

Student housing - what do Gen Z's want?

 By [John Schooling](#)

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Born between the mid-90s and early 2010s, Gen Z's have grown up around Wi-Fi, smartphones and social media. With easy access to Google and YouTube, they're accustomed to having infinite knowledge at their fingertips - they know what's going on in the world, and they want to make a difference in it. As this generation enters university, higher education institutions need to adapt to their values.



Image source: Gallo/Getty

Icons like Greta Thunberg, *Time* magazine's 2019 Person of the Year, characterise the core Gen Z values - radical activism, eco-friendly lifestyles and social inclusivity. All of this will impact the development of student housing in 2020, here's how:

Community and connectedness

Gen Z's spend more time communicating via technology and are less inclined to differentiate between in-person and online relationships and communities. They value interpersonal relationships across the spectrum and require space to conduct both real-life and virtual interactions. That means every area should have a purpose, or multiple purposes, and make the most of available space. Designing flexible common rooms with optional partitions, for example, allows students to move from private study to large group activities in the same room.

Inclusivity through affordability

As the most socially inclusive generation yet, Gen Z demands that on-campus student housing is integrated and available to all, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. As studying becomes accessible for more people across different income brackets, universities need to make affordability a primary concern. This means working to reduce capital cost per bed, as well as maintenance costs.

Gender and safety considerations

New ideas about gender and the role it plays in society have defined the social outlook of Gen Z. They expect housing and bathrooms that do not discriminate based on gender, a concept considered outdated and restrictive because it excludes those who don't conform to standard norms. At the same time, there is a call for increased focus on providing safety for young women and other vulnerable groups on campus. This is a new consideration in terms of development - adapting to it will require sensitivity and openness on the part of the developer.

Sustainability

With the most to lose from the negative effects of climate change, it's no surprise that Gen Z's are champions of going green. Gen Z's want to see sustainability built into every aspect of student housing, from the construction of the buildings themselves, through to the day-to-day operations. Moving forward, grey water systems, energy-saving lightbulbs and recycling programmes will be standard features of the university residence. An added benefit for developers is that green building can reduce operating costs by as much as 20 to 30% – a huge incentive for all parties concerned.

ABOUT JOHN SCHOOLING

John Schooling is the founder and MD of STAG African - a multi-dimensional green property development, student accommodation and renewable energy group.

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