat moet opgehaald worden. Het is zoals een huis runnen op grote schaal, dus dat vergt wel wat inzicht. Je moet ook zien waar de prioriteiten liggen in dit vlak. Het is zoals tetrix spelen, je moet kiezen welke blokjes je eerst laat vallen. Ik schrijf de kleine dingen vaak op in mijn agenda zodat ik die niet vergeet, maar ik focus mij eerst op de grote zaken.

01:20:50 – Interviewer: Is er nog iets dat u graag zou willen delen?

01:21:04 – Home manager: Ik denk dat ik al veel verteld heb.

01:21:15 – Interviewer: Heel erg bedankt, het was super leerrijk.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS – HEIDELBERG

Appendix D: Interview transcripts: Case study Collegium Academicum, Heidelberg

Appendix D1: Mira, CA resident and organiser of the Orientation Year (January 6, 2026)

00:00:04 – Interviewer: Hello, welcome. Thank you for coming over. It's very nice that you're open for it. So first, is it okay if I record our conversation for research purposes?

00:00:22 – Mira: Yes, that's fine.

00:00:24 – Interviewer: Do you have any questions before we begin?

00:00:23 – Mira: No, not yet.

00:00:38 – Interviewer: Is it okay if I use your input in my master thesis? And do you prefer to stay anonymous?

00:00:40 – Mira: Preferably, anonymous.

00:00:44 – Interviewer: Okay! Can you briefly introduce yourself? What your name is, your age and what do you study? And how long have you lived in the CA?

00:00:33 – Mira: I'm x. I'm 23 years old and will be 24 in March. And I came to Heidelberg in 2021, after I finished my voluntary year at Environmental Protection at the Baltic Sea in northern Germany. I came to Heidelberg to study educational science and psychology. And I submitted my bachelor thesis before Christmas last year. And I was looking for a place to stay in Heidelberg, and that's very difficult. I think in all the big university cities in Germany, it's very hard, but in Heidelberg especially. And so I looked on 'WG Gesücht', which is like the common place where you look for flat in Germany.

Then I saw something from the CA, and it sounded very nice, but I thought that I was not leftist enough for this place. And so I didn't apply and look further on. But I like the idea so much of living together and I after my voluntary year I wanted to incorporate environmental protection and sustainability more and more in my day-to-day life. And the CA looked like a chance for me to do that. And then I applied and I got in. And then it wasn't finished and I couldn't move in until almost two years later, in February 23. And so I moved from place to place in Heidelberg, back to my family, to my grandparents…

00:02:54 – Interviewer: And you said that it is especially in Heidelberg, very difficult to find a flat. Is it because the there is a shortage or are the prices going crazy because of the reduced amount of flats? What were the specific difficulties that you have experienced?

00:03:17 – Mira: I think it's very expensive to live here, especially if you want to live somewhere close to the university. I mean if you go to like the shores of Heidelberg, I think of the city, then it gets better, but then you have to travel a lot to get to university. I think it's mostly that it's expensive because if you can pay like €600 or upwards for one room in a shared flat, then you're fine basically. And there's also a lot of individual flats that get rented or sold, and they're very expensive because they're mostly in like renovated buildings or new buildings.

We also have housing from university, but they are always full. But if you get a place there, it is mostly not that expensive. I think someone told me that they lived in a room there for I think €190 euros, which is crazy.

00:05:16 – Interviewer: But it is like for a few lucky ones that got a place.

00:05:17 – Mira: Yeah. I think they also give these places to internationals because for them it's like especially hard to find places and for such a short time. I also applied there, but I was too late. Three months into my studies, I got a mail saying I got a place.

00:05:46 – Interviewer: And do you feel that there is a lot of people that really live in the university city itself, so in Heidelberg? Or are there also a lot of people that are commuting from neighbouring cities?

00:05:55 – Mira: I think it depends on the subject. Because in my subject, like educational science, there's a lot of people who already did or finished an apprenticeship or are in their 40s and need another bachelor's degree or something, and so they mostly commute. And also, I think it's a subject where people are very family oriented. And so there are also some that just live in the neighbouring cities.

I think some people also live in Mannheim and then commute to Heidelberg. But I think it's more people from Mannheim coming to Heidelberg than Heidelberg to Mannheim. But that just might be just a bias.

00:06:58 – Interviewer: What were your main reasons for choosing CA? You explained it already a bit, but what did you see here that convinced you that you wanted to live here.

00:06:47 – Mira: Oh, it feels so far back. But I think it was the sustainability aspect of it and it seemed very cool that it's like by young people and for young people. In the beginning I was taking back a bit, because some of the opinions of people here. Now I get along with that better and my opinions also changed a bit, but that was quite difficult at the beginning.

I got accepted in September 2021. Then I had these one and a half year of moving from place to place, and during that time, I regularly thought about not living here. Because it was very confusing coming here because it was back then the first time where the smaller group organised all of these open meetings. And they said, well, we need 170 people living here, so they need to come in and we need to introduce them to the project itself. And I think my wave of people was one of the first waves where they did that. And we all came into a very strong group, in which everybody knew each other and they knew like the difficulties they had with each other. I remember sitting in like one plenary meeting and everybody was screaming at each other. And I was like how do you do this? How do you not go insane from this? A few years on from that, I spoke to one of the people that was screaming and they said, well it's just what we did back then. We argued very heavily on all the topics, but we loved each other. It was kind of sibling energy.

00:10:04 – Interviewer: It is interesting. If I understood correctly, when you moved in, it was difficult to cope sometimes with the opinions during the meetings? Or was it also like in daily life that it was sometimes hard to integrate in such a close group. What were the exact difficulties?

00:10:10 – Mira: I think it was a bit of both. And it was not when I moved in. It was before that. So I lived elsewhere, but I came here for renovation stuff in the old building or building stuff here. I was connected with people from here, but not as regular as now.

I think it was both things, it was nothing I have had encountered before. And also coming into a new group.

00:11:29 – Interviewer: I can really understand that. Then a bit more about the orientation year. As you said before (during the language course on Sunday), you have led the orientation year. Can you explain what it is and what your role in it was?

00:11:44 – Mira: The orientation year is quite a basic project that was thought about from the beginning of the whole CA project, because in the old CA they organised their own course programme. The people that planned this whole project, thought that it would be so great if we could try different subjects at university or different apprenticeships. And so the idea was there from the beginning, I think.

And in 2021, I think, two people from the project group here started planning it, when they were sure that there would be buildings where people can live and stuff. They started and it's actually not that new of a concept in Germany. There are quite a few other places where also back then, orientation years exist. One of the biggest and oldest is the Leibniz College in Tubingen. That exists for 75 years or more. So it exists for a long time and it's very academic.

They (two initiators of the orientation year at the CA) travelled from orientation year to orientation year. Some were more on like the spiritual side, some were on the religious. Others are more on like the practical side, earning practical skills. And then they came back here and they were like, well, let's do a bit of all of them. And they took two years of planning and then two other people came and they took it upon themselves to implement all the ideas of the other two into reality. Then they made a plan and worked on getting the idea to people and getting people to apply.

In 2024, the first candidates arrived here. And at that time, I worked in the AG wit the main people who organised it. I also did an internships for 3 months in the organisation of the orientation year, because I needed it for my degree at university. And it was like three steps from my doorstep, so how easy can it be?

I was also very interested in what they were doing because I like the idea and the age group. And then when they started, my internship ended and I kept working in the group. And then in the summer we went to Berlin for 10 days with the young people. And because I worked in the group, I also got to go there. And then during these 10 days, one of the tutors told me that he wanted to do something else and thought I would be a good fit to do his work. And at first I was like, no I have other plans. And then he was like, do you? Afterwards I thought about it during the summer and then I got asked again by different people, and then I did it.

And then I started on the 1st of October in 2024 with the new candidates. And they spent ten months here, which is like the full length that was planned in the first place. And I led the orientation here with my other two colleagues at the time and I tutored the young people.

