

## *University Halls of Residence: Welcoming, Interculturality and Belonging*

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### **Abstract**

In this paper, we argue for the strategic role of university halls of residence in welcoming students. We emphasize the added importance of a comprehensive welcome for international students, given their need to build a support network in the destination country to prosper in their studies and adapt to the new reality. Furthermore, we found that the interaction between local and international students is beneficial for both groups. We consider the university halls of residence as an extension of the university environment, which, as such, should reflect the concern for the student's well-being and exceed the institution's welcoming and integration practices. At the same time, the residences should exude a homeliness rather than an institutional atmosphere. Based on the benchmarking of five different student housing facilities within the European context, in Dublin, Toulouse, Paris, Macerata, and Bologna, we list the best practices for student welcoming in university residences. Research findings point to the need for convivial environments in the residences; promotion of integration initiatives among students; staff who speak an alternative language to the local one, usually English; attentive management; positive information and communication strategies, extensive online service and information, student inclusion and participation in residence life.

Keywords: University Halls of Residence, Student Well-Being, International Student Support, Design for Social Innovation, Best Practices in Student Welcoming

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## Introduction

Higher education institutions from all continents are welcoming unprecedented numbers of international students (Nada & Araújo, 2019:1591) who face added difficulty adapting to the university experience in a different language. Among the welcoming strategies adopted by universities is the housing available to their students, in different formats, including halls of residence. Although university courses sometimes adopt English as an international language inside classrooms, the residence staff is not necessarily prepared to communicate with the international students.

Considering the current housing crisis faced by different countries around the globe, there is an increased importance on university housing given students' difficulty in finding and paying for suitable accommodation in the private market, either due to financial restraints, inflated prices, availability, environments suitability for academic success or document bureaucracy.

Given the substantial impact housing has on student's educational performance and personal development, there is a vast number of studies regarding student accommodation carried out all over the world, such as in Finland (Karna & Julin, 2015), Norway (Thomsen, 2007), United Kingdom (Vytņiorgu et al., 2023), United States (Safizadeh, 2023; Foste & Irwin, 2023), Hong Kong (Hou, Lai & Edwards, 2020), Malaysia (Ulyani, Nor Aini & Zulkifli, 2011), Saudi Arabia (Hassanain, 2008), Nigeria (Adewunmi et al., 2011), Ghana (Nimako & Bondinuba, 2012), Brazil (Garrido & Mercure, 2013), and others.

Dominant perspective regarding student residence halls centers them as valuable sites for learning about and interacting across differences (Foste & Irwin, 2023:741) seeing student housing not merely as a living space but as a series of facilities to enable students to adapt to campus life (Hou, Lai & Edwards, 2020; Ulyani, Nor Aini & Zulkifli, 2011; Adewunmi et al., 2011). As stated by Hassanain (2008:212-4) campus housing is an integral component of the university and its contribution to improving the performance of students should not be underestimated, as it plays a major role in supporting three important goals: helping students attain intellectual competence, enliven personal character and aid in forming patterns of behavior, thought and imagination.

On the other hand, negative aspects of life inside student housing have been investigated lately, shedding light in dense problems of power dynamics regarding interracial relations, such as microaggressions, racism and black loneliness (Foste & Irwin, 2023; Hotchkins & Dancy (2017); Howard & Kerr (2019)) and intercultural exchanges such as cultural shock, loneliness, physical, psychological, and social decline (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011; Mori, 2000; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004). In Howard and Kerr's (2019) study they stated that "positioning residence halls as home can minimize how residence halls function as sites of oppression and harm, especially for minoritized students".

Historically, student housing has been a place that encourages students to build community networks (McCartney & Rosenvasser, 2023:15), however in the last years there has been a significant growth in the need for student housing which led to a search for other accommodation solutions, including small cells of convivence such as apartments. In contrast, that presents a different atmosphere to students where "increasingly privatized living units can create feelings of isolation that can negatively affect grade point average and deter social

connection, possible friendship, and overall well-being” (McCartney & Rosenvasser, 2023:15).

