Processes of destudentification and studentification in Loughborough

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PROCESSES OF DESTUDENTIFICATION AND STUDENTIFICATION IN LOUGHBOROUGH

Chloe Kinton

A doctoral thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

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Abstract

This thesis presents the first empirical findings of processes of destudentification, using the case study of the university town of Loughborough, UK. Within the context of recent profound changes to higher education, studenthood and local housing markets, the study is timely since “understandings of the processes of destudentification and population restructuring remain underdeveloped” (Sage et al. 2012a: 600). The thesis advances knowledge of student geographies in several ways. First, the thesis establishes a definition of the concept of destudentification, which encapsulates the complexities and diversities of the processes at local neighbourhood scales. Second, the discussion considers the overlaps between studentification and destudentification from a conceptual perspective. It is contended that although studentification (as a concrete outcome) is a necessary prerequisite for destudentification, destudentification is not an inevitable outcome of studentification. It is argued that both are distinct, yet interrelated, processes of urban change. Third, the empirical findings show that processes of destudentification and studentification can unfold in concurrent ways, and within and between different areas of a university town. Fourth, the discussion exposes some of the leading causes of destudentification and studentification, emphasising the complex interrelationships between the balance of supply and demand of student accommodation, and the ways that higher education institutions, accommodation providers and the student population mediate and influence the dynamic production and consumption of student housing. It is concluded that an understanding of the complex and diverse relationships between geographies of destudentification and studentification is essential for progressing knowledge of processes of urban change in university towns and cities.

Key words: destudentification; studentification; students; accommodation; universities; Loughborough.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Studentification: a process of urban change

Over the last decade studentification has become a leading-edge process of contemporary urban change (Allinson 2006; Munro et al. 2009; Munro and Livingston 2011; Sage et al. 2012a; Allen and Hollingworth 2013; Cochrane and Williams 2013). Evidence from media and lay discourses indicates that the impact of an enlarging student population on established residential communities is of increasing societal significance (Chatterton 2008). The Guardian (15/05/2007) reports “with increasing numbers of students enrolling at higher education institutions, where to house them all is a dilemma exercising the finest minds in university towns across the UK”. This is exemplified by a new and distinct academic debate – the geographies of studentification (Holloway et al. 2010).

In recent years, the establishment of a number of political and institutional initiatives has indicated the strength of societal concern regarding studentification: in 2006, the Vice-Chancellors organisation Universities UK (UUK) published a report which raised awareness of the challenges and benefits of studentification. More locally, studentification has permeated the political discourses in many university towns and cities (Hubbard 2009). Local community groups have been established across the UK to contest and resist the urban changes associated with enlarged student populations (Smith 2008). This is perhaps best evidenced by the inauguration of the National HMO Lobby in 2001, constituted to ameliorate the impact of concentrations of HMO (House in Multiple Occupation) on their host communities (National HMO Lobby 2009).

The urban transformations associated with studentification have increasingly captured the interest of the national media in the UK. Media discussions have focussed largely on the negative impacts of expanding student populations on established residential communities, often evoking sensational representations of studentification and students as a social group. Issues often highlighted include: population imbalance and pressures on the provision of affordable housing; lack of community cohesion; anti-social behaviour, criminal damage and litter; and the neglect and decay of the physical landscape in studentified areas, for instance:
“Students have officially been identified as the new scourge of Britain's towns and cities ... destroying respectable neighbourhoods by driving out families, triggering rat infestations, causing vandalism and forcing the closure of corner shops in favour of tatty burger bars and cheap off-licences” (The Observer 21/07/2002).

“Blaring music, criminal damage passed off as practical jokes, overflowing bins, beer and kebabs regurgitated in front gardens all characterise this child-adult threshold” (The Daily Telegraph 14/06/2003).

Further to the negative representations of studentification outlined above, it is noted that more balanced interpretations of the positive impacts of enlarged student populations, although limited, are also evident:

“But the flipside can be a more vibrant cultural scene, preserving transport links, rising house prices giving an incentive for landlords to upgrade properties that might otherwise lie empty, and graduates settling in the area. Studentification, in other words, can be the prelude to gentrification, or at least regeneration” (The Guardian 24/01/2006).

Importantly, both national media and political representations of studentification suggest a homogenous set of processes and impacts, uniformly recognisable across the range of urban contexts. However, it can be argued that this simplified conceptualisation fails to engage with the complex expressions of urban change that are unfolding at the micro-geographic, enclave scale as well as differences between different university towns and cities (Hubbard 2008).

In the last five years the segmentation of student housing has undergone significant transformations (Sage et al. 2012a), with changing student population distributions unfolding within many cities. Motivated by the need to mitigate the negative effects of studentification by integrating students more effectively into established residential neighbourhoods, many local authorities, in partnership with universities and other leading stakeholders, have sought to enable the development of Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) by commercial providers (Munro and Livingston 2011). Alongside this, there has been the refurbishment of old, and development of new, halls of residence particularly on university campuses leading to a marked changing demand for student accommodation in the private sector (Allinson 2006). The result is that lower proportions of students are now living off campus in many towns and cities, abandoning former studentified areas and leading to void/empty
properties (Unipol 2005). Smith (2008) suggests that this may be leading to new processes of urban change in former studentified areas of towns and cities, deploying the term ‘destudentification’ (described as the reduction of a student population in a neighbourhood). Yet, despite this recognition of potential processes of destudentification occurring in towns and cities across the UK, to date there have been no academic studies of this important unfolding dimension of contemporary urban change and “understandings of the processes of destudentification and population restructuring remain underdeveloped” (Sage et al. 2012a: 600). However, there is a suggestion in Hubbard’s (2009) work on studentification that an oversupply in the student accommodation sector may create voids in the Loughborough market: it is clear that a town that shows signs of oversupply in a changing accommodation market is conducive to a study of processes of destudentification. It is here that this thesis seeks to make its contribution to contemporary geographical debates on patterns of student movement, concentration and segregation.

1.2 The case study of Loughborough

There are several apposite reasons for the selection of Loughborough as a case study site. Loughborough is a small market town within the Charnwood borough of Leicestershire with a population of 62,242 (in 2011). Charnwood is the second most deprived borough in Leicestershire (Leicestershire County Council 2005), and pockets of the Storer and Shelthorpe wards rank within the top 20% of the most deprived areas in England; Loughborough has a large Bangladeshi community, many of whom reside in these areas. In contrast, other parts of Loughborough, such as the Nanpantan and Outwoods wards (the Forest and Herrick areas of the town), are characterised by their high levels of affluence.

The number of students studying at Loughborough University is 16,025 (HESA 2011), with the student population forming over 25% of the town’s population. Loughborough provides an example of a small town where a university and its students are more ‘apparent’ than in a larger city, and where the local economy is relatively more reliant on the presence of a higher education institution. Loughborough is a town where the presence of the university largely defines its character:
“This high proportion of students relative to long-term residents suggests that the social impacts of studentification - both positive and negative - might be more acutely felt in Loughborough than in a larger city where the proportion is typically much smaller” (Hubbard 2008: 325).

Any processes of urban change and their impacts, therefore, are going to be more apparent in Loughborough; since studentification is clearly observable in the town, Loughborough is an ideal case study location to examine processes of destudentification.

The history of Loughborough University is characterised by its rapid development: it was founded as a technical institute in 1909 by William Brockington (at a time when the town's population was 23,000). The University developed buildings within the town: the first student residences were bought in 1919, including The Holt on Forest Road, and The Grove on Ashby Road, and the School of Art and Design building on the corner of Frederick Street was opened in 1937. Therefore, the relationship between the town and the University is of long standing. In 1958, the Burleigh Estate was bought by the College creating space for the university to grow and advance. Loughborough College was awarded university status in 1966 and was the first of the nine Colleges of Advanced Technology to be designated as such (Figure 1). The Robbins report (1963) recommended the development and expansion of campus-based universities: Loughborough University’s 438 acre single-site campus is the

Figure 1: Sign welcoming visitors to the “University Town of Loughborough” (author’s photograph)
largest in the UK (following recent land acquisitions in 2003, 2006 and 2010). In April 1966 Loughborough was awarded its Charter, becoming the country’s first technological university. A merger with the local college in 1977 expanded the range of disciplines represented on campus, and allowed the university to forge its current reputation for sporting excellence (winning the British Universities and Colleges Sport - BUCS, previously BUSA - every year for over three decades) and for its provision of a quality university experience (winning The Times Higher Education ‘Best Student Experience’ award for six years running, from 2006-2011, as well as being named Sunday Times ‘University of the Year’ in 2008). Loughborough University celebrated its centenary in 2009 – marking 100 years of education and innovation (www.lboro.ac.uk/centenary).

