

Studentification in Bloemfontein, South Africa

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Abstract. Studentification is a global phenomenon that has been prominent in urban geographical discourse since the large-scale expansion of higher education in the early 1990s. In many developed and developing world countries, expansion in student enrolment has outstripped the ability of institutions of higher learning to provide adequate accommodation. Similar trends have been recorded in South Africa. The task of this paper is to investigate studentification as experienced in one of South Africa's secondary cities. The paper draws attention to the economic, socio-cultural, and physical characteristics of this form of student housing on host locations. It is argued that studentification holds both positive and negative impacts for the host communities of Bloemfontein. Finally, it is suggested that studentification in South Africa requires greater research attention.

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1. Introduction

Studentification is a global phenomenon that has been prominent in urban geographical discourse since the large-scale expansion of higher education in the early 1990s (Hubbard, 2008; 2009; Smith, 2007; 2008; 2009; Smith, Holt, 2007). Studentification can broadly be understood as referring to a range of economic, environmental, physical and social processes which take place when large numbers of students move into a particular part of cities or towns in which desirable universities are located (Smith, 2007). In many developed and developing world countries, expansion in student enrolment has outstripped the ability of institutions of higher learning to provide adequate accommodation. Similar trends have been recorded in South Africa, but with the exception of the work of Benn (2010) and Donaldson et al. (2014), little academic reflection on the development of this phenomenon has come to press.

The task of this paper is to expand on the contributions of these writers by investigating studentification as experienced in one of South Africa's secondary cities. Bloemfontein is a city with around 400 000 inhabitants and host to a number of institutions of higher learning, the most prominent of which, with around 30 000 students, is the University of the Free State. For the past two decades, this university, along with other institutions of higher learning, has not been able to provide sufficient on-campus accommodation for its students. Those students unable to be accommodated on campus are compelled to find alternative accommodation in the neighbourhoods surrounding the campus. The paper provides some insight into what is seen as studentification in the neighbourhoods adjacent to the University of the Free State. The investigation draws attention to the economic, socio-cultural, and physical characteristics of this form of student housing on host locations. Empirically the investigation is informed by primary data generated through administering a random sample survey with student house residents ($n = 375$), permanent non-student residents ($n = 81$), and local businesses ($n = 24$) in the neighbourhoods surrounding the UFS campus. This investigation considers four broad themes. The first section focuses on the spatial distribution of student houses in the study area, the reasons students live in these neighbourhoods, as well as the

key role players in location choice. The remaining three sections are concerned with the description and analysis of the economic, socio-cultural, and physical characteristics associated with studentification in the neighbourhoods surrounding the university. The final section reflects on the main findings of the investigation. The general assessment of studentification in Bloemfontein is that there is currently a need for greater regulation of this process as it would appear that, on balance, studentification holds negative implications for the neighbourhoods in which student housing has proliferated.

2. Different types of student accommodation

Students who study away from their hometown require accommodation for the duration of their study. According to Smith and Hubbard (2009), this results in two main events that may occur. Firstly, students may move into accommodation provided by the university itself, namely 'self-segregated university halls of residents'. In the case of the UFS, the university accommodates around 4000 students on the Bloemfontein campus (University of the Free State, 2014). Secondly, students may make use of the local rental market to find accommodation, sharing privately rented student housing in residential neighbourhoods (Holdsworth, 2009; Smith et al., 2013). A student house is generally referred to as a house where the habitable rooms are rented out for an extended period of time to generally unrelated students who share communal facilities such as the kitchen, lounge, dining room, and bathrooms (Johannesburg Municipality, 2009). Student housing can be divided into two categories: namely, a house in multiple occupation (HMO), or purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) (Kenna, 2011). These different types of student accommodation hold different kinds of impacts on the neighbourhoods in which they are located.

