

Press release, 11 May 2023

The Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism – 50 years at the service of building culture for the Swiss Youth Hostels

For 50 years, the Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism has been building, renovating and managing the buildings of the Swiss Youth Hostels – from the historic castle to the modern wellness hostel. It focuses on high-quality architecture and provides affordable accommodation throughout Switzerland with a vibrant building culture. Young travellers from Switzerland and abroad should also be able to afford a stay at a youth hostel.

Exploring the world, getting to know new cultures and travelling sustainably must be possible for everyone. The Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism (SFST) pursues this goal by constructing and furnishing youth hostels. While the Swiss Youth Hostels Association runs the hostels, the Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism assumed the role of property and asset manager when it was founded on 11 May 1973, exactly 50 years ago.

The merger of the regional youth hostel associations into a national association in 1992 and the opening of a central office in 1994 made it possible to establish a professional developer. An architectural bible was created in 1993 with the «Bauhandbuch 2005», which is still valid today. The handbook forms the basis for refurbishment, renovations and new buildings as well as the ongoing maintenance of the youth hostels. It was developed by a planning team consisting of specialists in the fields of architecture, interior design, ecology, textile design, visual communication, landscape architecture and security, also reflecting the interdisciplinary planning approach.

Building culture as a benchmark

High building culture, as called for throughout Europe in the [Davos Declaration](#), has always been an important concern of the Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism. The focus is on good, modern architecture typical of the region. When constructing or renovating a youth hostel, the Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism always looks at the local building tradition. Local architects are invited to participate in competitions, guaranteeing good architecture with respect for the regional building tradition, in a modern and contemporary design language. Even if the Foundation, as a non-profit organisation in the field of social tourism, has to meet special requirements: «Good architecture is no more expensive than bad,» says René Dobler, CEO of the Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism and himself an architect and construction economist, in a nutshell. He has headed the Foundation as the Managing Director since 1999.

The Swiss Youth Hostels impress their guests with good architecture, buildings that take all aspects of sustainability into account and an exemplary corporate philosophy. After decades of continuous development, this can be seen in the buildings as the actual «corporate architecture».

While the first-generation hostels were still characterised by the simplest, close-to-nature accommodation with mass camps, the modern Swiss Youth Hostels boast spacious communal areas and a balanced mix of rooms ranging from comfortable double rooms to affordable dormitories with plenty of privacy. Maximum quality with a minimum budget is the challenge facing the Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism.

From historic buildings to wellness hostels: The variety of youth hostels

27 of the 49 youth hostels in Switzerland today are owned by the Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism and offer a total of 3,800 beds. (For comparison: In 1974, one year after its founding, the Foundation had eight youth hostels with 600 beds.) Around half of these 27 buildings were planned and built as youth hostels. The others used to serve other functions, such as a castle, factory, and

sanatorium, and were converted into youth hostels. In many places, these are buildings of historical significance. Maintaining this architectural heritage is a central concern of the Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism.

Although the Swiss Youth Hostels are one of the largest accommodation providers in Switzerland, they do not form a unified hotel chain. Each youth hostel stands for shared goals and values, but writes its own history and story. As different as the youth hostels are, the construction projects have one thing in common: They are based on cooperation with private partners and the public sector. The result is a wide range of combinations of uses, from an indoor swimming pool with wellness facilities, to a museum, to youth offices and a music school, which not only expand the offering available to guests of the youth hostels, but are also available to all other guests of the destination as well as the local population.

Consistent ecological construction, social commitment and economic viability

Since 2007 the Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism and the Swiss Youth Hostels have been awarded prizes almost every year for their exemplary implementation of sustainability, ranging from the ZKB Sustainability Award to the Environmental Award and the Swiss Solar Award. Compared to 2000 the carbon footprint of space heating is just one third. This was achieved through consistent development focusing on energy-efficient buildings. For example, the Minergie Standard was first tested in Zermatt in 2003, followed by the Eco Standard in Scuol, before finally the Interlaken and Gstaad-Saanenland Youth Hostels were awarded the Watt d'Or in 2015 for the first implementation of the Minergie P-Eco Standard in hotels in Switzerland. «When increasing energy efficiency, and when it comes to environmental issues in general, the economic aspects are always taken into account, because the hostels have to be economically viable both during construction and in operation by the Swiss Youth Hostels – and this is usually not at all contradictory,» says René Dobler. But social commitment is also common to all construction projects. For example, the buildings are continuously optimised with regard to their barrier-free design so that they are as accessible as possible to all guests.

Over the coming years, the Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism will pursue continuous development in line with its own objectives and values – just as the article defining its purpose states: Building and furnishing hostels for young people, youth groups, schools and families, and promoting youth and family travel, in cooperation with other institutions – be it in Martigny, Geneva, Lucerne, Pontresina or any other place where intense work is being done on continuing the story.

About the Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism

The Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism SFST was founded in 1973. It owns the majority of the youth hostels in Switzerland. It is responsible for facility management, from construction to maintenance, of the properties run by the Swiss Youth Hostels Association. The aim of the SFST is to promote social tourism and meaningful leisure activities on a non-profit basis. To this day, the Foundation has achieved this goal exclusively by constructing youth hostels. It performs all tasks relating to the Swiss Youth Hostels properties. The merger of the regional youth hostel associations into a national association in 1992 and the opening of a central office in 1994 made it possible to establish a professional developer. High standards in terms of design, functionality and sustainability and thus also in terms of the economic, ecological and social demands of today are the declared aim of the Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism.

About the Swiss Youth Hostels

The Swiss Youth Hostels Association's network comprises 42 own hostels and 7 franchise properties, ranging from romantic castles to urban design locations and wellness hostels. The non-profit organisation consists of nearly 70,000 members and generates approximately 750,000 overnight stays annually while focusing on quality-conscious, sustainable and affordable youth and family tourism.
www.youthhostel.ch

For more information:

Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism

André Eisele | Press Officer

Tel. +41 (0)44 360 14 54

andre.eisele@youthhostel.ch

www.youthhostel.ch