Loughborough University shares similar characteristics with the University of Bath, the University of York and the University of Warwick: all are campus-based universities founded in the 1960s, with a similar ‘class’ of student (a high percentage of students from NS-SEC1 (National Statistics Socio-economic Classification Class One), coming from higher managerial and professional occupation backgrounds), with an above-average white student population, and a student body that is more mobile (above the mean percentage living away from home) than most. Therefore, Loughborough offers a useful lens through which to explore student decision-making practices, since its social and active students (the Students' Union is owned and managed by the students themselves) are likely to be willing to express their perceptions of, and attitudes towards, student accommodation.

Loughborough features in the literature of studentification. The term studentification was coined by Smith (2002), following his observations and study of the impacts of increasing numbers of student residents on the established residential community in Headingley, Leeds but, significantly, one of the other pioneering studies of studentification was Hubbard’s (2008; 2009) investigation of Loughborough. In 1950, there were 1,545 full-time students (with a further 3,000 part-time and evening students), and by 1970 Loughborough University had 4,050 full-time students. The growth of student numbers at Loughborough University remained at approximately 6,000 throughout the 1980s, but doubled between 1990 and 2000 to 12,000. As Hubbard (2008: 329) states:
“since 2001, the numbers of students [in Loughborough] have grown significantly faster than the places available in managed student premises, and with only 4,978 managed bed spaces in the town this means there are around 6,700 students in the private (‘unmanaged’) sector”.

This reinforces Smith’s (2005: 78) comment that the private-sector will often “mop up” increasing populations of students. At a time when student numbers were increasing, the shortfall in bedspaces placed considerable pressure on those areas of the town where family housing was conducive for recommodification as HMOs and created opportunities for landlord investment.

It is the older pockets of terraced housing located between the university and town centre (the Storer and Burleigh area of the town) that initially proved most attractive to landlords (Figures 2 and 3); this area has become known as the ‘Golden Triangle’. Hubbard (2009: 1910) notes that the Storer ward in Loughborough “displays one of the highest rates of studentification in the country” with 16.54% of households in this area inhabited by students in 2001, making it the 8th most studentified ward in England and Wales (and one that features in the top 10% of wards in England for material deprivation).

However, this increase in students living off campus has led to a number of concerns being voiced about the impacts of studentification (for example, anti-social behaviour, a fluctuating housing market and community cohesion), particularly apparent in those areas where student residence is most pronounced. One consequence of studentification in these areas has been the formation of a residents’ group in 1999 (Storer and Ashby Residents’ Group – SARG) to oppose the development of three new University halls of residence on Ashby Road. Similarly, there has been opposition to the growing numbers of HMOs, anti-social behaviour and increasing population imbalance (leading to the closure of the Rosebery Primary School in 2006). In response to these town-gown issues, Loughborough University has formed the Loughborough Campus and Community Liaison Group to discuss strategically town-gown relations, as well as situating Wardens in the Storer and Burleigh and Herrick and Kingfisher areas of the town, and has been promoting campaigns such as SSSH! (Silent Students Happy Homes) to educate students to be better neighbours.
Figure 2: The Storer area of Loughborough (author’s photograph)

Figure 3: The Burleigh area of Loughborough (author’s photograph)
In these heavily studentified areas of Loughborough, in response to concerns over household turnover the local authority issued supplementary planning guidance relating to student properties in 2006. This imposed tight restrictions on the conversion of existing properties to HMOs in neighbourhoods where student properties exceed 20% of the total population (Charnwood Borough Council 2005), with the aim of dispersing students across the town by encouraging the conversion of HMOs in areas where student occupation was low.

In Loughborough, there was an overall increase of 5,429 students, from 10,596 students in 1995/96 to 16,025 in 2011/12 (HESA 2011) (Figure 4). This signifies a 51% increase compared to a 41% increase nationally across the UK. However, despite a pronounced expansion of the student population in Loughborough, it is significant that there has been a gradual decrease in the total number of students since the high point of 17,015 students recorded in 2006/07. This decline in student numbers may lead to voids in the student accommodation market in Loughborough, which makes it an ideal case study site for exploring processes of destudentification and student-related urban change.

![Figure 4: Total number of students at Loughborough University (HESA)](source: Higher Education Statistics Agency HESA 2011)
Furthermore, Loughborough University’s decision to enter into partnership with University Partnerships Programme (UPP) to develop 1,300 new bed spaces on campus (which opened in 2008/09) adjacent to the existing ‘student village’ may result in relieving pressure on the housing market and provide students at the end of their first year of studies with further options for remaining on campus (Figure 5). This initiative, coupled with the continuing expansion of the traditional private-rental student market, and the growth of PBSA in the town centre since the mid-2000s (Figure 6) is “diversifying the range of accommodation available to students” (Hubbard 2009: 1913). This suggests that the recent growth of PBSA off-campus (962 bed spaces in 2010) and on-campus (5,592 bed spaces in 2010) is creating an oversupply of accommodation and a change in the student accommodation market, which provides further justification for the selection of Loughborough as an important case study location in which to examine processes of destudentification.

The expected popularity of PBSA in the town centre, combined with new on-campus accommodation, “raises the possibility that, for the first time in many years, voids may appear in the town’s student accommodation sector” (Hubbard 2009: 1919). These “voids” are the visible signs that identify the process of destudentification, first noted by Smith (2008), when the number of students residing in a neighbourhood reduces. While destudentification is being identified in the literature, there have been no academic investigations into the processes and/or the geographies of destudentification and its relationship to urban space, and understanding of these processes remain underdeveloped (Sage et al. 2012a). It is argued here that further research is needed to uncover and explain the diverse and dynamic nuances of contemporary student geographies, and how the concept of destudentification links to broader theories of contemporary urban change.
Figure 5: The new Elvyn Richards, a newly-developed hall of residence built on campus in 2008 (author’s photograph)

Figure 6: Waterways, a purpose-built student accommodation block built in Loughborough town centre (author’s photograph)
Within this context, previous research examining studentification in Loughborough has shown that the distinctive geographies of student occupation in the town and the characteristic clustering of student residences in particular neighbourhoods:

“demonstrate the unevenness of studentification across the town, with the rise of the buy-to-let market most notable in a number of terraced streets located immediately west of the town centre, while areas to the east and south of the town centre remain largely free of student housing” (Hubbard 2008: 330).

Despite recognising that patterns of student residence in Loughborough have unfolded in relatively uneven ways, Hubbard (2009: 1911) does not suggest an acceleration in the movement of students to other parts of the town stating that students were “unwilling to live beyond this [the Storer] area”. However, emerging local media discourses claim that community opposition to the physical, social and cultural impacts of expanding student populations is present in other areas of Loughborough (Figures 7 and 8), indicating the student frontier is being rolled out into new enclaves in the town, such as the Kingfisher Estate, a 2002 new-build estate comprised of a variety of detached, semi-detached and townhouse properties, and the Forest/Herrick area, predominantly composed of traditional detached or semi-detached properties. These are both affluent areas with very low levels of deprivation:

“This [Kingfisher Estate] was a nice quiet area but now it is more like a student ghetto. They drink outside and in their house, making lots of noise until about 11pm, then head out and come back around 3am, with the same noise, absolutely legless. The next morning, the pavements and area are covered in glass, vomit, condoms and litter” (Leicester Mercury 08/11/2011).

“We estimate that both Oaklands Avenue and Ashleigh Drive already have 50 per cent student let houses. The Forest Road north side is an excellent area for family houses and we do not want to see what has happened elsewhere in the town happen here. We have nothing against students, we wish them well in their education at Loughborough University, however they do have a different lifestyle from permanent residents and we wish to preserve the peaceful and attractive nature of the area in which we live” (Loughborough Echo 08/06/2012).
Figure 7: The Kingfisher Estate area of Loughborough (author’s photograph)

Figure 8: The Forest area of Loughborough (author’s photograph)
Therefore, Loughborough offers an opportunity to explore any changes in student residential patterns, since previous academic research based in the town suggested that student residence is generally clustered in the Storer and Burleigh wards of Loughborough (Hubbard 2008). With this in mind, and drawing on Freeman’s (2006) assertions regarding the value of researching processes of gentrification as they unravel ‘in situ’, as opposed to entering the research site in the wake of the progressing gentrification frontier, Loughborough offers an ideal setting to explore the unfolding processes of (de)studentification and changing residential patterns of students within the town.

Importantly, destudentification is not identified in Hubbard’s (2008; 2009) study of studentification in Loughborough, although he makes reference to the possibility of voids occurring in the student accommodation market. This thesis is also timely given that profound changes, such as the evolution of Higher Education and the 2008/09 economic crisis, have occurred since previous academic studies (Smith 2002; Rugg et al. 2002; Allinson 2006; Hubbard 2008; Munro et al. 2009).

1.3 Research Aims

The main aim of this thesis is to examine processes of (de)studentification, using the case study of Loughborough.