2.1. House in multiple occupancy

HMO student housing can be described as a traditional single-family house often with a front

garden and a backyard which accommodates university students. In such a set-up, students usually have their own individual rooms and share communal facilities such as the kitchen, bathroom, and living-room (Garmendia et al., 2011). It is generally argued that the impact of HMOs on host neighbourhoods is far greater than is the case with PBSA (Hubbard, 2009). The presence of students makes HMOs distinct from that of normal family homes, with untended gardens, the accumulation of household refuse, excessive indulgence in parties, and phenomena such as vandalism, excessive noise and hooliganism (Garmendia et al., 2011; Kenna, 2011; Sage, Smith, Hubbard, 2013; Smith, 2008). The presence of HMOs in Bloemfontein is plentiful as most houses that are being converted into student houses were previously family homes.

2.2. Purpose-built student accommodation

PBSA developments are usually all-inclusive complexes, providing students with parking, laundry facilities, and convenience stores. The increase of PBSA complexes can be connected to the growing pressure on the private rental market because student populations continue to grow, and there is often a lack of available HMO accommodation (Kenna, 2011). PBSA also represents a property investment class, and many developers have prospered as they have increasingly catered to the demands of corporate investors and shareholders, with student accommodation being represented as a recession-proof investment vehicle (Smith et al., 2013). The skylines of many university towns are now dominated by large blocks of commercially provided off-campus student accommodation buildings (Sage et al., 2013). PBSA franchises have, in the recent past, surged in South Africa, with developments like Unilofts (2014) and Campus Key (2014) present in several South African cities and towns with universities. Beyond the high quality of accommodation and extensive services which are provided in this type of accommodation, it has been noted that these highly regulated environments lead to fewer street-level conflicts – in areas where students are living in PBSAs than where they are resident in HMOs (Hubbard, 2009). The erection of PBSAs was identified as a key mecha-

nism for dispersing students away from established neighbourhoods. This strategy can also play a key role in urban regeneration (Smith et al., 2013). The development of designated student accommodation complexes also allows for the lifestyles and noise of students to be contained within particular spaces, reducing community concerns about concentrations of large groups of students (Kenna, 2011).

3. Spatiality of student housing

In Bloemfontein, studentification is primarily the outcome of HMO housing, as the development of PBSA has only recently become available. Figure 1 maps the neighbourhoods surrounding the UFS and the main land use patterns. It is clear that both Brandwag and Universitas are mainly single residential neighbourhoods, although Brandwag has also become the focus of decentralized CBD functions, such as offices, and retail outlets. Willows, on the other hand, is primarily a densely built-up, section title unit neighbourhood, along with a number of small business premises and government facilities such as hospitals and schools. Figure 2 provides more detailed insight into the two neighbourhoods directly adjacent to the UFS campus and the location of student houses. It is shown that there is considerable clustering of student housing in these areas. This clustering is owing to a number of locational choices which concern student housing demand and student housing providers. Table 1 provides a summary of location indicators for students choosing a particular student house. The data received did not hold any surprises, with most of Benn's (2010) locational choice findings mentioned. For example, neighbourhood safety was ranked first, followed by issues of affordability and distance to the campus seen as important factors in choosing student housing.

There are, however, several other role players in the decision-making process for students when considering a student house. The decision on which house to live in is not only important to students, as most contracts are for 12 months, which means that they have to make a year-long commitment (Table 2) as do those who ultimately finance their decision. The students' locational choices are impacted