Okay, and what the orientation year is. The idea is for young people (I think the first year there were 11 candidates and the second time there were 22 candidates) that they come here and be part of our community for ten months. And they get to try different subjects at university, and at different universities in Heidelberg. So there's the university of Heidelberg, but there's also a pedagogical college, which is more focused on developing teachers for kids with special needs and also they train translators for sign language. And

there they could also do some courses and also at the University of Jewish studies. And they could also train their practical skills at the workshops we have here. So we have the wood workshop, one for metal and one for repairing bikes. And the other part is also developing their personality. Which sounds kind of wild on paper, but what we did is, we had them together and they organised their living together because they lived in shared rooms and also in one apartment together and so they organised this for themselves. And our rule to us, the tutors, was that we don't step in until there are like big problems. We give them the skills and tell them how we do it in the big CA and that they can look at it and decide for themselves if they want to do it the same way, or do it another way. We just let them do. Every quarter of a year, we had a sit down with everyone of them individually. We asked them, what are your plans and how do you feel? How do you feel in the group? In the beginning it was kind of difficult for them, similar to my own experience coming into the CA, to find your place in such a big group of people. But they all said that they learned so much in the organisation because you have to balance different needs of like 20 people.

And they also got a group coaching regarding their like professional aspirations where they got help from one of my colleagues who is a systemic coach. She tried to help them answer the questions for themselves. For example, what are my hobbies, and which of my hobbies do I want to make into my profession? What is better left as a hobby? So basically, what am I good at and what am I interested in? In which way can my interests and hobbies give back to society?

And they did that 10 months and I respect them so much for that because I think it's so intense to just ask yourself these questions for 10 months and then try so many different things. And at the end almost all of them made a decision for themselves. It was very cool to have the talks with them throughout because some in the beginning were like determined I will do this and I will do that and I will not consider going to university or doing an apprenticeship. And some of them stayed with that decision, but some of them also changed their minds and are now in an apprenticeship or at university or in a completely different subject they didn't even consider in the beginning.

00:24:33 – Interviewer: It seems really nice, it is a unique project. I do not know if there are similar project in Belgium.

00:24:41 – Mira: In Germany it also not that known by people.

00:24:51 – Interviewer: Okay, I have several questions about it. Firstly, the young people that wanted to apply, did they also had to pay rent and also pay for tutoring? Or how was it like financial possible to do the whole organisation of it?

00:25:15 – Mira: Yeah, I think that is one of the biggest downsides that I saw and why I also struggled to take up the role in leading. Because they paid rent, which was not that much for Heidelberg. But they also paid for tutoring. So in the end, it was like €500 per month. Which is comparable to other orientation years. There are others that are €22.000 for 10 months, which is like crazy. But they're also very elite and in the upper ranges. I think our orientation here was like kind of in the middle.

But there were also a lot of candidates that came to us. But like, I would love to do this, but I just can't afford it. And for them, we gave out grants, which they didn't have to pay back.

00:27:03 – Interviewer: Did the city of Heidelberg gave these loans or CA?

00:27:05 – Mira: The CA did, it is one of our structures that we have. (…). The orientation year was not financed with the same financial model that we have in the CA, with the direct loans. That is not what we did there. There was like a different model.

You know the old CA?

00:27:59 – Interviewer: Yes!

00:28:05 – Mira: When it evicted there were people and they wanted to build a structure in the law. But I do not know the word in English. And they build that and it is active still today. And it is financially also backed by a lot of people who support the general idea of the CA and it also came from the older CA. And they gave us some money to support the young people.

00:29:22 – Interviewer: You said that the candidates also were part of like the big community of CA, were they also involved in the weekly plenaries and the working groups and the maintenance plan of the whole project? Or was it more like, they manage their own flats, and really the whole CA?

00:29:51 – Mira: The original plan was for them to be just a normal part in the whole CA. In a practical sense, they weren't really a part of the people who live in the new building because they lived in the old building. So there was like a physical divide between them. Some of them worked in the groups. (…). So some of them did, but most of them didn't, which I think stemmed from kind of the divide. They didn't have much touching points with each other. I also think that both parties, like the people who live in the new building and the orientation year candidates, were both very busy with their own things.

I think in the second round we managed to connect them a bit better. We had like a buddy programme where every one of the orientation year candidates got matched with a person from the new building. And some of those couples had a very good relationship during the 10 months they were here. And some of them never even really got started which is sad. But we did our best to connect them. There was also one evening where the orientation year people cooked for people here and they got to talk about their careers and subjects and apprenticeships. The orientation year people said to us that it was very good for them to talk to people who are actually in these fields. Some of them even went to classes with these people or did an internship in their organisation.

00:33:02 – Interviewer: Super, that is very cool. And was the orientation year in German? Or were there also people from other backgrounds that didn't speak German?

00:33:19 – Mira: It was all in German. We thought about letting international people in, but then we thought that it would be difficult because sometimes German people don't have the English skills and the English people don't have the German skills. And so we settled on let's just first do it for German speakers. And I also think that a big part of the people, not all of them, but a big part, came from like middle or upper class families. Because in the end it's a year you do and we couldn't hand out any serious documents or certificates and they could not earn ECTS points from the university. So the parents also had a lot of trust in us that this would work for their kids. You could say that it could be one year wasted. I wouldn't say that.

00:34:55 – Interviewer: It sound very interesting to have such a year, because when you start university or higher education it's so difficult to choose. But I also understand that it's like a privilege to get such a year. And when I hear you speaking, you have led the

orientation year for 10 months, and beside that you kept on studying, living here and doing all your tasks?

00:35:31 – Mira: Yes, but I earned money for it. It was a student job. I think my job description said pedagogical assistance. Which is kind of an understatement for all the things I did there. But I didn't have a degree then, so it was kind of fair to have that title.

00:36:12 – Interviewer: And did you do your work mostly in the evenings or in the weekends? How was it organised in a practical way?

00:36:14 – Mira: I think it was a bit mixed. I mean, times were wild when I did that. One of my colleagues had a family, so she always had to go at 2:00 PM and couldn't come back because she had to watch her kids and manage her family basically. And so we always did all the organisational stuff in the mornings. Sometimes we also planned then our work sessions.

The ten months spanned 2 semesters, and in between my courses had changed and they were more on the mornings. So I did my classes with the young people then in the afternoons and evenings. We also organised a lot of workshops and classes from people outside the CA, from for example political organisations. They came in mostly in the mornings and then did their workshops for like a whole day or two days. And then we also had to watch them.

We didn't really have any strict working times because that's that wasn't possible. Sometimes I came in in the morning and I did two hours of work and then I went to university and I came back and did my class with the young people and then in the evening I still had some work left from the morning. And then also on the Wednesdays, we had the plenary meetings here. So that was blocked a lot of times.

00:38:58 – Interviewer: And I saw now online that there is no orientation year this year. When I hear you now speak, it sounds very cool and I think that a lot of people would be interested in it. What do you think that the main reason is that there is no orientation year this year?

00:39:18 – Mira: We thought about that for so many months before we decided that we would stop it. Our main problem was that people weren't applying and they also weren't applying in the ways they were the year before. And we also heard from other orientation years all over Germany that they had the same problem. So we knew something is not really right and it's not just us that are experiencing this. And so we thought, well, then we'll just do a campaign on Instagram and other people will be come flooding in. And we did that and they didn't come flooding in. In the end we were left with too few people to start another round.

Our concept originally intended to have 50 candidates every year. And we couldn't even in the slightest way fill that number with the people we had in the summer last year. **We think that maybe the majority of young people experience the political climate in Germany. We have now a new chancellor and he always talks about how we have to work more and work longer and they do all sorts of stuff to get people to work. Maybe that had an impact on young people that they just said, well then I'll just work or I can't afford to lose another year and not get any certificate out of it. In our rhetoric that doesn't make sense because the year is definitely not wasted, because**

if young people know better what they want to do then they do not want to quit their studies. But maybe that just doesn't fit with the political climate right now.

And also financially, if you do a voluntary service, you will get a few €100. But here you have to pay something. So maybe, that was also too big of a hurdle to pay that much for something you might not be able to grapple really at the first sight. I think it's a concept you have to explain to people for them to be excited about it. And that's very difficult also in our work on social media, even people that started here were like I'm not even now really sure what I'm doing here but it sounded good on the surface.

00:43:38 – Interviewer: The difficulties you are describing and which that you have experienced do all make a lot of sense. I think that was mainly the part about the orientation here. I is there something else that you are thinking about that we haven't discussed about that you think it's interesting or good to know?