The key objectives of the thesis are to:

- Analyse perceptions of the changing residential patterns of students within Loughborough.
- Identify the presence and scale of (de)studentification.
- Examine the influence(s) of accommodation providers and higher education institutions in processes of (de)studentification.
- Investigate the effects of student residential decision-making practices on processes of (de)studentification.
Figure 9: Map of Loughborough
(Source: map base sourced from digimap.edina.ac.uk; location of Loughborough in the UK from lboro.ac.uk)
Figure 10: Loughborough University campus map
(Source: www.lboro.ac.uk)
1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into six further chapters. Chapter 2 presents an in-depth and critical review of established academic, lay and national media conceptualisations of studentification. It is contended that established academic conceptualisations of studentification may be out-dated and too rigid to embrace the diverse contemporary nuances of student-driven processes of urban change. Chapter 3 explores conceptualisations of destudentification, emphasising that this is an under-researched aspect of urban change, given there is a current absence of a micro-geographic examination of its processes and impacts. Furthermore, the importance of theories of urban decline and abandonment to developing fuller understandings of destudentifying communities is explored.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology applied, justifying the mixed-methods approach taken to capture the perceptions of student-related urban change among established residents, accommodation providers and institutional stakeholders and the experiences of the student population, enabling the geographic intricacies emerging from the case study sites to be explored and compared. This methodology advances the importance of eliciting student perceptions when examining processes of (de)studentification, and highlights its absence in traditional research practice, calling for its use in future examinations of processes of student-related urban change.

Chapter 5 shows that dynamic processes of destudentification are taking place in Loughborough. By drawing on perceptions from face-to-face interviews and data analysis of student HMO occupancy, it is demonstrated that processes of studentification and destudentification are unfolding in unique ways and are temporally and socio-spatially uneven within the town. It is argued that destudentification processes form a significant element of the changing patterns of student living.

Building upon these findings, Chapter 6 presents analysis of 269 questionnaire surveys with students residing in Loughborough University halls of residence to explore their accommodation needs, preferences and expectations as a factor in the unfolding processes of studentification and destudentification. Student perceptions have not been addressed in the literature of studentification and this chapter provides
profound insights into how students’ residential choices influence the changing geographic patterns of student-living in the town. Therefore, these discussions with students provide a unique insight into the nature and effects of student decision-making practices on processes of studentification and destudentification.

Finally, Chapter 7 draws together the main conceptual, theoretical and empirical contributions of the thesis. The chapter suggests the adoption of a definition of destudentification which encompasses its complexity and goes on to consider the possible long-term implications destudentification has for community cohesion, neighbourhood renewal and future urban developments in university towns and cities.
2. Studentification: a leading-edge process of contemporary urban change?

2.1 Introduction

Studentification features widely in academic, media and local discourses. The term was coined to describe the concentration of high numbers of university students moving into established residential neighbourhoods and the distinct social, economic, cultural, and physical effects arising from this process (Smith, 2005). This chapter reviews the literature of studentification, considering the conceptualisation of studentification in the context of academic (Section 2.3), national media (Section 2.4), and local community (Section 2.5) discourse. Importantly, the connection between studentification and gentrification (Section 2.2) is explored and the neoliberalisation of studenthood (Section 2.6) is discussed.

Importantly, the chapter points to three main gaps in the existing scholarship on studentification. First, it is contended that established academic conceptualisations of studentification may be out-dated, and, in particular, do not fully embrace the diverse contemporary expressions of studentification. Second, students’ accommodation needs, preferences and expectations remain largely under-researched. Third, drawing on an observation of the diverse expressions of studentification (Smith 2005; Smith and Holt 2007; Smith 2009) and its inherent spatial unevenness (Munro et al. 2009), it would appear that the specific spatialities and temporalities of studentification have yet to be fully explored. This chapter provides the broader conceptual framework for understanding theorisations of (de)studentification (Chapter 3).

2.2 Narratives of gentrification

It is important to recognise that the concept of studentification is enmeshed within wider contestations of the conceptual margins of gentrification (Hubbard 2009) with recent debates emphasising that studentification should be considered as ‘nested’ within the wider conceptual rubric of gentrification (Butler 2007). First identified in the 1960s by Glass (1964), gentrification, as originally defined, referred primarily to a rather different type of ‘new middle class’ who began buying up older, often ‘historic’ individual housing units and renovating and restoring them for their own use. In the
process of doing this they began driving up property values and pushing out former, typically lower income working class, residents. The term had specific reference to the traditionally deprived East End of London and has subsequently been used to describe the widespread processes in which working-class areas of many cities undergo major social and physical changes as wealthier inhabitants move into the area (Hamnett 1984; 1991). In short, gentrification became synonymous with the ‘upgrading’ of neighbourhoods. Class has been recognised as a key aspect of gentrification, which Slater et al. (2004: 1144) describe as “nothing more or less than the class dimensions of neighbourhood change – in short, not simply changes in the housing stock, but changes in housing class”.

However, there have been numerous calls in recent years for a new interpretation of the somewhat narrow and limited concept of gentrification (Butler 2007; Clark 2005; Davidson and Lees 2005; Smith and Butler 2007). Clearly, all terms need constant re-evaluation to test their relevance to changing circumstances. Certainly, there is an emerging critical literature that seeks to extend the focus of gentrification, thus enabling the term to embrace a variety of contemporary forms of urban change:

“What has emerged most recently is a new division in the gentrification literature between those who wish to retain the term ‘gentrification’ to describe a variety of new urban, social and political processes … and those … who wish to leave the term with Ruth Glass” (Lees 2007: 232).

Such arguments claim that whilst the phenomenon Glass described has evolved over nearly fifty years, “gentrification is no longer about a narrow and quixotic oddity in the housing market but has become the leading residential edge of a much larger endeavour” (Smith 1996: 39). In Butler’s (2007: 162) view, the concept of gentrification is “somewhat middle aged and over endowed with its own history” suggesting representations of the processes of gentrification and gentrifiers is outdated, and no longer adequately describes the development of “new forms of sociospatial segmentation of urban centres elsewhere across the globe”. Therefore, although contemporary forms of urban and rural change, such as studentification, super-gentrification (Butler and Lees 2006) and greentrification (Smith and Phillips 2001) share some characteristics of gentrification, this researcher agrees that these
terms remain of limited value if we are to deepen our understandings of current urban, social and political processes.

There are several examples of geographers who assert that the conceptual criteria of gentrification are rigid, outmoded and now ‘unfit for purpose’ in terms of a range of diverse contemporary urban and rural contexts (Clark 2005). Hamnett and Whitelegg (2007) identify the conversion of industrial and commercial space in Clerkenwell, London as an example of gentrification without population displacement; and Butler and Lees (2006) draw on the examples of Brooklyn Heights, New York and Barnsbury, London, to describe the transformation of pre-gentrified urban enclaves into even more affluent and exclusive spaces, or ‘super-gentrification’. These advocates are in favour of adopting a broader, less restrictive conceptualisation of gentrification since it is clear that the scope of gentrification and its meaning have shifted significantly (Slater et al. 2004). This researcher supports this view and argues that the re-evaluation of conceptualisations is essential if we are to embrace the dynamism and variety of contemporary forms of urban change.

What emerges from these, and other similar studies, is the identification of complex processes of change unfolding in diverse urban and rural settings. Within contemporary gentrification research complexities have been noted: an acknowledgement of the micro-geographic processes of gentrification (Butler and Robson 2003); a recognition of the consumption of super-gentrified spaces by the ‘super-rich’ financiers of New York (Lees 2003); a consideration of the provincial city (Boddy 2007). Particularly crucial to the conceptual grounding of this thesis is Smith and Holt’s (2007) recognition of the influence of higher education students on contemporary forms of urban change in university towns and cities. These commentators move away from Glass’ (1964) original definition and attempt to re-define and widen the concept of gentrification, and this thesis aligns with the view that a re-definition is needed.

Central to the concept of gentrification is the issue of displacement (Slater et al. 2004). Displacement carries with it the implication that it creates ‘victims’, who have no control over their changing environment “when pressures on the housing market from affluent groups create inflated rents and prices which can push out the low paid or unpaid over time” (Atkinson 2000: 307). Others read the situation differently,
pointing out that when “working-class homeowners [take] advantage of the rise of property values to retire, sell out and move to the suburbs or beyond” (Hamnett 2002: 25, quoted in Slater et al. 2004: 1141), those ‘displaced’ are more than likely to see the move as a positive choice. In fact, the work of Davidson and Lees (2010) fundamentally questions whether the most recent housing developments and property conversions in London’s Docklands and in provincial UK towns and cities, can still be characterised as gentrification, asking:

“when luxury apartment complexes or townhouses are built on reclaimed brownfield land, does it count as gentrification? These are not old houses, and some argue there is no displacement of a low-income community. When public housing is knocked down to make way for new-build middle-class homes in so-called ‘mixed communities’, does this count as gentrification?” (Davidson and Lees 2010: 395).