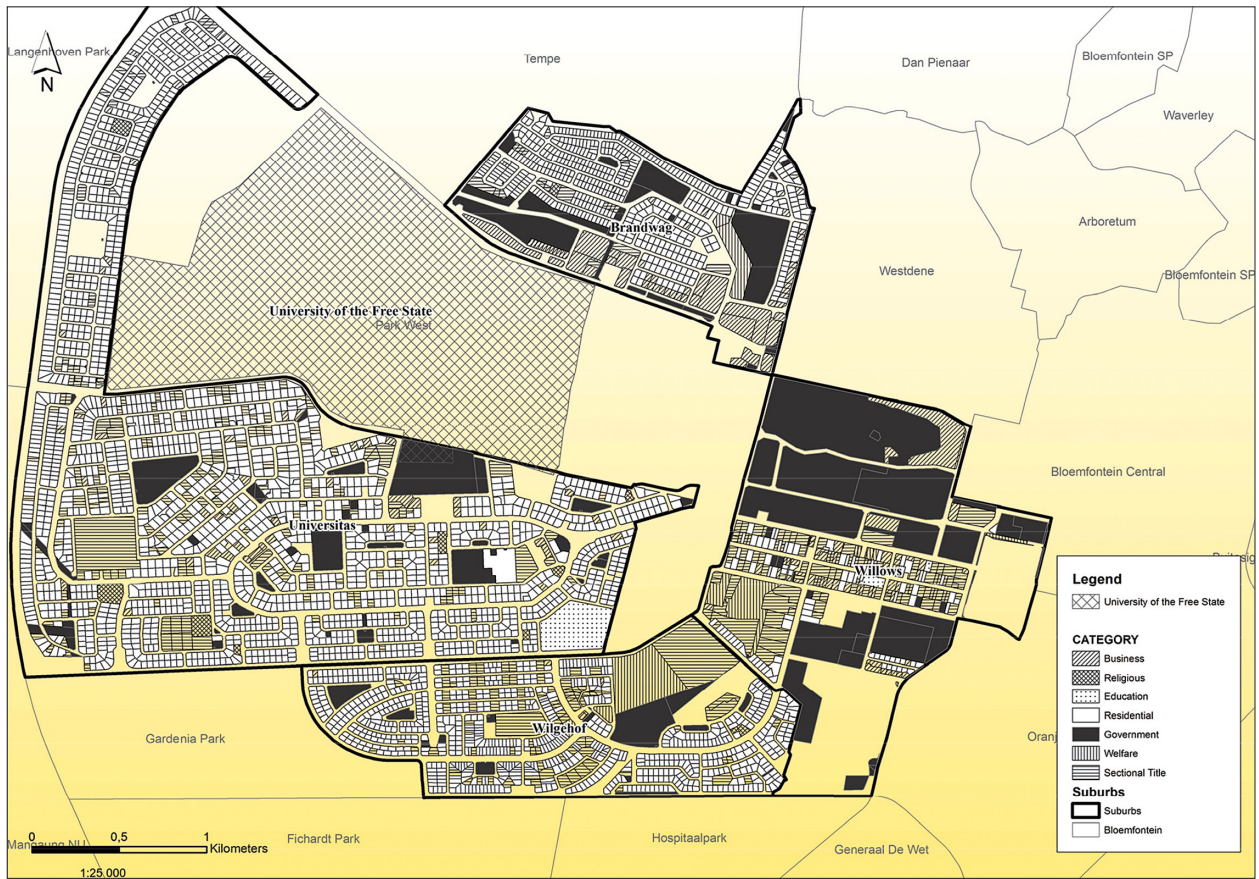


Fig. 1. Neighbourhoods and their land use surrounding the University of the Free State (2014)

Source: Donaldson et al., 2014, S140



Fig. 2. Student housing distribution in Brandwag and Universitas

Source: Donaldson et al., 2014, S140

by the parents or guardians of students as the top ranked role players, since the vast majority of parents have to pay for the accommodation. As noted by Garmendia et al. (2011) friends also influence the location choice of several students.

Table 1. Location indicators for students in Bloemfontein

Location Indicator	Rank
A safe neighbourhood	1
Affordability of accommodation	2
Distance of house from campus	3
Living an independent lifestyle	4
Friends who live there	5
Socio-economic status of the neighbourhood	6
Student life in the neighbourhood	7

Source: Authors' survey

Other role-players are those that provide the student housing supply, such as estate agents, letting agencies and the owners of these properties. Certain student houses are managed by estate agents, whereas others are managed by the owners of the house and renting agents such as Kovsie Private Accommodation (KPA).

Table 2. Role players for students in Bloemfontein

Role Players	Rank
Parent(s)/Guardian(s)	1
Friend(s)	2
Estate agent(s)	3
House owner	4
Lessor/Rental Agent	5
University official	6

Source: Authors' survey

4. Characteristics of studentification

4.1. Economic issues:

what does it cost and what does it do?