00:44:07 – Mira: We had a lot of support from all kinds of sides. We had a lot of foundations backing us, political foundations, backing us. A lot of people were very excited about the idea. We also presented it to the university, because, in Tubingen they have very close bonds with the university. And so we thought maybe that's the model we could implement also. And we talked to the chancellor of the university. But they said it is very difficult to find a model that will work with all the rules they have at the university and also German law.

00:45:29 – Interviewer: Okay, thank you already. It was very interesting to learn more about it. And what do you think that motivates residents to take on more responsibilities, like you did? And what could discourage them, for example, time or pressure? So what were for you the main reasons to take on this extra responsibility? And what were the things that you doubted about?

00:46:07 – Mira: I think that is like one of the basic questions where you can get people at the CA to talk about that question. We think about it so much because it's the way we sustain ourselves. I think for me, I almost just slid into it. It just escalated for me. I came in and I did not have the intention to work here or be a person that people know. I always was part of our internal communication system and people knew me as the person who always writes too many messages. I didn't plan on doing that. I think for me, I was just excited to learn new things and skills and I think that's what drove me.

You can learn so much here. I helped out with the building's renovation a few times and did all sorts of odd jobs. At one point, they were looking for someone for the cooking team, but no one was interested. I thought: "I can cook for myself, so how hard can it be to cook for 40 people?" However, it turned out that cooking for 40 people was much more challenging than I had expected. Still, I was glad I had taken on the challenge. The atmosphere of that time stemmed from a Swedish story about Pippi Longstocking – a girl who lives in a colourful house with a horse and a monkey. She often says: "I have never done this before, but I am sure I can do it." That summed up the spirit of that time perfectly.

Then they were looking for people to select the people moving in here. (…). And I got dragged along in it, because when you have the knowledge, you get asked very frequently.

00:49:57 – Interviewer: Okay, so you also did the applications?

00:49:59 – Mira: Yeah, I did that during that time (from 2021-2023). After these years, I had the knowledge and got asked if I did not want to get elected into this new committee

they were setting up for the move-in, to have the process formalised. I thought that I was not suited for a committee, because nobody knows me. (…). Then I got elected into the committee because, there weren't as many candidates and I had the knowledge. Then I worked there for one year. (…). I worked there, that was very difficult. But also I learned so much because we had to build our structure on the fly. There was just the thought about having a committee, but not the thought about how the committee would work. And so, umm, we had to give ourselves our own rules and discuss them with the whole project group. And we did that in a bilingual committee where one person only spoke German and one person only spoke English.

00:51:43 – Interviewer: To understand it correctly, this committee, was it before or after 2023?

00:51:53 – Mira: It was after 2023. After the move-in. So there was the thought of like, we have now this unstructured group that select the people moving in (before 2023), and after the move-in, we will elect ourselves a committee to have this process more formalised.

00:52:24 – Interviewer: Okay, and can you tell me a bit more about these elections? Is it on a yearly basis and how much people do you elect and for what positions are these elections?

00:52:54 – Mira: Some people are quite frowned upon about the elections, because they always say we have to pay attention to not getting too formalised and too bureaucratic. But we do have them and they take part once a year. We elect the Belegium, the committee I was in. It stems from Collegium, it is a play of words in German. The Schlau, the arbitration Committee for solving conflicts, gets elected by the big group. (...). If there is a conflict, people have to go to the Schlau, this can not act on itself, it needs to get invited deal with the conflict via one of the conflicting parties. And they will talk for quite a time. If the people in the arbitration Committee have the feeling that they can't deal with it and that they don't see any possibility of resolving the conflict then they can give a proposition to the leaders of our GmbH. Only they have the power to cancel contracts. That is kind of like the basic version of the process. (...)

(…)

Appendix D2: Sarah, Minimally involved CA resident (January 6, 2026)

00:00:08 – Interviewer: Is it okay if I record our conversation for research purposes?

00:00:10 – Sarah: Yes, you may.

00:00:11 – Interviewer: And is it okay if I use your input in my master thesis? And if so, can I use your first name or would you prefer to stay anonymous?

00:00:12 – Sarah: I would like to stay anonymous.

00:00:23 – Interviewer: The first question then, could you briefly introduce yourself? So what do you study and what is your age?

00:00:42 – Sarah: I'm x and I am 22 years old, and I'm studying anthropology and sociology.

00:00:52 – Interviewer: And how long have you lived in the CA?

00:00:57 – Sarah: (…) So basically two and a half year.

00:01:02 – Interviewer: Almost from the start?

00:01:12 – Sarah: No, I moved in in August and the start was like February or March.

00:01:15 – Interviewer: What were your main reasons for choosing CA instead of other housing options?

00:01:35 – Sarah: I think my main reason was that I wanted to move out of my old flat and it the housing situation in Heidelberg is kind of intense and it's not that easy. And I didn't want to go on 'WG Gesücht' because it was too stressful for me. And a friend of a friend who I met during a party told me about the CA. So I basically thought it was kind of cool, and also it was kind of easier to apply to it than to other housings.

00:02:15 – Interviewer: You say it is easy to apply, but I saw that there is like a whole application process. Can you explain it a bit more?

00:02:18 – Sarah: Yes, but you don't have to write a lot of texts to different people who are not answering. So for me it was easier.

00:02:39 – Interviewer: And the application process on itself, was it stressful?

00:02:46 – Sarah: Yes, kind of. The application process on itself was okay, it wasn't that long and it was kind of easy. But I think what was really stressful is that we only got the confirmation that we were allowed to move in like three weeks before the actual move-in date. It was kind of a special move in date because, a lot of people moved out. (…)

And because we were a special move-in date, we did not get a lot of welcome stuff and introduction, because it was also the beginning of the vacation.

And I did find the application process a bit stressful, specifically after I got accepted. Because then I needed to go to all the apartments to see in which apartment I wanted to move-in. And meet all the people from the different WGs (WG finding day).

00:03: 58 – Interviewer: A more general question, how would you describe living in CA? (…) What is different from the housing you have already been in?

00:04:45 – Sarah: One of the most important things I really like about the CA is that you live in a community. And honestly, I am used to that, because when I still lived with my parents, we also lived in an apartment complex. There, we knew our neighbours and it was very normal to invite them over for dinner. I really missed that when I moved to Heidelberg, because everything there was so isolated. So I would say that is a hugely important aspect: knowing your neighbours and living more in a community.

But I do think it's also quite complex because we have so many people and I do think it's a bit too huge to meet everyone their needs. We really try to be like needs-orientated. Can you say that in English?

00:06:01 – Interviewer: No, I do not fully understand.

00:06:04 – Sarah: We really try to meet the needs of everyone who lives here and I do think it's kind of too big in order to do that. People always say "Oh my God, it is so cool", but it does also have a lot of negative sides.

And I do think it's also a bit too idealistic. It feels like sometimes, people think "we do it better'" Some people think of it as something superior, and that we do everything better, of what is wrong in normal society. We try to be a safe space for people who are discriminated. But I do think that's kind of unrealistic.

00:07:20 – Interviewer: And what part of it is unrealistic?

00:07:32 – Sarah: First of all, the idea that we can do everything better. (…) I'm trying to break it down because I do have a lot of opinions on it. Okay, I thought a lot about activism, because in my studies I also had some seminars about it. And some people really do think that the CA is activistic and political, and there are a lot of debates about it. Because some people say it should be just for living and some people say it definitely political. And I criticise on a lot of activism, in which I feel like people criticise certain structures but they don't overcome them, they basically only turn them in the other direction. And I do feel like here we try to be so inclusive, but we are also exclusive in our inclusiveness.

For example, people really try to be very sensitive to queer themes. But there was this incident, of which I know about because I do know the person. This person is male, older, cis and not queer. He is not that familiar with queer topics and he wanted to apply for the Schlichtenstructs (Schlau process). He was asked to take back his application because some trans people found him transphobic. And I do know him because he's like a roommate of a close friend of mine. And I did get that he's not that sensitive, but I wouldn't call him transphobic. He just doesn't comprehend it, and it is not part of his current worldview. And I do feel like because he doesn't fit in like the standard CA-people, because he's white, he is not queer, he is male, he's kind of older. So basically we now have a new enemy: the old white man. And I do think that he doesn't fit in the idea of the CA. And we say we are so inclusive.

I do feel like that self-responsibility is not seen as very important, because we try to meet everybody's need. But I do think when you live in a community you have to be able to adapt. I think it is too idealistic, to try to meet everybody's need and to think that we do everything better. I do have my ups and downs with the CA.