It certainly appears that for many urban geographers to call such contemporary conversions gentrification “is stretching the term and what it set out to describe too far” (Lambert and Boddy 2002: 20), arguing that a conceptual remoulding results in unhelpful generalisations and that gentrification must remain true to the original concept coined by Glass (1964). Neil Smith (2002) suggests instead that the complex processes unfolding in contemporary urban and rural contexts reflect new forms of urban change which should be considered in isolation from the pre-existing conceptual terrain of gentrification. This researcher acknowledges the need to address the diversity of current urban change, arguing that no processes exist in ‘isolation’ from others, but have complex interconnections.

One new form of urban change, which is central to this argument over the conceptualisation of gentrification, is studentification. Smith (2002; 2005) and Smith and Holt (2007), in their pioneering work on this process in Leeds and Brighton, note the overlaps between studentification and gentrification. Moreover, Smith’s (2005) principal assertion that “social and cultural spaces of studentified locations provide a ‘training ground’ for potential gentrifiers” and studentification represents a “factory of gentrification”, explicitly positions this process within the contested conceptual boundaries of gentrification. With support from numerous other scholars (e.g. Butler 2007; Clark 2005; Davidson and Lees 2005; Lees 2007), Smith wishes to set the
agenda for “a refocusing of the academic gaze on gentrification, and a redeployment of the gentrification term at a revised conceptual level” (Smith and Holt 2007: 158).

Others, however, defend “the continued use of gentrification as a way of understanding the changing relationship between people and where they live” (Butler 2007: 163). Here the argument put forward is that gentrification retains elements of social class at its core but ‘class’ no longer remains the central point of reference for individuals or groups, suggesting that this has been replaced by where people choose to reside. As such, the motivations and decision-making practices in processes of settlement constitute core elements of identity (re)construction: Bridge’s (2003) notion of ‘mini-habituses’ that apply to individual sub-sections of the middle-class, and Savage et al.’s (2005) development of the term ‘elective belonging’ to describe the tendency for people to congregate with ‘people like us’. The concept of elective bonding, this thesis contends, is relevant not only to gentrification but also to studentification, adding to our insight into geographic patterns of student living.

Thus, it could be suggested that studentification is the process whereby students “move to places within fields where they feel more comfortable” (Savage et al. 2005, quoted in Butler 2007: 175) so that they live in proximity to ‘people like themselves’. The notion of ‘people like us’ is central to the formation and harmony of social groups and has application to conceptualising displacement, segregation, population imbalance and the cohesiveness of residential communities. The importance of this concept to informing understandings of cohesiveness in urban communities is further exemplified by Butler’s (2003: 1) contention that contemporary gentrifiers in Islington are “living in the bubble”, inhabiting entirely separate social spaces from non-middle class groups. It is also central to studentification. Students attending Loughborough University refer to the town as ‘the bubble’ or ‘Loughborough bubble’, suggesting a propensity to live apart from non-student residents. Here they build relationships and form discrete social groups composed, almost entirely, of ‘people like us’. This emphasises the importance of micro-geographies when exploring student-related urban change in university towns and cities.

Claims that academic researchers display an “infatuation” (Slater 2006: 774) with how to define the process of gentrification can be applied equally to studentification. Whilst some researchers perceive a close association between gentrification and
studentification, others have suggested that these terms have quite significant differences in emphasis. What is clear is that as processes of urban change evolve, definition refinements of all its interrelated processes are important and should be a part of any dynamic research agenda “in order to include other/new forms of social upgrading, other/new actors and other/new spaces” (Rérat et al. 2010: 336). The academic discourse of gentrification has been described as a “theoretical and ideological battleground” (Hamnett 1991: 174), and the terms gentrification and gentrifiers as “‘chaotic concepts’ which fail to recognise that a multiplicity of processes, rather than a single casual process, produce changes in the occupation of neighbourhoods” (Rose 1984: 62). This complexity aligns with Butler’s (2007: 177) view that “we need to see gentrification as a ‘nested’ conception – rather like a Russian doll in which the overall conception contains a number of smaller ones which have specific social and spatial contexts”. Similarly, studentification debates contain conflicting and limiting semantic arguments and conceptualisations: studentification, like gentrification, is clearly a problematic and complex concept and this researcher calls for further examination of these intricate processes in order to develop our knowledge of contemporary urban change.

2.3 Academic conceptualisations of studentification

The concept of studentification is, therefore, of significant interest in research, media and policy-making arenas. Smith notes in 2005 that, despite recognition of studentification within national media discourses, meagre academic attention had been paid to this phenomenon. Similarly, Hubbard (2008: 324) observes that “there has been a paucity of geographical research tracing the impacts of students on ‘host’ communities” with the majority of work in this field having as its focus the impact of universities on the wider environment. However, recently, a more vigorous debate has emerged, focussing on the patterns, processes and impacts of socio-spatial concentrations of students. A marked intensification of academic interest in the diverse ‘geographies of students’ has underlined the establishment of studentification in the geographical lexicon (Allinson 2006; Chatterton 1999; 2000; 2010; Christie et al. 2002; Christie 2007; Duke-Williams 2009; Holdsworth 2009; Hubbard 2008; 2009; Munro et al. 2009; Munro and Livingston 2011; Rugg et al. 2000; 2002; Sage et al. 2012a; 2012b; Smith 2002; 2005; 2008; 2009; Smith and Holt 2007).
Initial academic research on processes of studentification, as intimated by Hubbard (2008), tended to centre upon the economic impacts of universities on their surrounding communities (for example, Barden 1995; Glasson 2003; Lawton-Smith 2003); the community cultural interface (Chatterton 2000); the provision of popular culture and consumption spaces for students in city centres (Chatterton 1999; Chatterton and Hollands 2002; 2003); and the nature of demand for private rented housing from students (Rhodes 1999; Rhodes et al. 2000; Rugg et al. 2002). It is noticeable that none of these contributions had as its specific focus student-community interactions. It is the groundbreaking work by Smith (2002) in Headingley, Leeds, that marks the first explicit identification of the emergence of a distinct ‘student area’ as a result of the expansion of local higher educational establishments, and the concentration of student populations in a relatively small urban enclave. It was at this stage that ‘studentification’ was coined as a ‘label’ for this particular process of urban change.

Subsequently, Smith (2005: 73) contends that “processes of studentification connote urban changes which are tied to the recommodification of ‘single-family’ housing or the repackaging of existing private rented housing by small-scale institutional actors (e.g. property owners, investors and developers) to produce and supply Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) for HE students”. More substantially, Smith (2005) goes on to define studentification that encompasses four dimensions:

“Economic: studentification involves the revalorisation and inflation of property prices, which is tied to the recommodification of single-family housing or a repackaging of private rented housing to supply HMO for HE students. This restructuring of the housing stock gives rise to a tenure profile which is dominated by private rented, and decreasing levels of owner-occupation.

Social: the replacement or displacement of a group of established permanent residents with a transient, generally young and single, middle class social grouping; entailing new patterns of social concentration and segregation.

Cultural: the gathering together of young persons with a putatively shared culture and lifestyle, and consumption practices linked to certain types of retail and service infrastructure.
Physical: associated with an initial upgrading of the external environment as properties are converted to HMO. This can subsequently lead to a downgrading of the physical environment, depending on the local context” (Smith 2005: 75).

It could be argued, however, that Smith’s four-fold definition, as presented above, emerges as a somewhat restrictive definition of studentification, since it suggests that it unfolds in relatively specific urban contexts. Indeed, Smith (2005: 75) himself contends that “studentification does not indicate the varied trajectories and complexities of gentrification”, stating that the production and consumption of new-build developments of purpose-built accommodation for students does not fall within the conceptual limits of studentification, whilst the production of large-scale purpose-built developments specifically marketed at niche gentrifier markets (Lees 2003) has been integrated into the conceptual limits of gentrification:

“It is important to stress … that the processes of studentification do not explicitly encompass the new-build development of purpose-built HMO for HE students, for example university halls of residence or flat units, or the large-scale redevelopment of former industrial or commercial premises … clearly such developments do not fit within the rigid representation of studentification (i.e. recommodification of existing housing stock)” (Smith 2005: 80).

Smith states that the *replacement* of permanent residents with students is a key process in studentification, leading to new patterns of social concentration and segregation. This establishes a connection between processes of studentification and broader theories of ghettoisation and segregation; the idea of the ‘student ghetto’ has been frequently raised in discourses of studentification (Hubbard 2008) since it may have wider implications when we come to consider the impact of students on urban areas which demonstrate a more mixed demographic profile:

“Studentification … underpins the formation of ‘student ghettos’. The term ghetto is utilised here to emphasise the residential ‘concentration’ of Higher Education (HE) students in distinct enclaves of university towns” (Smith 2005: 73).