That is in accordance with Foste and Irwin’s (2023:735) description of campus residence halls as “consequential spaces where students learn, build relationships, study, eat, and rest”, and when adequately planned these residential facilities can foster mutual interests and desirable educational outcomes (Hassanain, 2008:212).

The architectural aspect of the house and context are important for student housing satisfaction and play an important role in terms of accepting or not a student residence as a home (Thomsen, 2007:593). Also, the design and configuration of the living space can significantly affect the social condition of students (Safizadeh, 2023), since the chance for social interaction increases within circulation spaces (Huang, 2006). Convivial spaces like kitchens, laundry rooms, and common areas are also keen to promote social interaction, be them intentional or unintentional – or active and passive, as defined by Safizadeh (2023:3). As stated by the author “Student residences are among the most critical facilities to design, which should significantly consider the links between circulation spaces’ visibility, spatial complexity, anticipated wayfinding difficulties, and visual appeal” (Safizadeh, 2023:16).

Therefore, it is important to consider the strategic role of university housing both for universities and for the development of students and the upbringing of citizens. To maximize this opportunity, it is necessary to think of student housing as a complex ecosystem and offer students more than just a roof and a bed. This paper focus on university halls of residence and their potential to welcome and promote a sense of belonging in their inhabitants. The aim is to list the best welcoming practices in university residences based on the benchmarking analysis of five residences in the European context, supported by existing literature on the theme.

### **Theoretical Framing: Welcoming, Belonging, and Emotional Security**

We commonly accept one of the goals of student residences is to create a community and sense of belonging in its residents. Although many institutions administratively perceive student halls of residence as a means to foster support to its students, some tend to believe community and belonging will form themselves (Foste & Irwin, 2023) by students’ action and without any extra endeavor from the University side besides the availability of space. It is important to remember that “not all students arrive to campus with positive associations with the word home, and it is dishonest for administrators to assume that all students have unfettered access to safety, comfort, and refuge within residence halls” (Howard & Kerr, 2019).

In this sense, studies encourage universities to build communities, practices, and systems that are inclusive, safe, and responsive to student’s needs (Howard & Kerr, 2019), where staff consider home and community as aspirations rather than presumed realities and both students and staff can reflect and self-define on their meaning, or potential meaning, and what would be required for residence halls to be home for students (Foste & Irwin, 2023:763).

Paradoxically university residences are perceived both as a “home away from home” that can provide comfort, safety, and rest after a long day, and as a place for growth and learning where students are exposed to differences and must learn to find a middle ground to co-exist with different people, representing a great learning opportunity for life (Foste & Irwin, 2023).

That indicates that when students arrive at the residence they still face uncomfortable situations and require an effort to navigate, with the possible outcome of learning and growth, which showcase common spaces, and even private spaces in cases of shared bedrooms do not offer rest and relief and are not necessarily refugees or sanctuaries from other aspects of student life.

Although residence halls are an extension of university they should not be perceived as such if the goal is to instill a feeling of home in its inhabitants. In Thomsen's (2007:594) study regarding student housing in Norway, the author found that "a perceived institutional character of accommodation inhibits the generation of a feeling of home" and "buildings expressing an institutional character caused students to be less appreciative of these buildings than buildings not perceived as institutional". Thomsen (2007:593) also showed that students' desire to redecorate their space is usually in conflict with the administration's interest in keeping standardized conditions and low expenses, which results in 'impermanent' changes of personalization (eg.: posters) to communicate self-identity. In addition, the author found that the need for personalization was low when the students appreciated the apartment's design and its furnishings (Thomsen, 2007:593).

There must exist a middle ground between none and excessive administrative intervention from universities in their halls of residence. Foste and Irwin (2023) showed in their study how tolerance to any kind of self-expression inside the residence can generate severe problems such as students feeling unsafe inside their halls and bedrooms, being targeted, or commonly hearing racist expressions, and being forced to self-evict from their bedrooms to avoid escalating conflict with roommates and their colleagues.