00:13:18 – Interviewer: It is very interesting to hear what you say about the inclusiveness in exclusiveness. And the last thing you said about meeting everybody's needs, on what incident is that based?

00:13:33 – Sarah: I am not sure if I can pinpoint to a specific point, but for example, we have three big meetings every year where we make consensuses. And everybody and every concern is being heard. (…)

And I do feel like it puts a lot of pressure on me to do something for the CA. And for me it feels very stressful, because right now I can not do a lot because of personal reasons. It depends on the people, put sometimes I feel like there is a lot of pressure on me to engage. I sometimes feel it very stressful to not be able to just live.

My room overlooks the outside gallery, so I can not completely shut myself off. Our doors are not very soundproof either, something you have probably experienced. And sometimes I wish I could just completely shut myself off for a moment.

But then I really like coming to this WG, when I can not study in my own apartment. And being here, even when the others are not. And when they are here, I find it very pleasant to be co-exist with people. That is something you can really do in the CA.

00:16:48 – 00:17:10: (…)

00:17:11 – Sarah: For example, we have a shelf where you can place your old books, and I wanted to rent one. There I met randomly a person that I kind of knew, and I talked them about fusion (kind of dance). And now we dance together. That is something I really like, you can do stuff spontaneously and things just happen. Which I do really like.

To be honest, I also feel not that well integrated because I do not engage enough and I also feel like people are judging me. I think that is mostly my problem and that people not really do that. Sometimes it is just too much, too many people, too many opinions, too many discussions and it sometimes does feel like you have to do obey by some rules.

00:19:54 – Interviewer: Are there a lot of general rules?

00:20:00 – Sarah: Not really. There are general living rules (ex. How deep you can put screws in the wall). Other than that, you have to sign a contract that you want to engage in the CA (only people from the new building), in order to move-in. There are not a lot of written rules, more spoken rules. I do feel like a certain type of people are used to live here, very left-handed people. There is often a general critique on society and people that want to do it differently. But it depends on with who you engage.

There is a set of rules, ground rules specific to the CA, that you have to sign. These are the foundation values of the CA. And they are important, and also were important during the application process.

00:23:56 – 00:32:30: (…)

00:32:34 – Interviewer: Okay, now a bit more about the maintenance of the whole building and of your own flat. How is the maintenance in your flat organised? Is it informal or rather with schedules?

00:32:36 – Sarah: We have a schedule. Basically, two of us do the cleaning. One person has mental health problems and is not capable of doing anything. And another person is basically living in another flat. She does not want to feel responsible for the flat. I always clean the bathroom and she does always clean the kitchen. The bins we do together.

I feel more responsible for the building, because it is self-governed, and the building does not belong to some rich person. So I do notice that I am treating it differently.

00:34:02 – Interviewer: I find it interesting what you say about responsibility. Would you think differently about it if the project were part of a developer?

00:34:12 – Sarah: Yeah, I would say so. (...). I do know the people that, for example, take care of who is moving in. And I do know them because they are basically my neighbours, so when something is off, you can just go to your neighbours. It feels more like they are one of us, and not another person.

In general, I feel more responsible. I really want to do everything right; for example, after I have done my laundry, I have to leave the washing machine door open. (...). I feel more responsible because we are responsible. It is not just one person, or one group, but we are all responsible for ensuring that everything works.

00:35:52 – Interviewer: Do you identify yourself more as a co-owner than co-user?

00:36:03 – Sarah: I feel like a co-user, but also a bit of a co-owner, more than in other forms of living without self-governance. But I would identify myself more as a co-user.

For me, people who really engage a lot in the CA feel superior. They are more the owners, and they do kind deserve it because they engage a lot. I feel like their opinion is more worth than mine.

00: 37:00 – 00:37:35: (…)

00:37:41 – Interviewer: Can you explain a bit more what you mean by that they feel superior?

00:37:50 – Sarah: I feel like I have to do something to earn living here. And I struggle with that, because I am not capable of doing so at the moment. And I am afraid that people will judge me for it. At the moment, I am also afraid to go to events, because there is a lot of talk about the CA there and I do not know much about it, because I am not up to date on the developments. And I do not really like to tell people that I live in the CA, because then they are going to ask me "which AG are you part of?". And then I have to tell them that I am not and that I am struggling. And during the general meetings where we make decisions, I feel like I am not allowed to give my opinion, because I do not know much about it. I do not feel like I am part of it, even though I live here.

00:40:05 – Interviewer: I do understand your feeling. The really raise the idea that everything is democratically voted. But if I hear you know, it doesn't feel that democratic?

00:40:26 – Sarah: No, indeed. The people who first lived here, do feel like a bit of celebrities because they have been in the project for so long. They did a lot for the CA. (…). They had a celebrity status and their opinion weight a lot.

00:41:40 – Interviewer: Do you have any idea or proposition how this issue could be solved?

00:41:51 – Sarah: I am not sure. The CA is all about "we don't have hierarchies", but I don't think it is realistic. I don't think it is realistic to have that much people and not have hierarchies. I do think it comes with problems, if you do not recognize it. I

don't think it is possible to have no hierarchy, because there are different groups with different knowledge. And I do think status in groups is a thing, and happens in big groups. So for me it is not about not having hierarchies, it is more about how to deal with them. But in order to be able to deal with it, we first have to recognize that we do have hierarchies. That is similar to my main critique, that the CA tries to be too idealistic and not realistic, and that comes with a lot issues.

00:43:21 – Interviewer: Do you think that if they would recognise this knowledge hierarchy a part of the problem could be solved? That it is acknowledged.

00:43:44 – Sarah: I do not know a lot about how they deal with hierarchies. There was once a workshop on it, but I was not part of it.

I do think that a big problem in the CA, and in society in general, is that people do not learn how to deal with their emotions and now themselves. And I do think that a lot of problems we have in the CA are because of that. I do like the quote "being an adult, means that you are learning to give yourself the things that you didn't get from your parents". And I do think that a lot of people are not able to do that. And I do think that a lot of conflicts come because people do not really know themselves and learned how to communicate their emotions. And also because, if you have a problem with me, it is mostly about you. And to kind of distance themselves from others and not take it personally. And to have compassion for others. (…). I think if we would have compassion, it would be a better world. And have more understanding and be more appreciative of one another.

00:46:36 – Interviewer: I think it also feasible on this topic. You earlier talked about the pressure you feel because you are right now not engaging in some of the CA things, but I do think that there should be empathy for that. It is sad to hear that you feel pressure of it.

00:47:02 – Sarah: Yeah. But there is also empathy, I talked with the clusterspeaker and she had a lot of empathy. She told me that I did not need to do anything and asked me what would help me to not feel that kind of pressure. It depends on the people.

For example, one of my flatmates, that is currently not living in my WG, is part of a group that does a lot for the CA. And I do feel like that they gossip a lot and also not talking appreciative of people. So my feeling partly comes from that certain group. And this group often talks about how hard it is for them because they do so much for the CA.

I talked with my clusterspeaker about it, and she told me that some people also just like to go into the world and say "we do so much for the CA, and it is so stressful what we do…" But it is a problem of them.

00:49:19 – 00:52:28: (…)

00:52:32 – Sarah: The CA is now talking a lot about how people can engage more and also about to deal with the fact that you are not able to go over your capacities. "The pressure to perform" is a general issue of the society but it definitely applies here as well.

My clusterspeaker told me that she thinks that when the CA needed to be ready for the move-in people had to go over their capacities in order to make the CA ready. There was so much to do and this mentality kind of stuck. And I do feel a pressure to perform.

00:54:50 – Interviewer: Another question about the spaces that are here and which aren't. Are there spaces that you miss, for example a more private space?

00:55:20 – Sarah: In general I would not say it is not a general space, but it is more a space where I am not confronted with CA-topics. Where I really can like shut off. And I do miss having a window that does not look right into the corridor.

Other than that, I miss having a garden that is not close to the street. I do not like our garden because it is so close to the street. I miss having a garden where I can just sit and be without so much stuff happening

00:56:44 – Interviewer: Yeah I understand. On each side of the façade there is something going on. Especially right now, with the new housing blocks that are being build. And what I was surprised about, this site is mostly for students, but there is no study place or library.

