

Reasons the petition for Affordable Housing and the Financing of the Student Union – So that studying actually succeeds!

From the dormitory council conference of the dormitory councils from the Studierendenwerk Hamburg

In 1921, students, teachers and other stakeholders fought for a social association to open up higher education to the public; the forerunner of today's Studierendenwerk. And still today, as a public institution, the socio-political mission of the Studierendenwerk is to realise the right to (higher) education, as laid down in the Grundgesetz through appropriate social conditions. In this sense, the Studierendenwerk is not a profit-oriented enterprise, but a partially democratic institution. In addition to the income from rent, canteen prices and semester fees, the Studierendenwerk is financed by public municipal funds. In order to truly fulfill the socio-political mission of providing good living and studying conditions for all public funding must be significantly increased.

In the "Statute for Self-Administration in Residence Halls of the Studierendenwerk Hamburg of 16.04.2008", the halls of residence are described as follows: "The houses are international and thus contribute to internationalisation in the Hamburg higher education area. [...] The Studierendenwerk promotes communication, integration and good coexistence. The cooperative collaboration with representatives of the students and universities in the committees contributes to this." Accordingly, the halls of residence are not comparable to flats on the open market. The democratic self-administration of the houses enables intercultural and interdisciplinary exchange, whereby the halls of residence fulfil the function of an educational institution. Important competences for living together democratically are acquired, which cannot be acquired when attending courses, e.g. the ability to deal with conflict and responsibility for the house community.

The refectories are also important places in this sense. In addition to the possibility of having an inexpensive and healthy meal locally at the various study locations, the refectories are also places for meeting, exchanging ideas and spending time outside of lectures. Therefore, it is necessary to extend the meal and opening hours and to offer breakfast and dinner.

In the halls of residence, the common rooms are an important part of making living together a success! The statutes of the Studierendenwerk state that: "Admission to a student residence is intended to create social conditions for studying, academic work and living together. The common rooms are available for academic work, discussions, events and leisure activities".

Due to the increasing densification of existing housing complexes to create new dormitory places, more and more common rooms are being lost. However, the common rooms are enormously important for living together in the halls of residence, so that events can be organised and the intercultural exchange that is talked about in the statute of the STW can take place. In this sense, sufficient space for joint cultural activities (such as sports halls, learning rooms, stages, workshops, music rooms, meeting places), etc. should also be planned for new halls of residence. The redensification to the detriment of common spaces in student halls of residence must stop immediately.

Instead, enough new halls of residence must be built and existing buildings must be converted into halls of residence. Students must be able to pay for affordable housing in Hamburg and not be forced to live in overpriced shared flats, commercial housing complexes or with their parents until the end of their studies. This is also essential in order to be able to study independently of family possibilities and conforming expectations. In perspective, the "Düsseldorfer Wohnheimplan" of 1958 is an ambitious target, according to which at least 30% of all students should be provided with a place in a hall of

residence by the Studierendenwerk. Currently, this is only the case for around 5.9% (winter semester 18/19) in Hamburg. The construction of further halls of residence also relieves the free housing market.

However, not only more dormitory places are needed, but also affordable ones. All halls of residence must also be affordable for financially disadvantaged students and be geared to their financial possibilities, without having to work disproportionately hard alongside their studies. That's why the last rent increase of 2022 must be reversed immediately and rents must be reduced to a socially acceptable level in the medium term.

The Studierendenwerk also has counselling centres, such as the "Counselling Centre for Social & International Affairs – BeSI". There, questions and problems regarding the social situation (financial support options, housing, special hurdles for international students, etc.) can be discussed. In view of the high demand for counselling, the support of the BeSis must be expanded by more staff members and should be oriented towards understanding the current situation as a problem that needs to be changed and not to place the blame on the individual person.

Due to the serious circumstances, such as war-related worries and fears, financial burdens and stressful study examination workload, in addition to the psychological counselling services at the universities, a central professional psychological and socio-pedagogical support service should also be introduced in the Studierendenwerk, which advises the dormitory councillors and protectors on a socially cooperative health-promoting culture in the dormitories.

Healthy living also includes maintaining hygiene, such as clean clothes. In October 2022, washing machine prices in the halls of residence were increased from €2 to €3 and dryer prices from €1.20 to €2. The washing machines are to be operated by the Studierendenwerk itself and not by a private, profit-oriented company. This will reduce costs in the long term. Residents should be able to do their laundry at low cost. In addition to the reduction of the user fee, quotas or credits for at least a sufficient number of free washes (at least once a week) should be available for all residents.

The implementation of good study conditions is currently failing due to the political will of the Hamburg Senate and its financial policy. Companies are currently making record profits and keeping them for themselves. The wealth created by the population should be used for social development. To create good conditions in education and health care, peace, sustainability and social justice. Investing in universities and students is an investment in the future. There is obviously enough money, also in Hamburg.

In order for the Studierendenwerk Hamburg to be able to fulfil its task, there must be funding from the Hamburg Senate so that all of our demands mentioned above can be met!