Evidence from several countries shows that higher education students have become highly influential role-players in local rental markets (Baron et al., 2010). The increase of student populations is, however, often seen in a negative light with undesira-

ble impacts on the local housing market (Hubbard, 2008), as the influx of students into a neighbourhood generally leads to an increase in rental prices (Benn, 2010). Pickren (2012), for example, notes that an owner of an apartment complex with high vacancy rates might lower rent in order to attract more consumers, thus creating more affordable housing. However, this is not always the case. Some owners prefer to keep their rent high which they can achieve through densely populated student accommodation as opposed to a family unit. Pickren (2012) has found that the rent landlords, developers, and owners receive from students is more consistent because students have to be on campus during the academic year. As Pickren (2012) explains, it is easier for a landlord to receive a cheque from a student's parents or funding body on a monthly basis, than from a middle-class worker who may not pay his or her rent on time. Thus, approaching this situation from the perspective of a landlord, in terms of reliable income, it is far more attractive to rent accommodation to students (Pickren, 2012).

Studentification implies at least three types of local economic impacts: those to the owners of the property that might or might not be located in the host city/town or neighbourhood; the local authorities rendering services, receiving rates and taxes; and the local businesses that provide products and services to the student resident.

Inflow of funds into the study area varied and was reflective of distance to the UFS campus and size of the property. To the north of the campus, Brandwag is located closest to the University of the Free State, with the largest part of the neighbourhood considered as within walking distance from the University. Most the student houses are HMO accommodation units and conveniently located close to two shopping centres. To the south, Universitas is also adjacent to the campus, although slightly further from the main teaching venues. In both cases, the student houses are former large family homes with large gardens that have been converted to their current use. In the case of Willows, most housing is in the form of flats in apartment blocks. In fact, there are only 66 registered single residential homes as opposed to 1 934 residential, sectional titles units in the neighbourhood. As seen in Table 3, rooms are most expensive in the neighbourhoods in close proximity to the university; the

rooms are larger; and there are more services included in the rental than in Willows (Table 4). It could not be established with any great certainty where these capital inflows from rentals would finally end up, although it would seem reasonable to argue that those student housings that are rented directly from the home owners are likely to be based in or around Bloemfontein, suggesting that nearly half the income would find its way into the broader local economy. In addition, letting agents are lo-

cally based and hence their economic impact mostly felt in Bloemfontein itself. Table 4 provides an outline of the types of services that are included in the rental price. The more expensive Universitas student houses often include satellite TV, off-street parking, as well as free internet access in some cases, and transport to the campus. It was noticeable that student houses in Willows do not include electricity which can also be linked to the fact that most housing units are flats in apartment blocks.

Table 3. Cost of rooms in student houses

	Brandwag	Universitas	Willows
Rent per Room	R1 994	R2 098	R1 863
Rent per housing unit	R19 310	R16 790	R7 925
Number of students in house	10	8	3
Rent house from	52% from letting agents 48% direct from owner	52% from letting agents 48% direct from owner	91% from estate and letting agents 8% direct from owner

Source: Authors' survey

Table 4. Services included in student house rentals

	Brandwag	Universitas	Willows
Electricity	94.67%	95.88%	36.84%
Water	93.42%	99.42%	79.22%
Internet	16.44%	24.85%	10.96%
Satellite TV	36.99%	55.29%	12.33%
Parking	60.81%	84.12%	71.05%
Transport to campus	9.72%	13.77%	5.41%

Source: Authors' survey

Students can be considered as significant economic role players as certain businesses are mainly in existence because of the presence of students. The presence of students creates a demand for certain services and products, sometimes similar and other times different from permanent non-student residents. This demand contributes to business formation and subsequently employment creation (Allinson, 2006; Benn, 2010). These businesses flourish during academic semesters, but also experience the impact (loss of business) during student holidays. A total of 24 different stores and businesses were surveyed, for instance convenience stores, liquor stores, pubs, supermarkets, laundromats, and fast food restaurants, concerning the impact of students on their businesses.