00:57:14 – Sarah: In the exam season, people study in the aula. But it would be nice to have a cosy study space. And maybe also a cosy common space, because I do not think that the aula is comfy. I do think it is kind of empty, but it is important for events.

I am not sure what will happen with the café.

00:58:08 – Interviewer: In the masterplan of the city, it was named as a community centre that is also open to the public.

00:58:18 – Sarah: Yeah, that is nice. But it is also directly located next to the street. And it will also going to have a total glass wall…

00:58:38 – Interviewer: It is interesting what you said about the issue you have with the windows directly located next to the hallway. If there was an internal staircase you would not have this problem.

00:58:59 – Sarah: Yeah, that is true. I used to live in the WG 0.5, in the corner. There you do not have a glass door. It did have some negative aspects, you are not that engaged in the project. However there are also positive one, no one can look directly into your living unit, there is like a barrier to go there.

00:59:20 – 01:00:32: (…)

01:00:32 – Interviewer: Compared to other type of housing, do you feel more freedom to do what you whatever you want?

01:00:51 – Sarah: Yes, kind of. I talked about it earlier. I feel more responsible, because there is not one person you have to obey to. It is kind of more relaxed. (…).

And about the freedom, there is freedom in some aspects and in others I am less free. I do feel more free to be kind of alive, to do stuff. In my last flat it was really quiet, and no one was talking to each other. And here I just go in and out someone else's flat and take for example spices. But another aspect is that you feel kind of more blocked. It depends on the people, but some opinions are not okay. (…).

01:06:52 – Interviewer: What would for you be the biggest risks for the long-time functioning of the CA? In ten years, what will be the working points of the CA?

01:07:10 – Sarah: I think the biggest risk is that it is a student residence and that the students are not here for a long time. And in my opinion there are a bit too many students. Is there not something like a critical mass of 150 persons? With a 150 people a group will still work because you can know each other, but more than that you do not know each other.

01:07:53 – Interviewer: And why do you think that the transience of student life is a big risk?

01:08:12 – Sarah: Because you need to have people with a certain depth of knowledge. And to pass that on, it is kind of difficult. The knowledge on how to do it and how it has been done.

01:09:16 – Interviewer: Okay, I think we have talked about a lot. Is there still something you want to share?

01:09:25 – Sarah: No, I do think I said a lot.

01:09:30 – Interviewer: Thank you so much for your help!

01:09:41 – Sarah: No problem, you are welcome!

Appendix D3: Klara, Highly involved CA resident (January 6, 2026)

(…)

00:58:00 – Interviewer: Okay, something besides the management part, living with a lot of persons in the shared flats, how do experience it? I really like it so far, but I have only been here for like a few days. Do you sometimes miss a private or quiet space in here?

00:58:24 – Klara: Yeah. I'm laughing because you're asking all the questions that we talk about so regularly. That is good, because you're asking the important questions. Yeah, I do, would be the easy answer. A bit more about the architecture. **Because everything is made out of glass (front doors) you can always see what everyone is doing, but also everyone can see what you are doing. And sometimes I miss the peace and quiet.**

And it is also about some sort of privacy. In the apartments themselves, our doors – I mean, you have probably noticed – let a lot of sound through. So it takes a lot of communication to get some silence. Which can sometimes be quite tiring and stressful. For example, when your housemates are making noise. They do not mean any harm; they are just living their lives. But if it is too loud for you at that moment, you have to keep communicating with each other. So it just takes a bit more effort.

And regarding the glass everywhere I live in the flat WG 1.13, you can also come with me later and have a look at it. Our apartment is very exposed to the outside world. I would say one of the most exposed apartments, because we are directly in line with the large bridge and the other bridge along the roof garden. And everyone from our row of apartments walks across both bridges, so basically everyone walks around us. We have a large glass door, so every time you sit in our living room or work in the kitchen, you are being watched by passersby. And we also have two extra windows, namely the windows of our living room, so every time I sit on the couch, people can see me. Sometimes I find that very difficult to deal with.

And you can't escape reality for a moment, because everyone is watching you. And if you get up at 1:00 PM one day, for whatever reason, and you're sitting there cooking in your pyjamas, everyone looks at you and walks past. Some people don't have a problem with that, and it might be a kind of 'me problem'. But it can definitely affect you.

01:03:01 – Interviewer: Yeah, I can really understand it. Yesterday evening, I was working at the dining table in this shared flat and I could see through the aula and I saw people like dancing. And for me it was nice to see that there is a lot of living here, but I can understand that you also sometimes need some me-time or private time. So I really understand the feeling.

And I find it also interesting what you said about the architecture. Do you have suggestions like what would help? For example, placing curtains can be an easy solution. Or another one, now all the doors are sliding doors, which is nice to have an open view, but would it be nicer to have a closed off space? Or maybe do you miss specific spaces? Or quiet study room or quiet library?

01:04:16 – Klara: I mean, a quiet library was planned for the old building, but then that room got occupied by things from the wood workshop. (…)

I always think that it's like very a two sided thing because the architecture is so open and you basically can't get anywhere here without people seeing you from the aula. It's very inviting and very social because you always meet people on the stairs and then you have a little chat. **When I am in my apartment and it is a good day and I am happy and not stressed, I love that so many people walk by. I always wave to my neighbours when they pass by, and they wave back. Everyone coming down the main staircase always glances inside, and if someone is there, they wave. Or in the summer, we have our window open and people come by for a chat. We even had a party on the bridge there, and our window turned into a bar.**

It can be such a good thing and it can be so stressful. I don't know if it would be good if you can close yourself off all the time. Maybe, it sounds very harsh, that's just the price you pay, that sometimes it isn't really that great. It can also turn a bad day into a good one when someone waves and smiles at you and is happy to see you. And if I could shut myself off so easily, I might just stay in that bad mood. Because the decision, whether people see me and wave, is not up to me, it can sometimes take a positive turn. Or it can make the situation worse. It just depends.

01:07:41 – Interviewer: I find the two perspectives very interesting. And as an architecture student, I'm really looking forward to think and design spaces that have a bit of both. Because I do think it's important to have some private time. It's a difficult question indeed, but also an interesting one.

Which spaces of the whole building do you use the most? And are there also spaces that you avoid, that you don't really like?

01:08:26 – Klara: I like my flat a lot. I also like to visit other flats just because it is the same, but so different. And it is so inspiring to see what people have made out of it. For example, this spice rack is very cool. I love visiting other flats and getting inspiration for my own. And it is so easy to implement in my own flat because it is the same.

If there is something going on in the aula I like to be there. I am not that often in the aula when there is nothing going on there. And sometimes I avoid the aula, because I am not in the mood for a plenary meeting. But then you can not get around the aula or into your flat without potentially someone seeing you and seeing that you are not at the plenary meeting. I think I got better with managing the emotions coming from that.

01:10:12 – Interviewer: Maybe one question about it, you said, what people can do with their flats they can choose. How do they start decorating/rebuilding their flats? For example, my roommate for this WG said that they just started building the mezzanines without asking. But is it in all the flats like that, can you just choose what you do with the shared spaces?

01:10:46 – Klara: We have a few rules to keep the building in good condition. For example, you are not allowed to drive screws of a certain length into the walls, because that would make the walls unstable. But if you stick to these rules, you can basically do anything. Many people also move and leave the things they made behind for the next residents, and if they do not like them, they can just take them away again. In my apartment, we have a swing. I love that swing. It has become so normal for me that I am afraid of the day I live somewhere without a swing

01:12:22 – Interviewer: Another part of it is like the maintenance of the whole building. So if I understand it correctly, there are different parts of the maintenance plan. There is the cleaning of the flats, and then the cleaning of the common rooms which is done by the clusters, and then you also have the different working groups. In your flat, so your own personal experience, are there rules about cleaning? Or is it more informal?

01:12:45 – Klara: In my flat, I have lived there from the beginning, we have a cleaning plan. But it is really more than that, it is more a household plan, because we also buy all our groceries together. So every week only one person buys the groceries for the whole flat and then next week someone else does that.

01:13:49 – Interviewer: Oh wow, you're like a little family.

01:13:52 – Klara: Yeah, we really are. (...). We also have weekly flat share plenaries and on one plenary we made a list of things we realised we need like on a weekly basis, for example oats and pasts. And now we text in our group chat "well, I will tomorrow at like 3:00 PM go and get the groceries. I will get everything from the list, but if you want to add something for yourself then just text me and I will get it". And that has worked very well for us.