As Vytنيorgu et. al, (2023:6) say, "Students are never simply 'students'" – they are from a specific locality, university, and background with their personal narrative environments "that foster emotional experiences of belonging or contribute to feelings of loneliness". Institutions also have narrative environments that enable them to communicate a chosen narrative through the physical environment (Vytنيorgu et. al, 2023:2).

Authors highlight the place where students live during their studies influences their overall experience of the university's broader narrative environment, and that in any discussion of the connection between the built environment and feelings of loneliness and belonging "it is crucial to be attentive to how this environment [student residences] can be experienced by people as more than simply bricks and mortar" and not just a place students pass through (Vytنيorgu et. al, 2023:4).

Vytنيorgu et. al (2023:3) continue: "Emotional experiences of loneliness and belonging are not simply caused by the physical or architectural shape of an environment, but through the way an environment constructs and circulates narratives that offer or inhibit qualitative affordances for experiences such as belonging". That does not mean physical environmental aspects (e.g.: adequate light and ventilation, colors of floors and walls, room size, among others) do not affect students' wellbeing or perception of wellbeing, but that the people factor is a strong point of connection with the residence life and belonging.

Holton & Riley (2016) echo this argument as they state student accommodation, and its collective and cultural affordances are an example of university narrative that impacts students' physical and psychological experience of place and their feelings of loneliness and belonging. Especially regarding differences among students in terms of class, international

student status, and age, the university infrastructure plays a key role in shaping how the university narrative environment affords or constrains opportunities, perceptions, and motivations to belong (Vytņiorgu et. Al, 2023:5). For instance, many European universities (eg.: Austria, France, Finland) are implementing a program to par local and international students as studies show the interaction between them benefits both groups.

We must remember the ways administrators construct and attach meaning to notions of diversity and inclusion have powerful implications for the broader campus community (e.g.: Thomas, 2018). In this sense, let's not lose sight of international students' added adaptation difficulties, and remember Moores & Popadiuk, (2011:296) findings that when students have support from peers inside the residence, they perceive it as a kind of sanctuary from outside problems.

## **Benchmarking**

In this session we will present five cases of different university residence management located in Dublin, Ireland, Toulouse and Paris, in France, and Macerata and Bologna, in Italy. The benchmarking was conducted from May 2022 to February 2023. Data were collected by scheduled interviews for up to 30 min, e-mail, onsite visits, guided tours for up to two and a half hours, virtual tour, and websites of universities and their partners.

### **Case 1: University College of Dublin**

Ireland has been facing a severe housing crisis since the 2000s (BORGEN PROJECT, 2022), while at the same time, welcomes almost 32,000 international students (IUA, 2022) annually. International students have reported poor housing conditions to ICOS (Irish Council for International Students) with students living in dilapidated buildings, overcrowded housing or even having to sleep on the street or pay to sleep on an acquaintance's sofa (E-Dublin, 2022). Amid this severe crisis, the University College of Dublin (UCD) offers around 4,000 places to its students and, although the number does not cover all the university's international students, it offers security in this serious housing crisis. UCD is Ireland's largest and most internationalized university, with more than 37,000 students, almost 10,000 (27%) of whom are international and come from 152 countries, according to the institution's website.

In May 2022 we contacted UCD by email to present this research and request a visit to their student residences. Unfortunately, it wasn't possible due to the full occupancy of the rooms and unavailability of students because of the exams period, thus directing us to take the virtual tour available on their website (Figure 1).