If the acceptance of segregation is a prerequisite for studentification this undermines the role of students as agents of urban change in more diverse communities where segregation has yet to unfold. Thus, it is evident that, conceptually, the notion of studentification remains somewhat confused: students are perceived as forming
‘ghettos’ but elsewhere compared to marginal pioneer gentrifiers. Exposing the interconnectedness of studentification and gentrification, Smith (2005: 76) goes on to note:

“There are prominent economic-related similarities between studentifiers and early phase (marginal) pioneer gentrifiers … in this respect, studentifiers are similar to artists and other creative workers, and may be viewed as the ground-breakers for gentrification activity in some contexts”.

These alleged connections between gentrification and studentification need to be examined and the conceptual limits of both loosened if we are to examine and analyse more fully a multitude of contemporary expressions of urban socio-spatial change.

Smith’s (2005) definition of studentification is based on a range of criteria that leads to a relatively rigid conceptualisation tied to a particular set of processes unfolding within specific urban contexts. However, more recent scholarship on the geographies of students has outlined increasingly diverse spatial practices (Holdsworth 2009; Christie 2007) and accommodation preferences (Hubbard 2009) among a diversifying UK student population (Findlay et al. 2010). Comparability can be inferred here between the inherent complexities of urban change identified within gentrification scholarship, and the conceptual critiques that have followed (outlined in Section 2.2) and those within the scholarship of studentification.

Despite the somewhat limited nature of Smith’s original definition of studentification, he acknowledges the complexity of the process, pointing out that “empirical evidence suggests that studentification unfolds in different ways, and takes different forms in different contexts” (Smith 2005: 74). We can see here that there are similarities with Van Weesep’s (1994) review of the literature of gentrification, in which he explores why processes of gentrification unfold in some neighbourhoods, and not others, and how the particular urban contexts of gentrifying areas affect the ways in which these processes of change unfold. What thinking like this alerts us to is that it is important that research maintains a focus on the micro-geographic/small-scale specificities of the processes of studentification.
Problematising homogeneity within studentification research is important in determining the varied social outcomes of studentification. This is underlined in Hubbard’s (2008) work in Loughborough where interviews with local residents uncover a range of problems associated with the concentration of students in the Storer area, including: noise and anti-social behaviour; visible deterioration of the physical landscape; litter and refuse; vandalism; the proliferation of ‘to let’ signs; likelihood of burglary and theft; traffic and parking issues; domination of private rented housing. Also noted was the decrease of: property values; primary school intake; levels of community investment increasing community homogeneity; and levels of community cohesiveness. Indeed, the emergence of a resident group (Storer and Ashby Residents’ Group - SARG) suggests an empathy with “a media narrative in which students are deemed responsible for neighbourhood decline” (Hubbard 2008: 323). Interestingly, Hubbard concludes that there is a concentration on negative views among local residents of students as a social group and their impacts on the Storer community, stating “no respondents suggested that the influx of students has a positive influence on the aesthetic quality of the town” (Hubbard 2008: 333). Importantly, student residential patterns, that is, the tendency to cluster in specific neighbourhoods, and the perception of students’ needs by others are also addressed by Hubbard (2008: 326):

“[The] geographical concentration [of student populations] ... is encouraged by students’ predisposition to locate in areas that they regard as convenient for university, as well as the tendency for letting agencies to push students towards certain parts of the town, often making stereotyped judgements as to which areas suit undergraduates (who are assumed to have homogenous and inevitably alcohol-fuelled interests)”.

A key point arising from this is that assumptions are made about student motivations and interests in terms of their accommodation decisions, leaving a gap in studentification debates. This calls for empirical research into the needs, preferences and expectations of students and how these impact on their residential choices. A significant contribution of this thesis is to fill this gap.

It is noticeable that, in terms of issues of conflict between the established local residential community and students, the views of residents are detailed while student attitudes and opinions remain largely unreported. Hubbard’s (2008) research,
therefore, reveals established residents showing opposition to their student neighbours in discourses of ‘othering’, communicating their aversion in a “language of displacement…replete with metaphors more usually associated with xenophobic and racist discourse” (Hubbard 2008: 334). A key element is the point at which a ‘changeover’ occurs, when there is a transition from an urban area dominated by established local residents to emergent ‘student areas’. The notion of a ‘tipping point’ is problematised by Hubbard due to its discriminatory undertones “having been defined in the context of sometimes questionable studies of ethnic diversity as that point at which non-white occupation triggers ‘white flight’”. Therefore, there is a suggestion that notions of ‘othering’ and the marginalisation of student populations are, ironically, reciprocated. The idea that students and ‘locals’ live largely separate lives is rooted in the ‘town-gown’ division (Chatterton 2000) and segregated entertainment provision (Chatterton 1999; Chatterton and Hollands 2002); students appear to distinguish and define their own bounded territories, imbued with their own cultural lifestyle, deliberately choosing to distance themselves from ‘other’ local residents, where possible opting to live alongside ‘people like us’ in their chosen accommodation:

“to develop and maintain a strong sense of being part of a ‘student’ community, with Loughborough students’ pejorative descriptions of ‘locals’ or ‘townies’ suggesting that there is a strong exclusionary imperative encouraging the maintenance of strong distinctions between student selves and local others” (Hubbard 2009: 1918).

Hubbard concludes that the impacts of diversifying student accommodation should be considered in relation to wider urban theories of gentrification, segregation and displacement, and their implications for social cohesiveness in urban communities. In the light of this there is a need to establish the extent to which student accommodation choice is driven by the desire to live with ‘people like us’ and the extent to which students are motivated to segregate themselves from non-student groups, in the same way that the middle-class “search for cultural exclusivity” (Hubbard 2009: 1920) in gated communities.

Finally, Hubbard (2008) considers a range of options introduced by Charnwood Borough Council to manage the proliferation of student housing in Loughborough, acknowledging the awareness on the part of the local authority that studentification
produces challenges and local policies need to respond positively to these. The ‘threshold approach’ piloted by Charnwood Borough Council involved a restriction on planning permission for any changes likely to increase the concentration of student residence in a neighbourhood. This is noted as representing:

“a remarkable attempt to use planning legislation to shape the distribution of a specific population across an urban area, with policies discriminating against student occupation and other forms of multiple occupation” (Hubbard 2008: 337).

Indeed, the adoption of such an approach focussing on population mix in the immediate surrounding area of an individual planning application - rather than adopting an ‘area-based model’ such as the Area of Student Housing Restraint (ASHORE) developed by Leeds City Council (Smith 2005) - reflects the specific policy requirements of a small market town, compared to those in a major university city.

Since Hubbard’s (2008) research, the introduction of an Article 4 direction in Loughborough (planning permission is now required to change all properties within Loughborough from a family home (Use Class C3) to one occupied by 3-6 unrelated people (Use Class C4)), enables Charnwood Borough Council to set limits on the number of HMOs in particular areas. This is clearly a response to the perceived deterioration of the urban fabric, and the (real or perceived) lifestyle conflicts between students and established residents. Certainly, these are examples of both local and governmental policies and the actions of residential groups “seek[ing] to halt, alleviate or even reverse” studentification (Smith 2008: 2542). This marks the necessarily context-specific heterogeneity of planning responses to the issues of student housing, reflecting the differentiated expressions of studentification between university towns and cities (Hubbard 2008). It is clear that the effects this legislation has on the concentrations and segregation of student populations will require close monitoring and research over the next few years if we are to keep abreast of the complexities and dynamism of contemporary student-related urban change.

Whilst Hubbard’s (2008) study has as its focus town-gown issues in Loughborough, historically, across a variety international of urban contexts, relations between town and university have been a source of difficulty (Brockliss 2000), with student
settlements often highlighted as a source of problems for the local community (Van den Berg and Russo 2004); as far back as the twelfth century the existence of medieval universities (across Europe) involved large concentrations of students living in nearby areas, such as the ‘Latin Quarter’ in Paris. Indeed, there are examples of student activity creating town-gown conflict: in 1995 at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, an end of year student party ended with the ‘Ezra Street riot’ which led, ultimately, to the university adopting a ‘code of conduct’ to regulate student behaviour. Indeed, Van den Berg and Russo (2004) suggest that strategic action aiming at the integration and valorisation of student communities for urban development is still required. As Bruning et al. (2006: 128) state:

“Almost exclusively student engagement has involved sending students of the university out into the community. Very few institutions have, however, thought of engagement in terms of asking members of the community onto campus, sharing university resources with them”.

In the search to lessen the negative effects of studentification, Russo et al. (2007: 199) argue that a more sustainable city-university relationship is required. Their proposed model has the University as a potential driving force for positive urban development, provided a balance can be achieved between the various stakeholders (including both local communities and students), thus enabling the “embedding [of] knowledge in the local and social economic networks”. The relationship between university and city is ideally a mutually-beneficial one. Munro et al. (2009: 1823) emphasise the importance of the relationship:

“universities and other local stakeholders need at least to be aware of potential adverse consequences of growing HE provision on local neighbourhoods and residents and to consider taking ameliorative action as appropriate”.