01:15:06 – Interviewer: If there are some tensions within the flat, with your flatmates, is it easy to address these conflicts?

01:15:33 – Klara: We haven't really had a big conflict where everyone's screaming at each other. But I think that also stems from our weekly plenary session, because in there we have one part where we share what we liked about living with each other in that week, and one or more things what we didn't like. And it's a space where everyone can come forward and say something. It is very accepting and I think because we have this, we didn't really have any bigger problems.

We also have a shared calendar in the apartment, and we have a rule that everyone can put a time in the calendar when they need the apartment to themselves. For example, one of my previous housemates had online therapy on Thursdays and didn't want anyone in the apartment then, but she did want her own space where she felt comfortable. So on those days, we always left that time and went for a walk or did some grocery shopping. Or if someone is going through a very stressful period, you can put a time in the calendar when you need some silence.

01:17:56 – Interviewer: Wauw, I feel inspired by hearing how you're organising your flat.

01:17:58 – Klara: It feels so normal to me.

01:18:05 – Interviewer: In our previous conversation in the aula, you said that after graduation, you are thinking what you should do next (staying in the CA or not)? What are the main things that keep you here and things that convince you to do something else?

01:18:38 – Klara: Do you mean in Heidelberg or in the CA?

01:18:42 – Interviewer: I mean the CA like. I can understand that, for example, the self management part of it is very time consuming or that you want to do another degree while staying somewhere else.

01:19:02 – Klara: I think the community keeps me here. There are always people around. With most of the people I'm not in a very deep relationship or friendship, but you can

always talk to them and have a have a chat when you meet them on the stairs or somewhere else.

There are also a lot of events happening all the time, that can be stressful, but mostly it's just very cool to have such a space as the aula. There always nice events, for example, an author reading their book to you or a Greek band playing for you.

And to be in contact with so many people from so many different realities than my own. That I like as well. And I think that's something you can't get anywhere else so easily. I have still a lot of learning opportunities I haven't used yet, there are many parts of this project, that I still want to know more about how it works, like the whole financial thing. I know how it works on a on a very basic level, but there are people managing that on a daily basis. And I'm always like, how do you do it? How does it work?

I think that this place is enormously beneficial for your development in a certain phase of life, whereas in other phases it can be very stressful. And I think that I am now entering a phase of my life where it is becoming too stressful to continue living here. So that prevents me from staying here any longer

01:22:20 – Interviewer: I understand, I think this way of living is like ideal for student housing and like in the stage of when you're studying. But I can understand when you're getting older that you maybe want to use what you've learned on your own.

Maybe something you said about living with people from different backgrounds and like coming in contact with them. Are there a lot of students living here that are not German?

01:22:55 – Klara: We have some internationals, I mean, they are minority in in the CA, but they are there. Some of them in the new building, some of them in the old building.

01:23:16 – Interviewer: And all the plenaries and working group meetings are in German? Do the internationals speak German?

01:23:21 – Klara: Yeah or we do whisper translations for them. I think that is also a part that's not very inviting to internationals. The fact that so much of our communication is in German. (…) During all of our big, annual meetings (two in a year), where almost everyone gets together, we do it in German, but we have whisper translators for every person that needs a translation and also the slides come in English.

I mean, when I was in the Belegium, we had this bilingual situation there and we settled on doing one meeting in German and doing a whisper translation for the English speaking person. And the next meeting in English and doing a translation for the German speaking person.

01:25:05 – Interviewer: It's very nice that you are actively thinking about it and finding a solution for both parties.

01:25:18 – Klara: Yeah, we had to find a solution and I think that was the most practical we can do. And we also did all the messages in our group chat in German and in English. It wasn't possible any other way because there was the language barrier.

01:26:00 – Interviewer: Do you sometimes miss a bit of an authority in here? For example when there is a conflict about noise from the neighbouring flat. So do you sometimes miss that there is not like one party that you can address your problem with, or is it something that you don't miss in here?

01:26:38 – Klara: Oh, I missed that so much in the first few months or the first year I was working in this project group. How is there not like one person you can go to? But at some point I just didn't miss it anymore, because it's just another mode of communication and solving conflicts. And if everyone participates in that mode, it gets easier. But it's definitely something you have to learn while living here.

And we don't have like a big authority figure. Also the people we elect to lead the GmbH or the other committees, are more part of a formal process we have to do to comply with German law. And also to have some commitment from people in these committees because they're so essential to our project, but they don't come with that much authority. These people are in these committees, but they're just normal people in the group.

I do think though that we have hierarchies stemming from knowledge. (...).. I think that we absolutely have informal hierarchies, because there are people who know much more than others. And naturally, they propose many of the decisions we make, because they have the knowledge. Especially for example, the finance group, nobody else in the CA has as much knowledge in the finance field of this project as they do. And it's sometimes so complex and they try to explain it to you or do extra rounds where they explain it for everyone. However, it remains a proposal that no one will disagree with, because no one else has the knowledge.

01:30:31 – Interviewer: In the long term, what do you think are the biggest risks of CA? What do you think are the main working points that we have to keep in mind in order to keep this sustainable way of living and self management?

01:30:50 – Klara: One year ago the MHS did their general meeting with the all the projects over Germany here, because we are one of the biggest projects and we have a big room and there are a lot of other projects in Heidelberg where people can sleep during that time.

And that was a very exciting weekend, because you meet so many other people from so many other housing projects and all of different sizes, colours, and political orientations. I mean there are not really any right wing housing projects in there. They're all basically like centre or left wing, but still different all in their ways. I met an older person and he is also very active in the MHS-structure and lives in housing projects for a big part of his life and he always said that housing projects either fail because of conflict or because of financial difficulties. And I would stand by that statement also for the CA. Because the financing is always a topic here. I mean, it's a very expensive project of a few millions. So that will be a topic for the next few years and we are very dependent on people believing in us and people seeing the potential in the project and investing in the project with direct loans. And we will be dependent on that in the future.

And also conflict, because conflict can have an effect on how we present ourselves to the outside. If people think of us as a group with a lot of conflicts and without the ability to manage themselves. Then they won't invest in this project. So it's very essential for us to keep being a good functioning group and that's difficult enough.

We also come from a summer that was very high in in conflict and CA-public. It had very negative effects on basically everyone here, because people were involved even if they weren't personally involved, because we care about this and we want this to work, but it can only work if we're fine with each other in the sense that we can work with each other.

We are also trying to find a balance between working together and building our community, but I do not think we have achieved that yet. Sometimes people do not

come to these community activities because they say: "Oh, I already have so much work to do for the CA, I can not make time for this." As a result, the community does not get priority, but the work does. And I know that is necessary, but it is also dangerous, because if people associate the CA, their living environment, only with the work they have to do for self-governance, that can become frustrating. But if we only build our community and do not work on the very important, urgent problems, then we are not functioning either. So I think we still need to find a balance, and I hope that we will find it someday, or at least achieve some kind of balance. Because right now, the emphasis is more on the work, and that is very frustrating for some people. And it can be a source of conflict.

And you asked me earlier what is something that motivates people and something that demotivates people. And I think that is part of it, like the attitude. Some people portray in the project that everyone has to work, because they say “I study too and I work for the CA for many hours, so why can't you?” Yeah, sometimes it can get confrontational and it think that demotivates people. But we also have a lot of tasks that require people to be committed and to work on something for a long time. And we have a lot less tasks that are very easy and you can do and then do another task, so you have to be committed to one group to be helpful in most cases. And I think some people don't have the time for that commitment to an invest so many hours or they don't want to commit to one group. Or they have other responsibilities in their lives, which is also very fair in the phase we're living in.

And on the other hand, the community can motivate people to get involved or to stay involved if your working group has good community activities and you feel like that's your friend group you're working with, then you're obviously more invested and committed because you don't want to let your friends down and you also enjoy working in this group in the first place.

01:38:52 – Interviewer: It was really, really, really interesting for me. Thank you so much. I don't know if there is anything left that you were thinking of that I haven't asked or that you haven't talked about.

01:39:19 – Klara: No, I can not think of anything right now.

01:39: 23 – Interviewer: If you would think of something, I will still be around for another week, so you can always ask! Thank you so much!

01:39:26 – Klara: You're welcome! It is so cool what you do, about us and for us, it should be done more!