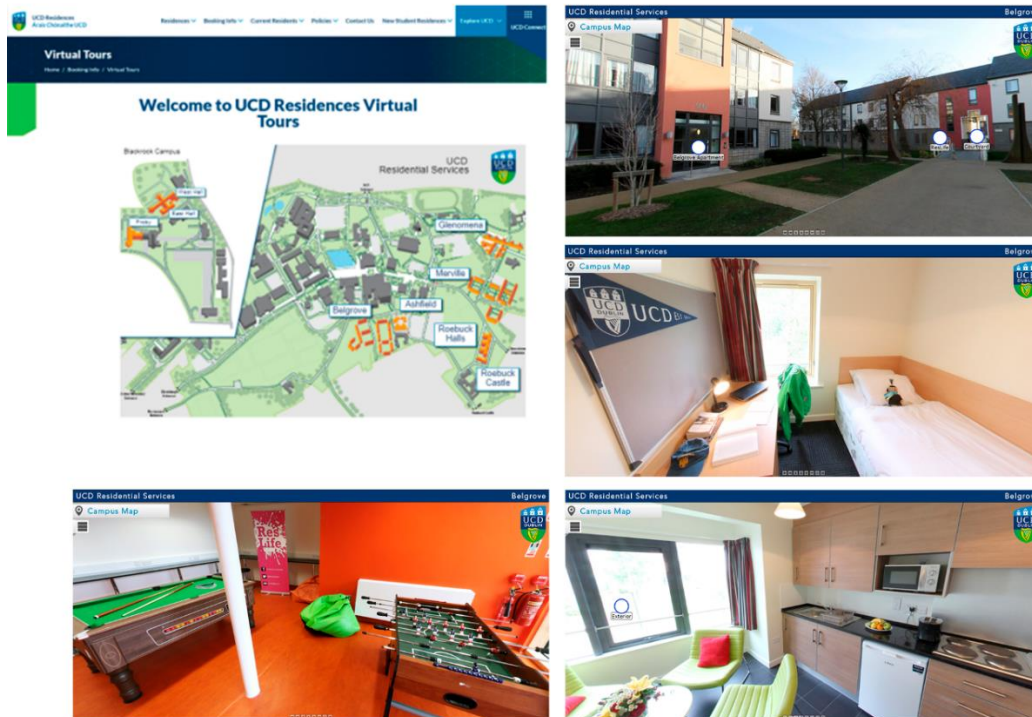


Figure 1: UCD residences virtual tour

(Source: [www.ucd.ie/residences/bookinginfo/virtualtours/](http://www.ucd.ie/residences/bookinginfo/virtualtours/). Access November 02, 2022)

UCD has six residences on the Belfield campus and three on the Blackrock campus, totaling nine residences with a capacity for more than 4,000 residents. Their website gives a fair idea of what students will find when they move in, presenting informative content that range from basic essential information to a complete guide on all the relevant aspects and rules to be respected during campus life.

UCD also offers a comprehensive welcome for residents, in the words of the institution "The UCD RESLIFE Program aims to build a community here in UCD residences through sports teams, activity days, outdoor fairs, quiz games, cooking classes and information on safety and awareness" (UCD, 2022:2). In fact, the activities calendar is full of events, and residents can take part in many social groups (e.g.: arts, reading, swimming, etc.). There is also the possibility of reserving one of the residences' spaces to hold a private event, such as birthdays or movie nights.

Another interesting idea UCD applies is residents are part of the residence's support system. The organizational model employs students who live on campus to act as Residence Assistants (RAs), at night and on weekends, available to help with other residents' needs. Each residence has its team of RAs, and interested students apply via a form during a specific selection period. In return, RAs receive discounts on accommodation fees and develop their communication and problem-solving skills.

At UCD, we see several positive approaches to managing the residence and integrating students into the internal environment. Positive points include a complete and integrated online system that allows access to different services and requests in a single portal; a good maintenance service; the integration of students as part of the residence team; the UCD RESLIFE program; a detailed guide to campus life available online; and the possibility of a virtual visit.

