

**SOG Notitie**

**International Student Housing**

**2017/18**

## Introduction

Last september we saw that in Groningen there is a significant problem in regards to the housing of the growing number of international students. On paper there should be enough living space available in the city to host the current amount of students. The problems in september, however, have shown that in reality a mismatch occurred which caused a housing shortage. This result of this was that students had to spend nights in hotels or had to sustain even tougher conditions<sup>1</sup>. The well-being of its students should be a university's main priority and even though housing might, strictly speaking, not be the responsibility of the university, the SOG believes that the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RUG) should take its responsibility in order to ensure the well-being of its students.

## Analysis

As mentioned earlier, the current housing market should in principle be able to ensure proper housing possibilities for the students in the city. However, what we see on paper does not comply with the reality for international students. The main cause of this is the fact that 'Dutch houses' only want Dutch roommates and hence exclude international students in advance. This leads to a situation where the housing market is a lot smaller for international students than the numbers would make you believe. Besides that we also see that a part of the student housing in Groningen is owned by housing associations<sup>2</sup>. In order to get access to the houses these associations offer you often have to be registered with them for a certain period of time. This is a relatively high bar for international students since they often have a language- and information backlog and, in many cases, are new to the country. This causes an already small housing market to be even smaller for international students. This shows that the Groningen housing market is much less accessible for international students than the numbers show and in practise this lead to a housing shortage.

This is a structural problem and cannot be solved by one single party. All parties involved will have to work together in order to make an impact. The initiative 'at home in Groningen' is a good example of such efforts and is very promising. However, the RUG should also contribute to a short term solution to make sure the problems regarding international

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sikkom.nl/de-groningse-kamercrisis-internationale-studenten-slapen-op-straat/> - 05/09/17, <http://www.dvhn.nl/groningen/Komen-de-buitenlandse-studenten-onder-dak-22401578.html> - 03/08/17.

<sup>2</sup> Lokale Monitor Studentenhuisvesting 2017 - René van Hulle. p 22.

student housing are being dealt with. In order to achieve this, the SOG is of the opinion that the RUG could act as an intermediary between international students and students who already live in the city and are looking for subtenants.

There are many students that spend some time abroad during their studies, this can be caused due to an internship outside Groningen or due to studying abroad for a semester<sup>3</sup>. More and more students make use of the opportunity to gain experiences abroad during their time in Groningen, it is even being stimulated by the university itself. The fact that students reside in another country means that they are not using their room in Groningen but they will, however, come back and are often not willing to give up their room indefinitely and hence they are looking for a subtenant to take over their room for a relatively short period. Finding subtenants is far from easy because most don't want to sublet but want to move into a room for a longer period of time. This phenomenon does however grant us the opportunity to tackle the current problem around international student housing in Groningen. This is because for international students a sublet room can be an excellent solution. These rooms would be furnished from the start and will allow the subtenant to enjoy a house which is immediately ready to use. Besides that it gives the student plenty of time to look for a long term housing solution when they are in the city themselves, it is not needed to do this from afar anymore. This way we can make sure international students have more time to personally find an adequate living situation while living in an actual house rather than a hotel. As a result, the new system would function as a safeguard against international students being swindled by local landlords as they would have the opportunity to be physically present and able to visit the potential new rental accommodations.

Obviously the possibility to sublet a room already exists. However, it's a market which is difficult to access for an international student since it is often done through personal networks or by means of Dutch websites such as Kamernet.nl. This is where the university could do its part, it could be an intermediary and make this market more accessible for international students. The SOG would like to propose that the RUG should set up a platform, especially geared towards international students, on which students can post their rooms when they would be leaving Groningen for a certain period of time. This way the university could act as the facilitating party and it would contribute to a solution for two growing problems. On the one hand the pressing situation surrounding international student housing and on the other hand the difficulties students encounter while finding subtenants when they spend a period abroad, which is stimulated by the university.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.rug.nl/about-us/who-are-we/strategic-plan/documents/strategic-plan-2015-2020-nl-web.pdf> - RUG Strategic Plan 2015-2020.

## Implementation

In order to implement this initiative a platform should be set up through which students can advertise their rooms in a set format. This platform could be comparable to the Career ConNEXT platform for internships and job openings. Besides that there are several conditions this platform should meet in order to actually help in solving the problems surrounding international student housing.

- Firstly it is important that this platform should be especially geared towards international students. This means it should be in English and should be made apparent to prospective students before the academic year starts.
- It should also be marketed towards first year international bachelor- and master students, as well as exchange students. These are the most vulnerable groups since they are completely new to Groningen, are unaware of Dutch regulations on housing and have to take care of their accommodation from afar.
- Since this platform is meant for subletting, the maximum amount of time a subletting period should be is one semester. When you exceed this limit you should not be able to advertise on this platform.
- The last condition is very important. Students who decide to advertise in this platform should do this in a RUG environment. This would mean that correspondence should initially occur by means of RUG e-mail and that any advertisement should be linked to a student number. Seeing that students only have one room it should not be possible to advertise more than one room on one s-number. This way abuse can be prevented because it will at all times be known who is responsible for a certain room and commercialization of the platform will become impossible.

## Advice

1. Create a platform such as that of Career ConNEXT on which students can put room in order to be subletted.
2. Make this platform available to all students via their student number and let contact go through the RUG e-mail.
3. Make sure the platform is marketed towards new, international students and presented in combination with an elaborate explanation of the current housing situation in Groningen.
4. Involve At home in Groningen with this initiative. In order to make sure as much students as possible would be profiting from this initiative it would be good to include Hanze students as well. At home in Groningen is the perfect platform to make this happen

Faction Studenten Organisatie Groningen 2017-18

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