Appendix D4: Stefan Rees, Urban planner, and Felix Wohlfart, IBA architect (January 7, 2026)

00:00:00 – Stefan: The US Army left Heidelberg in 2013 and the hospital was a second area were we made a planning. There was an urban planning competition. (…). The masterplan consists of mostly housing, a green space and narrow streets. The idea was that there was no car traffic in the area. There would also only be parking on the perimeter of the area.

So that was the beginning in 2014, so it started with a competition. It was at that time that the Collegium Academicum (CA) came to the town of Heidelberg with the idea of a new project for student housing.

In the local government it was a lot discussed, because the old CA was on the left side and there were demonstration and protests. That is why not everybody in the town government was very happy with the idea of a new CA. But they made us a very long list with what they wanted to do and their new ideas. The text is very interesting because it combines the history of CA and the future of it.

00:02:30 – Felix: There is also a big difference between the CA in the 60s-70s and the new CA, right?

00:02:37 – Stefan: Yeah, there is a big difference in formal terms between the old and new CA. It was a project from the university. And nowadays it is foreign, like a private society.

00:02:58 – Interviewer: Yeah, I now stay there at the CA. It's very nice to see, but it's indeed a community on themselves. And I talked to the neighbours and I walked through the city to see like the kind of housing that there was around it. And the neighbours have not a lot of contact with them except when there are big conferences in the aula of CA.

00:03:10 - 00:05:12: (…)

00:05:12 – Stefan: The city planning office then commissioned a feasibility study for the existing building. In 2015, the idea was to put CA in the existing building, because then there was no idea about the size of the project. Then there would have been 31 rooms. Nowadays it is around 260 people.

After the feasibility study IBA came. And then the idea came to build a new building next to the old one. After that decision the masterplan got adapted.

00:06:32 – Interviewer: How did the CA became an IBA-project?

00:06:33 – Felix: I came in the IBA-project in 2018 and my job was to have a look on the projects under construction, so also at CA. Ca had at that time an architect (It was the same architect for the whole site, the architect that did the feasibility study). **The IBA helped CA to find the best fitting architect. (...). The IBA organised a workshop with 4 architects to find the right one and they chose Hans Drexler (DGJ Architects), because he is very experienced in timber building, affordable housing and flexible design. I helped them to overwin the difficulties in the building phase.**

00:07:30 - 00:09:50: (…)

00:09:50 – Interviewer: My first question is about the US hospital site. Was the main idea that the plot could give extra housing?

00:10:19 - Stefan

We have four reconversion sites and there are different ideas for the sites.

00:11:30 – Felix: It was not the idea at the beginning that something like the CA took place on the hospital site. It was an IBA-project and they were looking for a building ground. They asked the city where can we find a cheap building ground, but that does not exist in Heidelberg. And the US Hospital site was one of the best possibilities, so it was not part of the project. Was the masterplan then already clear?

00:12:20 – Stefan: The masterplan was already ready, but we changed it again for the CA. Most of the plots on the side were meant for GGH (housing company of the state). Some plots had a different goal, for example the Montessori school.

00:12:54 – 00:13:13: (…)

00:13:14 – Stefan: The aim was to create affordable flats. And the CA fitted in that concept. And we were lucky that such an interesting project could take place on this site. And together with the IBA the process had highs and downs. For example, the parking spaces were a problem. In Germany for every building you have to build a parking space, so for each unit a parking space. And CA was a special project, not a normal housing project. So we discussed for a very long time how many parking spaces there had to be build. But they did not want to build any parking spaces because they say that their customers are all students, so that the CA does not need parking spaces. At the end, we marked in the planning parking spaces, but they have never been build. (…). So this was one of the problems when the different parties did not understood each other. The role of the IBA was very important in there to make it work.

00:15:49 – Interview: And did the CA together with the IBA came to the city to propose their idea? Or came the IBA later?

00:15:59 – Felix: The IBA and the CA found each other. They wanted to be an IBA project. With IBA they dealt with the city and wanted to find a building plot.

00:16:55 – Stefan: Yes, they first came to the city office with the question for a building plot and the city did then the feasibility study. After that IBA came into the game and then came the idea of building a new building. So the idea became bigger and bigger. (…)

00:17:19 – Felix: They first only wanted to have the old building, because building a new one seemed to much for them. (…)

00:17:51 – Stefan: Yes indeed, and then the new building came first and the renovation of the old one came later. (…)

00:18:18 – Interview: How did the IBA supported the CA? Had they an advising role or also financial?

00:18:24 – Felix: Not a lot of financial help, because we had a very low budget, so not for building invest. There was only enough money for little support (20.000-50.000 euro/year). And the planning itself was over 100.000 euro.

So we mostly support them in their conversations with the city, to find an architect, during the building process, the discussions with the architects and technicians…

We helped them with the difficulties during construction (for example, the cost that kept increasing).

00:19:54 – Stefan: One of the problems was that the CA consisted of very young, nice, but unexperienced people. But they really wanted to persuade this concept.

Another problem was that a large part of the local government wanted to plan the master plan "their way" and applied many rules. The CA wanted to approach it differently. They wanted to build affordable housing for students and paid no attention to those rules. But together with the IBA, we found good solutions to these problems.

00:21:24 – Interviewer: That's something I am still really shocked to see. How is it possible that a group of 20 students were able to build like multi-millions euro project?

00:21:42 – Stefan: Students with no money are doing a project of 20 million years. It's very rare indeed. But the two main people in this project were really dedicated to succeed this project.

00:22:08 – Interviewer: Do you think that it would have been possible without the IBA? Because I have the feeling that they give a lot of credibility to the students and the project.

00:22:19 – Felix: Not in this way. Maybe they could have found their own way. I think it would have not been possible to find this kind of architect without the IBA. But they were very professional in their non-professional way, because of their idealistically behaviour. They wanted to reach their aim and spend a lot of time in it. They act more professional than in a professional company.

00:23:30 – Stefan: They learned a lot of the process. First they had no idea of building and the problems that come with it. (…) There was a woman and a men and to me they seemed the leaders of the project. The men made a very strong proposal for the photovoltaic panels and he send it to the government and to us. It was because of this behaviour that they were able to make it happen. But not everyone loved them. (…)

00:25:38 – Interviewer: How was it received by the neighbourhood that there was suddenly a student residence at the US Hospital site?

00:25:48 – Stefan: At that time there was not really a neighbourhood. Except of the houses in the street in the north and west. And we had a very long process with this neighbours. We planned 10 evening discussion with them and we talked with them about the masterplan.

The CA was not there during these discussions. It was about the housing and parking areas. Sometimes it is a positive project if there are not too many neighbourhoods.

00:26:56 – Interviewer: And I am also interested in the neighbourhood of Rohrbach itself. Because when I walked through it, I had the feeling that there is mostly family and social housing here. Where is the student population located in Heidelberg?

00:27:17 – Felix: The students of the CA wanted to have a location more in the inner city, but there was no place for that and they also searched for something low-priced. They looked at Bahnstadt but that was not possible. Also for their mobility concept was the US hospital site not a good choice, but that was the only place the city could offer them for a good price.

00:27:53 – Stefan: Most of the universities are in Neuenheim and there is most of the student housing. In Neuenheim you really feel a student area, because Studierendenwerk has a lot of tall buildings there (student residences of the university).

And then you also have student residences in Bergheim and Altstadt. Here is more spread out over these areas, no concentration such as Neuenheim. Mostly students rent a flat and make a *wohngemeinschaft* of it. So the CA with 260 students is new for Heidelberg.

00:29:23 – Interviewer: I heard that the prices for student housing are increasing a lot.

00:29:30 – Felix: Yeah, indeed. That is a big problem.

00:30:15 – Stefan: In Bahnstadt there are now student rooms from commercial firms for prices between 600 and 900 euros per month for 12 square metre rooms with collective spaces. The firm also gives the opportunity to buy these flat for 120.000 euros, so this is for rich people. But normally it is about €500/month for one room in a *wohngemeinschaft*.

00:33:53 – Interviewer: What are the reasons for the increasing student housing prices?

00:34:20 – Stefan: We have 30.000 students that are staying in Heidelberg. And there are 150.000 inhabitants. So there is simply not enough space for everyone. The prices for all of our housing are increased in the last 10 years, and it became very expensive. So a project like the Collegium Academicum is a "drop on the hot stone", but it is good and the best solution.