The survey material revealed that businesses in Brandwag and Universitas are very dependent on

students as customers and their turnovers are negatively impacted by the absence of students during the university vacations (Table 5). In Brandwag, it was recorded that a large decline in business was experienced during student holidays. According to two business owners, about 90% of their customers are students. In Universitas, the decline in business was not as significant during holidays as there are still several families living in the neighbourhood who keep the businesses going in the absence of students. In Willows, a decline in business activity was also experienced during student vacations and most business owners situated in Small Street indicated that their businesses would most likely not be able to exist without students' patronage.

Business dependence on students is not only registered but also the types of products and ser-

Table 5. Illustrating the percentage of surveyed businesses which are affected by students

Neighbourhood	Students have an economic impact		See a decline in business during student vacations	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Brandwag	100%	0%	83%	17%
Universitas	100%	0%	57%	43%
Willows	88%	12%	75%	25%

Source: Authors' survey

vices businesses in the study area provide. All the 14 franchises and 10 non-franchise businesses surveyed had directed sales strategies focused on students. For example, the Burning Spear Spur (an international family steakhouse chain) in Brandwag has a student burger special on offer every Sunday, one of two Bloemfontein Spurs which offers such a special. The Bloemgate Pick 'n Pay (a large, food retailer) ensures that certain food products which students prefer to buy, such as 2-minute noodles, are always available. Stadium Foods (fast food), located in Willows, also caters for the tastes of students on their menu. These are only a few examples of how franchise businesses have adapted their approach to ensure they also benefit from the student market. Several local businesses have specials exclusively for students, for example a pizza restaurant in Universitas provides two specials for students, namely the 'Hungry Student' and the 'Budget Student' specials. Galaxy Sports Restaurant and Pub which is located in Willows, also offers a student special on pizza every Wednesday. The impact of the student market has even caused the merging of unrelated services into one business. A business located in Willows is both a Laundromat, as well as a print and copy store. Although these services are not related, both are essential to students.

4.2. Socio-cultural impacts

The social impacts of studentification concerns the replacement of permanent non-student residents by students in neighbourhoods and a change in the type of socio-cultural reproduction that takes place in that locality (Garmendia et al., 2011). The presence of students can trigger resentment when the permanent non-student residents feel that they are becoming a minority cohort in their neighbourhood

(Smith et al., 2013). High concentrations of students and student houses in a neighbourhood can lead to an increase in population density, as well as an imbalance in population diversity (Smith, 2008). The continuous replacement of permanent residents by students leads to a shortage of children, leading to some schools having to close down, and/or to other amenities aimed at family units becoming redundant (Chrisafis, 2000). The students also establish new habits and behaviours, as well as causing social changes to a neighbourhood (Benn, 2010). Some have students as cultural investors (Midgley, 2002), presenting planning strategies to rejuvenate neighbourhoods.

According to Allinson (2006), the most cited negative impact of student populations was their lifestyles, namely their preference for excessive noise, drunkenness and late nights (Allinson, 2006; Russo, Van den Berg, Lavanga, 2007; Selwyn, 2008) and the establishment of fast-food takeaways and off-licences selling cheap alcohol that come to dominate the shopping streets (Harris et al. (2002). In a neighbourhood that experiences a high concentration of students, there are usually no attempts from the students to interact with their neighbours (Hubbard, 2006).

Pickren (2012) notes that there is a notable social separation between students and long-term residents, with non-student residents feeling threatened by the changes in character and experiential quality of their neighbourhoods. It is argued that studentification reduces opportunities for positive and mutually beneficial interactions between these different groups and, as a result, there is an increase in the segregation of groups based on their difference in lifestyle and life-course, as well as the difference in economic capital (Smith, 2008). The expansion of student populations and their residential geographies also threatens the sustainability of the oc-

cupied neighbourhoods and their social cohesion (Smith, 2008). The survey results could not come to any conclusive finding in this regard.