Some action in response to the impacts students have on the neighbourhoods in which they live has been the focus of more recent academic scholarship. In their study of the dilemmas that face those seeking to contain the problems students can cause neighbourhoods in five UK cities, Munro and Livingston (2011: 1) assert that “dominant ideas about ‘typical’ students and what it means to be a student shape the way that policy towards students is conceived and delivered”. It is noted that although
there are similarities in the problems across the case studies, the severity of these problems, and the nature of the responses to them, are shaped by local context:

“There must be a case for thinking about new ways of forging partnerships between HEIs and the local policy community, to find ways of anticipating and managing such changes better than in the past … there must now be an argument as to the degree of responsibility that universities ought to have for their broader impacts, even where unintentional, on their localities” (Munro and Livingston 2011: 15).

Furthermore, Munro and Livingston (2011) emphasise that national policy changes have unanticipated local impacts which are shaped both by local context and by discourses about what is ‘normalised’ student behaviour. Increased student numbers as a result of government policy, for example, create problems at the local level. This underlines the need for a greater awareness of the problems involved in absorbing increased numbers of students into local environments, and is crucial if our understanding of differential geographies is to be deepened, and effective national policies formed and implemented.

Growing numbers of students and the impacts they have on towns and cities suggest wider implications, as identified by Smith (2009: 1797):

“This concern with the studentification of university towns and cities provides only a partial understanding of the wider sociospatial effects of expanded systems of higher education and enlarged student populations”

Clearly, this points to the need for a broader lens of enquiry to explore geographies of home-based and international students, and to forge a more robust theorisation of the sociospatial impacts of systems of higher education.

The international dimension of the geographies of students shares significant overlaps with migration and mobility literatures. Most notable here are Findlay et al.’s (2010) contribution which illuminates processes of international student ‘knowledge migration’ in the UK, and Findlay et al.’s (2006: 291) examination of “changing mobility patterns, attitudes and behaviours of UK higher education students who spend a part of their degree programme studying or working abroad”. However, Mavroudi and Warren (2013: 265), when exploring the varying reasons why students from abroad come to the UK, suggest that many are “drawn by the reputation of the
UK HE system”. This influx of international students forms a significant group of non-British citizens actively attracted and encouraged to settle here to study, with the aim of boosting the UK’s market-share of ‘global talent’. This policy of welcoming international students, aligned with the globalisation of higher education, is influential in shaping the characteristics of the student population in the UK and needs to be considered in studentification research, since, paradoxically:

“On the one hand, international mobility is seen as the ‘ideal’ in higher education and to be encouraged; on the other, immigration policy in receiving countries can also create challenges for such mobility” (Mavroudi and Warren 2013: 269).

Despite some specific characteristics of the UK higher education system (for example, university tuition fees and the culture in which many students move away from the family home while studying at university), processes of studentification are identified in a growing scholarship as occurring beyond the UK, in international contexts: Collins (2010) explores the growth in numbers of international students in Auckland, New Zealand, and their role in transforming the urban space; Fincher and Shaw (2010) study the distinct spaces ‘local’ and ‘international’ students inhabit in central Melbourne, Australia, particularly the channelling of overseas students into high-rise accommodation which is resulting in “sociospatial separation from the host society” (p.1884); and Pickren (2012) investigates issues of class conflict in processes of studentification occurring in Garden Springs, Georgia, USA.

However, it is clear that there has been little attention paid to the “spatial impacts of a mass HE [Higher Education] system” in the UK context (Munro et al. 2009: 1806). This is somewhat surprising since this is a mobile social group which, through its lifestyle and consumption practices, impacts on the areas in which it settles. Significantly, there is a paucity of appropriate data enabling sophisticated socio-spatial analyses of student populations, although Munro et al.’s (2009) analysis of the residential patterns and labour market effects of students, and Duke-Williams’ (2009) study of the geographies of student migration in the UK begin to fill this gap. Also, Munro et al. (2009: 1805) underline two crucial characteristics of studentification when they observe that “students are typically highly residentially concentrated and statistically the population of students shows a high degree of segregation from non-
students” which reinforces the discourses of ‘othering’ in the literature of studentification.

In wards with high concentrations of student residence Duke-Williams (2009) demonstrates that flows occurring within these wards are dominated by the in- and out- movement of students. This study asks key questions about the measurement of studentification and the concept of a ‘tipping point’: “will areas continue to intensify their student population to a saturation point of around 90%?”; and, if studentification is to be quantified, “at what proportion of resident student population does an area become studentified?” (Duke-Williams 2009: 1844). The implications of these questions extend our awareness of the importance of studentification and its connections to wider processes of urban relocation.

Interestingly, while the focus of much of the literature has been on students leaving home and ‘going away to university’, Holdsworth’s (2009) contribution to the debate is to focus on those students that attend university while ‘staying at home’. Since increasing numbers of students now attend local HEI’s, this paper illuminates the diversity of contemporary geographies of UK students. The trend to remain living at home whilst studying locally may well intensify and there is a need to monitor students’ mobility and immobility if we are to develop a fuller understanding of the significance of the residential preferences and patterns of students.

The diversity of the geographies of UK HE students emerges as a key theme in the literature of studentification. Hubbard’s contribution traces the recent proliferation of PBSA in Loughborough, and reinvigorates the debate about the interconnectedness of studentification and gentrification:

“in the midst of a ‘third wave’ of gentrification … the marketing of new-build rental properties to post-students and graduates suggest that the relationship between student occupation and gentrification is now somewhat different, with the blurring of student and post-student lifestyles generating new demands for shared and communal living in the private rental market” (Hubbard 2009: 1903).

While the conceptual commonalities between gentrification and studentification have been presented by Smith and Holt (2007), Hubbard (2009) takes a different view,
drawing on a case study of the production of high-quality PBSA developments in Loughborough to prove that:

“studenthood is itself now being effectively gentrified, with institutional investors identifying students as part of that group which possess a ‘metropolitan habitus’ and is hence willing to pay a premium for inner-city living” (Hubbard 2009: 1904).

In the light of this comment, it is interesting to consider the involvement of private developers (such as Unite, University Partnerships Programme, and Opal) in the provision of luxury PBSA. This provision may be a response to offset shortfalls in student accommodation, to changing student preferences, and/or to make a profit – the promotion of accommodation specifically-designed for students is clearly an expanding sector of the property market. This expansion has encouraged private investment in new and evolving types of developments, such as the “construction of ‘living pods’, studios and ‘living cubes’ with self-contained kitchens and bathrooms” (Hubbard 2009: 1908).

In support of this argument, Chatterton (2010: 509) maintains that PBSA represents “new heights in the reformulation, upgrading, and commodification of the student experience”, suggesting that students no longer “choose from grotty ‘digs’ let by slum landlords”. He argues that the introduction of contemporary luxury student living means that students are less likely to tolerate substandard accommodation and have come to represent “a monetarised and commodified, as much as an educational persona” (p.512). As a result, there has been an increase in the provision and upgrading of accommodation (housing, PBSA, and University halls of residence) as providers compete for student spending. Similarly, Smith (2009: 1799) emphasises the growth in PBSA:

“Within the UK context, this is particularly pertinent as private sector actors increasingly develop exclusive, high-cost, purpose-built student accommodation … such as the Nido concept in London”.

The idea that PBSA is a solution to the many challenges of concentrated student HMO is problematised: there are concerns expressed by the National HMO Lobby about the location of PBSA, since this type of accommodation can exacerbate social, economic and environmental problems:
“Purpose-built development in the wrong place…can exacerbate the situation; and insensitively sited, can actually generate new problems with demographic imbalance” (Tyler 2007, quoted in Hubbard 2009: 1909).

Additionally, Garmendia et al.’s (2011: 1) study of student flats in Ciudad Real, Spain, identifies ‘vertical studentification’, a situation where studentification happens “in a high-rise morphology but in a vertical and hidden way, making policy implications less straightforward”. It can be seen that the introduction of PBSA, in an international as well as national context, does not necessarily solve the problems associated with studentification but can create its own equally problematic challenges.

The current situation is one where students are often being presented with a wide range of accommodation choice. The result of research with first year and returning students underlines the significance of student demand in influencing the diversification of student accommodation (Hubbard 2009). Yet, whilst Holdsworth (2009) tracks student accommodation pathways through from the traditional movement away from the parental home into halls of residence, followed by a move into private rented accommodation, the preferences, choices and constraints underlying these pathways remain under-researched and neglected in the literature. As Hubbard (2009: 1912) states:

“To date very little has been written about how students weigh up the merits of different forms of accommodation, with most commentators describing a fairly standardised housing route”.