## Case 2: CROUS Toulouse

Toulouse is situated in the south of France and is its fourth largest metropolitan area, behind Paris, Lyon, and Marseille. The city is home to over 100,000 international students, with 11,000 new students every year (Université de Toulouse, n.d.). The University of Toulouse was founded in 1229 and has mobility agreements with more than 200 global institutions and 378 in Europe under the Erasmus program, totaling around 4,000 (40%) international students under its tutelage (Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès).

In France since 1955 student residences are managed by CROUS, a network of public institutions responsible for student housing, food, social support, and access to culture. Crous Toulouse manages 45 residences with almost 11,000 beds, 34 of which are in Toulouse, with over 9,700 beds. Their website lists all the residences and their contact emails, as well as basic information about each one, including the number of places, type of accommodation, location, services included, photos, and link to take a virtual tour (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Notre Dame Residence virtual tour

(Source: <https://www.crous-toulouse.fr/logement/notre-dame/>. Access November 04, 2022)

On November 4, 2022, we contacted CROUS Toulouse through their website but were directed to select one residence and contact them directly. We found it difficult to know which residence to contact, as the intention was to deal with broader issues covering several residences, but we selected one - Arsenal. We received a quick reply and exchanged a few emails, but the administrative assistant was unable to answer any questions about that residence or the Crous Toulouse residences in general.

On November 30, 2022, we visited the University of Toulouse's west campus and Notre Dame residence. We did the virtual visit and, in person, checked out the centrality of the building, close to nursery schools, colleges and with easy access to transport. The building is identified with the CROUS brand at the top, visible from a distance, and has 92 apartments, 78 of which are singles, 11 doubles, and 3 for people with reduced mobility.

After visiting the campus, we contacted the Notre Dame residence by email for follow-up questions but received no response. Although we were unable to communicate with a representative of the Residence and had no means of contacting CROUS Toulouse as a regional body, we chose to keep this case study because of the insights it facilitated.

At first, the sectorization seemed excellent, radiating an image of organization and efficiency. However, in our experience, the absence of a direct regional e-mail makes it difficult to contact the administration and obtain certain information. For example, the contact is initiated via a form on the CROUS Toulouse website with limited characters and pre-established topics. Questions that deviate from the most common topics are more difficult to be answered. So, improving points are the user needs to know in advance who to contact; uncertain or broad questions have more difficulty being answered through the available means of contact; and the lack of a general e-mail contact for dealing with questions beyond the scope of one residence.

As for positive points, they include the mailing list for all residences in the region on the same site; separate email contacts facilitate the management of residences and allow for faster responses; virtual visits to residences; Notre Dame residence location, singing, and visibility; and an explanatory video for the accommodation application process *Demande de bourses et de logement*.

### Case 3: CIUP – *Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris*

The International University City of Paris (CIUP) is the largest student housing area in the Île-de-France region, with the capacity to house around 12,000 students from 150 nationalities distributed among the 6,800 rooms of the 43 on-site residences (CIUP), identified by green dots in Figure 3 below.