Students are not only temporary residents in neighbourhoods, but new students move into these neighbourhoods annually, which negatively influences the continuity and sustainability of neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods that have a large student population are targeted by criminals, with increased levels of house and car burglaries occurring (Kenyon, 1997). According to Benn (2010), student houses contain a great variety of electronic devices such as televisions, computers and iPads. Criminals are aware of this, and, as a consequence, target student houses. Permanent non-student residents fear that the high number of student houses will attract criminals to their neighbourhood (Kenyon, 1997). According to Benn (2010), this fear can sometimes lead to the selling of houses by permanent residents. In the case of Bloemfontein, the crime rates for the study area as a whole were higher, but this is rather a function of the number of residential units and higher number of residents than necessarily connected to studentification *per se*.

The majority of studentification literature refers to negative impacts when it comes to the socio-cultural interaction between students and permanent residents. It is suggested that permanent residents do not get along with their student neighbours; that there is often a need to file complaints with either police authorities and/or the owners of student houses and that there can be general acrimony between these two groups. As seen in Table 6, this does not appear to be a real concern in Bloemfontein's studentifying neighbourhoods. In this case, the only evidence of the majority of permanent residents not getting along with their student neighbours was in Willows. In large part, this can be explained by the fact that this neighbourhood has a range of apartment buildings, and hence the students are in far greater proximity to permanent residents. In addition, Willows has a lively entertainment node which is supported by a range of people, many of whom are not students but persons renting flats in the area. On the other hand, Brandwag and Universitas, as formerly and still largely middle-class family suburbs with far lower housing densities, and at a far greater distance from key entertainment nodes in the city, do not present the same challenges.

Table 6. General relationship between students and permanent residents

		No complaints	Complaints	No disputes	Disputes	Get along	Do not get along
Brandwag	Students	81%	19%	85%	15%	69%	31%
	Residents	77%	23%	68%	32%	55%	45%
Universitas	Students	79%	21%	83%	17%	70%	30%
	Residents	83%	17%	62%	38%	67%	33%
Willows	Students	81%	19%	87%	13%	69%	31%
	Residents	73%	27%	44%	56%	47%	53%

Source: Authors' survey

4.3. Physical impacts

The physical impact of students on a neighbourhood can be seen, on the one hand, as the environmental decay, or, on the other hand, the upgrading of the neighbourhoods' wealth, and this occurs in the social, cultural, economic, and spatial dimensions (Benn, 2010). Much of the international literature suggests that studentification can be seen as part of the larger gentrification debates (Smith, 2005). Certain city areas that have been in decline

have experienced regeneration and renewal as a result of student housing developments (Benn, 2010; Curtis, 2005). The functional diversity of a neighbourhood can increase, owing to the presence of students, with new bars, restaurants, clothing stores opening to cater for students' tastes. This also leads to a student atmosphere reigning in the neighbourhood as students participate in community service and increase the volunteerism of the neighbourhood (Benn, 2010). In the case of Bloemfontein, no such regeneration has been recorded. Property prices in neighbourhoods such as Brandwag or Uni-

versitas have not increased above the general housing market of Bloemfontein nor has there been any great expansion of higher level services or products. In fact, in the case of Willows, perhaps the opposite is taking place as the general mix, particularly of retail businesses, has become increasingly basic, their interiors and exteriors seldom aesthetically appealing, with no evidence of high-level entertainment establishments and retail outlets recorded.

Home owners require the student occupants to uphold the standards of the house or apartment they are renting, but this is usually not the case and the owners do not always monitor if the students comply with such expectations (Smith, 2007). Their negligence results in the property not being maintained and leads to physical and visual decay, and even to the point where the property value decreases. The decreasing value of houses cannot only be blamed on the students, because the home owners have to make the maintenance of the house compulsory for students and should check it on a regular basis (Benn, 2010).