Whilst Christie et al. (2002: 219) suggest students generally “got better quality accommodation in any subsequent move they made within the private rented sector” as their knowledge of the housing market improved through experience, there has been no recent research which examines the extent to which student needs, preferences and expectations drives their accommodation decisions.

Research on the linkages between student migration and residential change in university towns and cities has focused on neighbourhoods with deeply engrained and relatively mature expressions of studentification. Clearly, limited attention has been given to neighbourhoods that are in the process of being studentified or experiencing the preliminary, trend-setting flows of student in-migration. However, in one of the first studies of its type, Sage et al. (2012a) explore how studentification
unfolds ‘in situ’, shedding light on the rapidity of population and demographic restructuring in Brighton. This underlines the argument that we have a limited understanding of the pace of local demographic change and population restructuring in studentifying neighbourhoods. The recent development of PBSA in Brighton is acknowledged as being linked to changing student expectations there:

“the changing residential geographies of students in Brighton indicate changing student expectations (in terms of the quality of interior housing specifications, exterior housing condition, amenities, location, and so on) that have underpinned the rise of PBSA in recent years. If this is the case, new student geographies may be emerging in Brighton, tied to the production of new types of student housing and wider processes of urban regeneration” (Sage et al. 2012a: 609).

Indeed, there is further indication that over time a lack of suitable properties in some areas, a perceived ‘saturation’ of an area by students, and opposition by long-term residents have “prompted a movement of students out of these ‘student ghetto’ areas and further afield as the ‘studentification frontier’ is rolled out across new urban neighbourhoods” (Sage et al. 2012a: 599) - this out movement of students is destudentification.

2.4 National media conceptualisations of studentification

Studentification has been portrayed predominantly as a negative process of urban change within national media discourses. Generally speaking, the content of articles reporting on processes of studentification has tended to contain negative accounts of local residents’ experiences of student neighbours, often expressed in emotive language using phrases such as “student ghettos” (The Times 15/09/2005). Perhaps most evident in this type of reporting is the suggestion that students are “the worst neighbours, second only to squatters” (The Independent 27/01/2006).

Such negative representations of students as a social group rely mainly on stereotypical and sensational descriptions of them. Indeed, this underlines a central theme running through national media discourses of studentification where students are perceived as “rowdy” and “yobbish”; a population that causes communities to “spiral into decline” (Daily Mail 24/01/2006) and are responsible for “abandoned pint glasses, overgrown gardens, heavily curtained windows and loud kerfuffles at the
“Angry residents’ groups in big university cities say they are being ruined by an influx of students. Neighbours who party all night, streets littered with takeaway containers and trash, neglected, crumbling houses, rat-infested discarded mattresses in back gardens” (The Guardian 05/05/2001).

“Studentification can have various adverse effects on … areas, which can become overcrowded in term time … Conversely, they become like ghost towns in the holidays. The condition of local housing often gets worse and, while off-licences and takeaways prosper, schools and nurseries close down” (The Observer 23/05/2010).

Indeed, The Times Higher Education Supplement on town-gown relations (30/06/2006) suggests that the word ‘studentification’ has become synonymous with a collection of negative impacts associated with expanding student populations in residential communities:

“The word “studentification” … is a blot on the English language, but communities in a growing number of towns and cities are well aware of its meaning … regional development associations and city councils may associate it with urban regeneration, but to the residents it means noise, mess, high property prices and even school closures and the loss of local facilities”.

This negative representation of studentification in the media repeats Hubbard’s (2008) recognition of the ‘othering’ of student populations by local established residents in Loughborough, expressed in intolerant language more commonly associated with racial prejudice. Similarly, in Headingley, Leeds, The Economist made a comparison between local residents’ views of students and ethnic
discrimination, with its use of strong language such as “distaste”, “sense of panic” and “an invading army”:

“In Headingley, aformerly quiet suburb of north-west Leeds, students are regarded with the same sort of distaste that the inhabitants of 1950s London reserved for West Indian immigrants. The sense of panic at an invading army is the same too” (The Economist 20/05/2004).

There are a few instances, however, of national media discourses beginning to acknowledge some of the benefits students have brought to residential communities. For example, The Guardian (05/05/2001) reports the positive, culturally-enriched impact of an enlarged student population in Leeds:

“I am not a student. I live in Headingley and I think it is great so many students live in the area. There are loads of interesting pubs, restaurants, plus the cinema of course, which would all face terminal decline without the student population” (response to BBC Leeds Online’s bulletin board, quoted in The Guardian 05/05/2001).

However, when a more understanding approach towards studentification is taken, the negative aspects of large student populations continue to be cited, as exemplified by the following quotation:

“Students come back from clubs at 4am. Most don't intend to be a nuisance, but it does create tremendous tensions. They also affect the housing market .... The bins are a big issue … It brings an imbalance in terms of age. When they refer to a place as a ‘student village’, that really gets up our nose” (The Observer 13/09/2009).

The diversification of student accommodation has received more recent national media coverage (Hubbard 2009; Holdsworth 2009). The first of the following two quotations resonates with Holdsworth’s analysis of increasing numbers of students choosing to study at local HEI; while the second echoes Hubbard’s (2009) discussion of the rise of PBSA, and the emergence of ‘service’ as a central facet of the student accommodation market:

“Surging fees and the impact of the recession has seen the rise of the stay-at-home student. With accommodation in student halls now costing an average of more than £3,800 a year, thousands of undergraduates are opting to study for a degree while living with mum and dad to avoid building up a mountain of debt” (The Guardian 12/08/2011).
“Nido Spitalfields isn’t even the most expensive [purpose-built accommodation] being promoted to students. The seventh-floor rooms with a view, go for £390 per week – equal to £20,280 a year. Its pampered residents enjoy a gym and spa, a weekly clean, linen and towel supply, internet and Sky TV” (The Guardian 21/08/2010).

The concept of studentification has been portrayed consistently, therefore, by the national media as presenting a threat to the established neighbourhood and community structures that exist within university towns and cities. Recent reports of more diverse residential expressions of studenthood observe both the tendency for students to live at home and the role of PBSA in raising and fulfilling accommodation expectations among student populations. Any benefits associated with studentification remain limited in national media coverage, however, with the dominant presentation emphasising the extreme negative impacts of studentification on the life experiences of established local residents.

2.5 Local community conceptualisations of studentification

A distinct conceptualisation of studentification has emerged at the local community level, which tends to assume a homogenous experience of studentification, and emphasises the barriers that prevent harmonious interaction between local established residents and students. It is useful to bear this conceptualisation in mind when exploring levels of community cohesiveness in studentified urban areas.

In order to counteract the negative impacts of studentification, the National HMO Lobby, an association of community groups, was formed in 2000 with the expressed intention of “trying to redress the impact on their communities of concentrations of shared houses or houses in multiple occupation (HMO)” (National HMO Lobby 2009: 3). This organisation lobbies for legislative change to enable the control and management of clusters of HMO on behalf of disparate community organisations and action groups across the UK. This organisation states that its primary aim is:

“to lobby government nationally to introduce legislation which will enable government locally to preserve communities from destabilisation by concentrations of shared housing” (National HMO Lobby 2009: 1).
According to its mission-statement, this body seeks “both to clarify the concept of studentification, and to campaign for its recognition and resolution” since it perceives that studentification results in the substitution of a local community for a student community, arguing also that a sustainable community should be well-balanced in terms of demographic structure. This imbalance is identified as being caused by concentrated “shared households or HMOs” (Tyler 12/05/2006) and it is claimed that the “student market is by far the most important” since the needs and preferences of local residents take second place to those of students. Again, this response to student concentration in an area points to a perceived polarisation in the lifestyles of local residents and students, a situation in which local residents become ‘victims’.

In light of this, the National HMO Lobby’s portrayal of studentification, in a similar manner to that endemic in the national media presentation, is conceptualised also in a largely pejorative style. There is limited recognition of any positive changes resulting from the in-movement of students to established residential communities, as demonstrated by the following quotation:

“There are no benefits to studentification, there is no profit-and-loss balance to be made. To pretend otherwise is to fudge the issue. It’s not only the quality of students which is the issue, students as such – it’s the sheer quantity … To be sure, there can be ‘positive effects’ of students in a university town … But there is a clear distinction between students and studentification. It is students which bring ‘positive effects’, not studentification” (Tyler 12/05/2006).

Lobbyists maintain that the negative aspects of student-related urban change stem from the clustering of student HMO and argue that if one in three residents is a student then a ‘tipping point’ has been reached:

“If students number one in three, the disproportion is marked, the student community achieves autonomy and becomes the dominant social group (being larger than any other segment), and cohesion is lost” (National HMO Lobby 2009: 1).