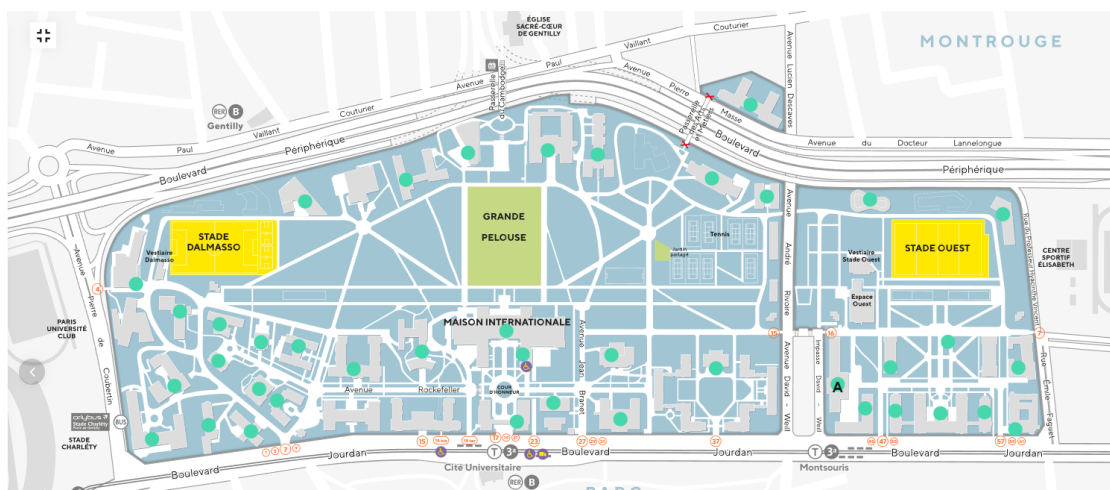


Figure 3: CIUP residences Map (Source: <https://www.ciup.fr/plan/>)

The CIUP is managed by the *Fondation Nationale Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris*, a French foundation of private law and public utility. This public-private partnership includes members of the Foundation, representatives of the countries with houses on campus, and the chancellor of the universities of Paris. It also receives donations from private companies and patrons.

On the CIUP website one can consult details of each residence, such as the inauguration year, the resident's lodgment, from how many nationalities, its history, and other interesting facts. It also presents all the pertinent secondary links for specific themes, including the online platform The Buddy System, that pairs international and local students and stakeholders, responsible for coordinating the integration of new students, and the Citescope site – a portal



dedicated to organizing the thousand events held by CIUP in an annual calendar. The events are also advertised in posters around campus and students' newsletters.

CIUP organizes a welcome event in September with various stands set up by different organizations to publicize and inform about existing activities and services, such as health, the university restaurant, sports clubs, music, research, theater, architecture, and others. Students also receive a welcome kit with a map of CIUP, an information pamphlet, a tote bag, and some gifts, and food and drinks are offered to make it easier for students to integrate.

We contacted CIUP on December 12, 2022, but they could not provide any additional information to that listed on their website. As a complement, we informally interviewed a former international student who lived in one of CIUP's residences in 2014, who corroborated the above information and praised CIUP's organization and excellent communication with residents, stressing how "lucky a student is to live at CIUP when they arrive in Paris" and listing as the only negative point the low number of French students on site, given that it is an international community and only French people from outside Paris live at CIUP.

Positive points observed at CIUP include the existence of a central reception to answer questions, the structure of the residences and student support being very well organized, the vast events calendar during the academic year, especially the welcome event in September, and overall clear communication.

#### **Case 4: University of Macerata**

Data from 2021 showcased that 68% of Italian students live with their parents and only 5% live in student accommodation, compared to a European average of 17% (Eurostudent, 2022?). Furthermore, in 2022 Italy welcomed 58,508 (2.9%) international students (UIS, 2023) that also needed accommodation. The public administration of each region (*Azienda Regionale per il Diritto agli Studi Superiori*) manages most of the beds available in student residences, although there are also residences managed by the universities and private market. We selected two cases, one of which, that exemplifies the Italian management approach.

The *Università degli Studi di Macerata* (UNIMC), founded in 1290, is one of the oldest universities in the world (UNIMC, 2023b). Set in a small town of approximately 42,000 inhabitants in the Marche region, the institution focuses solely on teaching humanities and social sciences. Nevertheless, it presents a strong internationalization with several courses taught partially or completely in English, exchange programs, and foreign visiting professors.

UNIMC's total student population is 11,000, of which 3,000 are international (27.3%) (UNIMC, 2023a). In addition, there are 67 current agreements with international institutions beyond the Erasmus program, in 22 countries, (UNIMC, 2023a) and more than 200 partnerships with universities under the Erasmus+ program, (UNIMC, 2022b). For the university, "Internationalization is a priority" (UNIMC, 2023a).