Single-family houses are converted into HMO student accommodation. The conversion of these houses can have several undesirable consequences (Smith and Holt, 2007). These undesirable consequences include inadequate electricity supply, overpopulated houses, insufficient facilities and vandalism (Midgley, 2002). According to Hubbard (2008), the mere presence of students in HMOs can be easily identified by looking at single-family homes in the neighbourhood where there are unattended gardens, an accumulation of waste, and indulgence in parties. As a result, studentification can be clearly seen from street level, as the visual quality of the street deteriorates and the car ratio per house increases. In terms of the physical decay of student housing in Bloemfontein, findings were negative. Well-tended gardens are certainly not a feature of student houses in any of the neighbourhoods investigated. Moreover, many of the student house gardens have been converted to off-street parking. An increase in traffic volume and traffic congestion can also be a result of studentification. Moore, Boyn, Bothan, Donohue (2004) concluded that traffic problems are caused when the local infrastructure is surpassed as a result of the seasonal traffic increases generated by returning students. In this

investigation, traffic problems were not recorded as presenting any great challenge in the study area.

A potential positive physical impact of studentification is that city areas in decline are being re-generated owing to the influx of students into such areas, and this can change the physical and social image of neighbourhoods that have previously been in decline (Harris, McVeigh, 2002). While studentification can contribute towards instability in neighbourhoods, it can also bring about stability and an influx of wealth to an area that is in decline. Should, as suggested by Midgley (2002), student housing be integrated in a planned fashion into a neighbourhood, it can contribute to the regeneration and sustainability of a neighbourhood. In the case of student houses in Bloemfontein, the physical impact of studentification has generally been negative. Most of the properties are not well maintained, neither in terms of the physical structure and the gardens. The sidewalks are often not tended to and refuse accumulates.

5. Conclusions and future research paths

The research reported in this paper points to a number of known issues surrounding studentification and builds on the recent investigations of Benn (2010) and Donaldson et al. (2014). The investigation confirms a range of characteristics and impacts seen in those studies, but also in a number of urban places in the developed North. It was established that there are significant economic impacts related to studentification. These capital inflows are, however, not necessarily positive for the host neighbourhoods, as the capital flows are to other parts of the city and even outside of the region as a whole. Studentification does hold impacts for local businesses and some of them are very dependent upon student customers. However, it has to be noted that the presence of students does not mean there is a larger inflow of capital than if it was a normal residential neighbourhood. Rather, those types of businesses would not be possible but there might very well have been other types of businesses in the absence of students. In the study area there is currently no sign that studentification might be

leading to urban regeneration or gentrification. On the contrary, these neighbourhoods have become far less desirable to the general population of Bloemfontein. The socio-cultural impact on the studentifying neighbourhoods appears to be uneven, with Brandwag and Willows registering a significant change in character, but less so in Universitas. The physical impact of studentification appears to be far-reaching and once desirable neighbourhoods have lost their middle-class family residence allure.

Looking forward, there are issues that require future investigation, not only in Bloemfontein, but all urban spaces with large or multiple institutions of higher education in South Africa. In this investigation, the primary focus has fallen on HMO student housing, as the study area did not yet have many PBSAs. However, over the past three years, PBSA investment has seen a significant increase, particularly in Universitas. In addition, the UFS has expanded its on-campus accommodation offering significantly, and hopes to be able to accommodate the bulk of its undergraduate students in the near future. This holds implications for neighbourhoods with large numbers of HMO accommodation. Generally, the quality of PBSA is far superior to HMO accommodation. Issues that arise are that there is a danger of an over-supply of student accommodation, which can lead to a drop in rental and financial viability, particularly of HMO properties. In addition, given that HMO properties are often cheaply converted to student use, those properties lose their desirability to prospective home buyers, who generally will have to invest heavily in converting the house from its current use. We join Donaldson et al. (2014) that there are issues regarding the regulation of student housing. In Bloemfontein, studentification has in large part taken place without much planning or intervention from the local authority planning department, nor is there seemingly any policing of how building regulations are being ignored. The impact of purpose-built student accommodation, as opposed to general family homes being reworked as student accommodation, requires careful consideration. At the broader level, similar investigations should be undertaken as to how this process might have (or might not have) resonance in other developing world countries, not least in African urban places.

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