The city is busy with organising the shortage of housing for normal people. So the student housing is separately organised from that by the Studierendenwerk.

00:35:41 – Felix: It is a special project. It is not only low price, they have their own society and pedagogical understanding. They want a connection with school. They want to educate not only in an academic way. They want also to help the kids from school to help them find the right way, they call it orientation year. So it is more than low pricing. There is also ecological understanding, they want to use as less area as possible and energy as possible.

00:36:59 – Stefan: And it is not only housing. You have to integrate you in the whole process when you are a resident in the CA. (…) In a normal *wohngemeinschaft* there are a lot of discussions, but in the CA it is much more.

00:37:48 – Felix: Yes, indeed. But they are well organized. In the building process, it was sometimes difficult because you do not have one person to talk to but you have 10 persons. But every person has a special knowledge. And the democratic way of making decisions worked very well, so in their own way they are very professional.

00:38:25 – Interviewer: If the concept of the CA, with adaptations to the local context, would be transferred to other places, what would be the main conditions that have to be there in order to succeed?

00:38:36 – Felix: You need the people! It is grassroot development. They work with the *Mietshauser Syndikat*. The individuals do not own the building but have a democratic way of organizing the building. (…)

00:40:00 – Stefan: The first part is that you need money. And then you indeed need people that do everything without getting anything in return. I have a lot of respect for the founders. They did not get anything in return, they did it for their idealistic beliefs. However, they did not get any money back, but they learned a lot of the process of setting up such an initiative.

00:40:49 – Interviewer: How much participation was involved in the design process?

00:41:32 – Felix: In the beginning not all the students who are now living there could give their opinion, only the group of initiators did. One side the architect was specialized in projects like this, with building groups. On the other side it was a very difficult process to discuss everything. There were constantly changes, for example the cost was constantly increasing (ex. fire protection needed to be added at the end, only wooden connection nothing with metal). So it was very difficult but at the end it worked.

00:43:10 – Interviewer: And now in the old building there is also a place for families, was this an idea from the city?

00:43:30 – Felix: No, this was an idea of the CA. And they chose a local architect for this building. The work with Hans Drexler was very difficult, because he is more a designing architect with innovative development. And the old building need to be cheaper and easier.

00:44:20 – 00:45:03: (…)

00:45:10 – Interviewer: You talked earlier about the *Miethauser Syndikat*, what do you think are the strengths of the two shareholders system?

00:45:32 – Felix: It works for the long-term.

00:45:55 – Stefan: There are different projects in Heidelberg that are supported by the MHS. In Südstadt, the other conversion site, there are three projects there that are managed by the residents and helped by the MHS. It is a very good idea for low cost buildings. (…). Sometimes there are difficulties in the process with the town, because some people of the town are a bit conservative and not open for new ideas. I think however that it is a very good idea to provide affordable housing.

00:47:38 – Felix: But it is not a solution for the housing problem. Because it is for special kind of people and it is not possible to build a lot of different CA's. Especially because the CA has very low rent because it gets a lot of public and private money, so you can not do this for a lot of different projects in Heidelberg. If you would calculate the rent of the flats without "the money for free" then the flats would be much more expensive. So it is not the normal price.

00:49:22 – Interviewer: How did the neighbourhood get to know the CA?

00:49:40 – Felix: We worked together. The IBA has a public. We helped them to get them more public and to get them better known. But they did also a lot by themselves. (…)

00:52:10 – Interviewer: What have you both learned from the process with the CA? Would you be open to assist a similar project again (with or without the similar financial support)?

00:52:14 – Stefan: The city has a lot of ongoing self-managed housing projects, but not for students. I think we were open from the beginning. It is sometimes difficult to work with

these persons, because they sometimes wanted everything their way and did not listen to the other sides. I think it is a learning process to understand that not everything can be done and that both sides (CA and the city) have a meaningful opinion on it.

00:53:43 – Felix: But private investors are also complicated in their way. They have power and money. (…). I learned a lot of them to be able to do it in another way and to believe in their thing and do everything to reach it. Their organisation was amazing, every person had their special knowledge (ex. Financial topic). So every person had their experience and knowledge about a topic.

00:55:12 – Stefan: But for the government it is sometimes stressful because it is not the normal way of doing things. It worked for the CA and the other cooperative projects, because they do good things for people. From the side of the government we learned to deal with such projects (and are now doing several ones in Heidelberg). Some architects are not open for this kind of self-organised projects because sometimes you have to be more a therapist than an architect.

00:57:09 – Interviewer: An extra question about the reconversion sites. There are four right?

00:57:46 – Stefan: Yes, you also have the HIP village. This is the technological part.

00:57:59 – Interviewer: And in the Patrick Henry Village is nowadays also a refugee camp?

00:58:10 – Stefan: Yes indeed, that is a problem for the reconversion of the site. Half of this site is occupied by refugees. Refugees directly come to this village. And it is a problem because the refugee camp is in the middle, so you can only design the southern part of the village. Another problem is that the north of the plot is not connected to the main roads, so mobility is very bad from there. The idea is that we are first going to rebuild the northern part of the village and replace the refugees to this part. Afterwards we can plan the other big part in the south. But it will take 4-5 years. Another problem, same as for the other sites, that we do not own this plot. The plots are owned by BImA. So when we want to decide something we have to find a compromise with them. (…).

00:59:55 – Interviewer: And for the US Hospital site the CA was not part of the masterplan?

01:00:12 – Stefan: Yes, we did the masterplan. We developed the green and open areas. There is municipal housing and some plots are sold to private developers. (…). There were competitions for these smaller plots. There is a garage. There also is a school for children with a disability, called *Lebenshilfe*. (…).

And the mobility plan is as followed: the original bus stops are taking into account and the main idea is that there is no car traffic on the site. They did not want garages in the plots of the middle of the site. So only bikers and pedestrians in the site.

A current problem is a private investors wants to implement underground parking for their plots, but this was not part of the initial idea. The investor said that he can not sell it without parking lot, because the price range is 8000 – 9000 euros/m^2.

01:04:00 – Interviewer: The main idea of providing affordable housing, was it also implemented for the plots of the private investors?

01:04:20 – Stefan: The idea is that there is mixed housing. So 40% of each building should be affordable (in total 40% of the total site).

01:05:15 – Felix: It is possible to build some buildings without affordable housing but then there should be extra affordable flats elsewhere on the plot. So the central idea is that they wanted mixed housing.

01:05:43 – Interviewer: Is there also a mix in the housing around the US Hospital site in Rohrbach?

01:05:56 – Stefan: It is mixed. Hasenleiser is one of the poorer areas in Heidelberg. Low-income families and low housing prices. North and east of the Hospital site are mostly family houses.

In Hasenleiser there are more higher buildings. There is also for example a building that has 150 owners, there is not a company that owns it. So it is a different kind of housing. The problem is that no one is responsible for the building. And there is a lot of change of residents.

01:07:15 – Felix: Yeah, they do not have the money to care for the building.

01:07:30 – Stefan: This was the goal of the US Hospital site, to have mixed housing, with higher and lower priced housing units. (…)

01:09:28 – Interviewer: When the CA was developed in 2013, was the main driver then affordability as well?

01:09:32 – Felix: Yes, it was part of the financial plan. If the rents of the room where lower than 300 euros they get money (grants/subsidies). Besides the affordability, ecologically and self-governance were main ideas. (…)

01:12:29 – Interviewer: One of the issues that some have is that they experience a lack of privacy, with the amount of windows and the external hallways.

01:12:39 – Felix: If you want to have less space to reach the flat, the external hallways is the most efficient way to reach the flats. For example, for a housing company with non-students this design is not thinkable. But for students it is not a problem.

01:13:33 – Stefan: You have to be very open-minded if you want to live there. Because everyone sees everyone and your private space is very compact. But that is a concept, they have to speak with each other and organise it with each other. For me personally, living there would be very stressful. On the other hand you get a cheap room and a community feeling.

01:14:54 – Felix: It is not an answer for everyone but it shows the possibilities.

01:15:10 – Stefan: I find it interesting that the students learned so much during the process, example making their own furniture. This is a big advantage of self-organisation.

01:15:20 – Interviewer: Yes, that is indeed a fantastic benefit! Thank you very much for your time and valuable insights!