In Italy, there is public housing available for students who meet pre-established academic and socio-economic criteria, and in Macerata there are eleven apartments with over 322 vacancies<sup>1</sup> available for them (ERDIS). In addition, UNIMC has its accommodation organized as four residences (84 beds), six apartments (35 beds), and three campus residences

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<sup>1</sup> One residence was closed for refurbishment during the 2022/2023 academic year and was not accounted for.

(134 beds), refurbished and furnished in 2014 and managed by an external entity via public tender. There is also work in progress to build another residence and a sports complex on the land (Figure 4). Some of the beds are reserved by the International Office for international and Erasmus mobility students.



Figure 4: Campus Padre *Matteo Ricci* (Source: Archive, February 2023)

On February 3, 2023, we contacted the coordinator of UNIMC accommodation and arranged for a guided tour. Four days later we met him and his associate, responsible for welcoming students and teachers into the residences. The tour took just over two hours to visit the three residences on campus and the largest off-campus residence: Villa Lauri.

We observed in detail the management approach and practices and noticed a close relation with the students, welcoming every new student in person and talking to a few from different nationalities during the tour; the care taken with the facilities, all clean, with new furniture and several convivial spaces; and the well-being of the residents, organizing a welcome event at the beginning of the academic year and improving service based on their feedback.

In summary, the outsourced management model works well. Students and the administration have frequent and direct contact, with close communication, and residents seem satisfied with the housing conditions. The personal welcome to every new resident is a very positive and personal first impact, the welcome event is a fruitful occasion to get to know your neighbors, the online maintenance system is well thought out, as records the history of breakdowns and the order of requests, the residence's website has great usability and presents all relevant information on the same place, a customer satisfaction survey is applied and used to improve service, both groups seem to care for the space and the administration seems committed to implementing improvements to students' daily lives after observing the actual use of the space beyond what was envisioned (e.g.: a community kitchen with a capacity for 150 people is underway and scheduled for completion in 2025).

### **Case 5: ER.GO Bologna**

Founded in 1088, the *Università di Bologna* (UNIBO) is the oldest university in the Western world and is recognized as such by the *Magna Charta Universitatum*, signed by 94 countries and 960 universities (Magna-charta, s/d). UNIBO currently has five campuses (Bologna, Cesena, Forlì, Ravenna, and Rimini) and advanced study centers in Buenos Aires, New York, Brussels, and Shanghai. It has more than 90,000 students enrolled, among whom more than

7,000 are international students (7.8%), making it one of the largest universities in Italy (UNIBO, 2023).

In Italy, until the 1980s the university managed student residences, but in 1983 the government passed a law that transferred this competence to each region (Mondin, 2023, personal communication). In Bologna, the student residence is managed by the Regional Authority for the Right to Higher Education - ER.GO (*Azienda Regionale per il Diritto agli Studi Superiori dell'Emilia Romagna*), which also offers assistance with financial matters, food, advice and support on work and career issues.

Bologna has a very old tradition of student residences, most of which date back to the year 900, although there are three units from the 1950s and a few new units opened in the 2000s and 2022 (Mondin, 2023, personal communication). ER.GO manages around 3,800 beds spread over 48 residences in the region, with 1,700 beds and 19 residences in Bologna (Mondin, 2023, personal communication). General information about each residence can be found on the institution's website.

On February 16 we visited ER.GO's office in Bologna and scheduled a meeting with its director Patrizia Mondin and the coordinator of Bologna welcome service. The interview lasted 30 minutes. They explained the many support mechanisms in place, especially the existence of a sector dedicated to assist international students, the students' possibility to make individual appointments to help with inclusion struggles, integration, study or other support matters, ER.GO's role in contacting students and the vast socialization actions in place, such as a program where senior students assist new students adapting; a volunteer program to help disabled students in the residences; artistic workshops; organization of events by international student communities; an initiative to sponsor students proposals to improve residence life; a regional talent festival organized by students with the support of ER.GO; a reception program for new residents called the Freshmen Welcome Project; the initiative 'Adopt a Residence', in which ER.GO employees could select residences to visit more often and strengthen ties with student residents; among others (Mondin, 2023).

ER.GO has a good communication strategy in place, using virtual communication channels with students, face-to-face visits, direct communication with the residence halls, and anonymous surveys to collect students' impressions of the residence's habitability, comfort, and services. But the most positive aspect of this case is the extent of social programs, through which we see that residents can participate in volunteer, artistic, study, counseling, and career activities; the management commitment to maintaining close contact with students and communicating frequently; meeting their requests when possible; providing support in adapting students to their new life in residence; and integrating students into their new homes.

## **Results**

We observed the best practices present in the five benchmarking cases above and perceived each one of these universities focused on a different point: positive approaches to student integration and residence management, attentive management and infrastructure, positive information and communication strategies, extensive online service and information, student inclusion and participation in residence life, and extensive social agenda and welcoming events. Table 1 summarizes all points.

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5
Location	Dublin, Ireland	Toulouse, France	Paris, France	Macerata, Italy	Bologna, Italy
Institution	University College of Dublin	Université de Toulouse	CIUP	Università degli Studi di Macerata	Università di Bologna
Enrolled students	+37.000	~10.000		+11.000	+90,000
Housing capacity	+4.000	9.700	12.000	253	~1.700
Virtual guide	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Guided tour	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of residences	9	34	43	13	19
Welcome event	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Welcome guide	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Format	Online	Online	Printed	-	-
Pages	64	24	4	-	-
Best practices	Approaches to student integration and residence management	Information and communication strategies	Extensive social agenda and welcoming events	Attentive management and infrastructure	Management commitment in community building

Table 1: Summary of benchmarking welcoming mechanisms (Source: Marcela Rosa, 2023)

We also retrieved some practices from the literature review, such as collectively defining the meaning of home and community, not disregarding prior student experiences regarding their homes, choosing the adequate university narrative, balancing institutional presence in the building to try to exude homeliness, the need for convivial spaces in student residences, among others. Our additional input is to prepare staff to speak an alternative language to the local one, usually English, and pay attention to minimally comfortable room sizes.

All this effort is also beneficial to the universities as a major selling point offering security, comfort, community, and a wholesome experience presenting a safe harbor midst of a turbulent housing market worldwide.

## Conclusion

We have presented a brief review of the current literature regarding students' sense of belonging in university halls of residence, presented five benchmarking case studies of residence welcoming practices in three different countries: Ireland, France, and Italy, and summarized findings.

Halls of residences are a complex ecosystem with different young adults (mostly) from diverse cultural backgrounds and convivence should be considered when managing this space. Some students will be more social, others more reclusive, some will benefit from institutional

support to bring people together, and some will do it on their initiative. Some will be more individualist and need to learn about collective living and sharing of space, some can't handle different opinions and don't know how to compromise. Among others, these are common profiles found inside students' residences.

A possible way for institutions to intervene without retrieving students' autonomy would be to promote certain events helpful to communal life inside halls of residence. Induction week is a good start, a valuable opportunity to welcome all students and install a good atmosphere through the university narrative, presenting the facilities, services, safety regulations, staff, and an occasion for students to meet each other. It can also be an opportunity for students and staff to come together to collectively reflect and self-define the meaning – or potential meaning – of home and community and what would be required for residence halls to be home for students (Foste & Irwin, 2023:763). With initial guidance to the desired positive direction students will have a north to follow and an understanding of what is expected from their behavior in that space.

We argue findings here present relevant welcoming practices that contribute to students' sense of belonging and creation/integration with the community, being a good directional guide to follow. It is important to emphasize the added importance of a comprehensive welcome and support for all students, especially international ones, when the interaction with local students is beneficial for both groups.

Bringing all these practices together in the same institution would have a powerful impact on the residence community, with strong communication, services, social agenda, management, and integral student participation. For the future, we propose the creation of a guide to present the best practices of student welcoming into university residences.

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