However, as has previously been argued, the use of the term ‘tipping point’ to describe the residential concentration of a marginal social group is problematic. It not only carries discriminatory undertones (Hubbard 2008), but also contains the inherent assumption that it is possible to ascertain a rigid, quantitatively-defined point at which communities become unbalanced. The National HMO Lobby’s attitude and language
confirm that, as Smith and Holt (2007: 157) observe, studentification “induces territorial claims to space, housing, and public and private services”, claims which can create conflict.

The National HMO Lobby, therefore, focuses on the divisions and separations studentification can bring to local neighbourhoods, and recognises the problems involved if students are to be integrated positively and harmoniously within residential communities. This suggests that perhaps there is a need for local and national strategies to address these problems. Yet Smith (2008: 2541) observes that “the lack of government policy and the incapacity of institutional actors to intervene or regulate the residential geographies of students are yielding ‘unbalanced’ populations”. It appears certain that in the absence of well-thought-out locally-specific schemes and/or a national policy on student housing, the polarisation and ‘otherness’ created by studentification will remain as a key issue going forward.

2.6 Neoliberalisation of studenthoo...
the time of the expansion of the universities in the 1960s) demand for term-time
student accommodation in the UK was met by institutionally-managed ‘halls of
residence’ in campus-type environments, with smaller numbers lodging in the private
rented sector. More recently, a large increase in student numbers meant that many
HEIs, lacking land on which to expand, have been unable to provide campus-based
accommodation for the majority of their students. It was estimated by Rugg et al.
(2000) that around 50% of students had to rent accommodation in the private sector.

The difficulty HEIs found in trying to accommodate their increased student numbers
was recognised by property owners and developers, who seized the opportunity to
recommodify single-family housing and make it suitable for student occupation,
thereby setting in motion, and subsequently accelerating, the processes of
studentification:

“characterised by particular practices of subdividing, renting, and managing
housing, and landlords are typically able to extract more rent from a four-
student or five-student household than they would from a family in the same
accommodation” (Hubbard 2008: 325).

Profiteering and capital investment in the student letting business suggests
studentification operates as a tool of neoliberalism. There were those who,
encouraged by Thatcherite entrepreneurial policies, recognised the opportunity to
profit by dealing in the ‘open’ (and initially unregulated) business of acquiring houses
suitable for letting to students, and maximising the economic opportunities in that
market. Such conversion or subdivision of housing appeared to be a lucrative
investment, the result of which has been the argument that it is “reasonable to
assume students now constitute a significant presence in many areas where they
were barely evident in the early 1990s” (Hubbard 2008: 328).

It is clear that Universities are operating, increasingly, as businesses. According to
consultants Savills (2010), 70% of purpose-built student housing is owned and
managed by universities, although this proportion may begin to reduce in the light of
lower levels of central government funding. This reduction in university funding is
likely to push institutions into attempting to boost their finances by such methods as
the disposal of assets to the private sector, or partnership arrangements with private
organisations (Savills 2010). Certainly, there is evidence that the renovation and
development of on-campus accommodation, in some cases, is being funded by partnership with private operators as “universities are becoming increasingly entrepreneurial, forging new relations with business and government at a variety of scales” (Holloway et al. 2010: 8).

When the former Business Secretary Lord Mandelson spoke of a ‘new University vision’ he stressed the centrality of the “customer experience of students and ties with business” (BBC 3/11/2009, emphasis added). The fact that students are so clearly perceived as ‘customers’ shopping around for the best quality ‘product’ is a crucial change. The commodification of the student experience in the light of the neoliberalisation of the UK University business model, and the associated shift in student accommodation preferences towards a mass-produced, high-quality product is an important development (Chatterton 2010). This commodification is a key factor in the reshaping of the contemporary urban landscape, resulting in the production of specific differentiated spaces for night-time consumption by students in the city (see Chatterton’s (1999) study in Bristol), and the mass production of mainstream urban ‘playscapes’ targeted at young people (Chatterton and Holland 2002). These various observations are significant in that they closely resonate with the development of gated communities and differentiated branded nightscapes marketed at gentrifiers.

Therefore, quite clearly, the increasing neoliberalisation of studenthood, in particular the ways in which this is reflected in student-related urban restructuring and the consumption of the ‘student experience’, necessitates a rethinking of the established definition of studentification. Moreover, the impacts of changes to the higher education system - loans, tuition fees, bursaries, debt and other governmental housing policies - all form major elements in the evolving processes of studentification.

The Browne Report (2010), abolishing the ‘capping’ system and enabling universities to charge up to £9,000 fees from the 2012/13 academic year, means universities, like all profit-making businesses, will need to consider the quality and desirability of their ‘product’ when fixing the ‘price’ they ask for it. In such an open market the importance of non-EU overseas full time students throughout UK universities (210,000) is underlined, since they are a source of vital income to universities (Savills 2010) – and may become more so if, with higher fees, some potential British undergraduates are
not prepared to take out large loans to fund their university experience. The issues associated with student indebtedness have been highlighted previously in the literature (Christie and Munro 2003; Hubbard 2009; Maringe et al. 2009), but more work on this may well be needed as the student-financial landscape continues to evolve. There is a relevant, more recent study in Brighton (Sage et al. 2012b: 1073) that suggests poorer-quality housing is becoming popular with students as “the low-cost HMO...may be appealing to a more financially-stretched student population”. This emphasises the need to evaluate the importance of the cost of housing to students and how this shapes the demand and supply of student accommodation.

Leading on from this, the higher cost of a university education invites us to consider whether universities will continue to be “a sufficiently powerful brand for which students...are willing to make significant sacrifices” (Maringe et al. 2009: 157). In an early analysis of the evolving higher education sector, Munro and Livingston (2011) also speculate about the nature of changes expected in university towns and cities in the light of the considerable financial commitment demanded from students:

“More recently, more radical changes to HE funding in the UK raise the prospect of dramatic local changes driven by the rising cost of attending university, which may cause more students to live at home or even not to attend at all … There is a potential for marked redrawing of the map of HE” (Munro and Livingston 2011: 14).

It is clear that the rising cost of attending university is likely to bring about dramatic and dynamic changes in the Higher Education system: some students may decide not to attend university altogether, others may attend but select cheap accommodation in order to minimise the debts they will accumulate, whilst others will make the financial commitment needed to live in more expensive accommodation. Therefore these changing circumstances seem likely to have a profound effect on student populations and residential patterns in university towns and cities in the future.

2.7 Summary

In summary, this chapter has provided a review of established academic conceptualisations of studentification and suggests that these have become outdated
in light of new, diverse expressions of studentification, diversifying student populations, and increasingly complex accommodation choices and pathways for students. The chapter has detailed the widespread recognition of: the varied, geographically uneven outcomes of studentification tied to the contingencies of student populations, the history of town-gown relations in university towns and cities, and the demographic, social, cultural and economic characteristics of established residential communities experiencing studentification. There is also recognition of the significance of political discourses of community to debates of studentification, and the importance of current changes affecting higher education. Importantly, it has been noted that there is an absence of research into the needs, preferences and expectations of students and how these impact on their residential choices. This underlines the significance of the contribution of this thesis in investigating the effects of student decision-making practices on processes of studentification and destudentification.

The discussion has pointed to a scarcity of research examining the spatial patterns of student residence, in particular at the sub-city level: “there is much unexplained variation between cities…which suggests the need for more localised work” (Munro et al. 2009: 1805). Similarly, the temporal aspect of studentification remains largely unexplored. Therefore, this points to the need to undertake micro-geographic investigation of complex processes of (de)studentification as they unfold in varied and nuanced ways according to their specific urban contexts.
3. Destudentification: an expression of urban decline?

3.1 Introduction

The chapter begins by exploring how destudentification is contextualised via an overview of scholarship on urban abandonment and decline (Section 3.2). The conceptualisation of destudentification is considered in the context of academic and national media discourses (Sections 3.3-3.4). The connection between destudentification and segregation, exclusion and fear of the ‘other’ (Section 3.5) is also explored, and overlaps with sustainable communities and housing renewal (Section 3.6) are considered. Most importantly, the chapter highlights that discussions of destudentification are based on anecdotal rather than empirical evidence, and are marked by an absence of academic investigation into processes of destudentification. Therefore, it is postulated that to understand more fully the processes of destudentification, a more informed insight into contemporary geographical debates on studentification, gentrification, urban abandonment and decline is required.

3.2 Narratives of urban abandonment and decline

An examination of urban abandonment and decline provides the broader conceptual framework within which to understand the concept of destudentification. One dominant strand of the literature of urban abandonment and decline describes events that occurred in Western cities on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1960s and 1970s, leading to Clark’s (1989: 1) assessment that “far from being centres of attraction, cities have become zones of abandonment”. It can be argued that when an area begins to accumulate a number of buildings vacant of tenants, it is experiencing the first phases of housing abandonment (Sternlieb et al. 1974). This desertion can sometimes initiate a process of urban decline, which is described by Accordino and Johnson (2000) as a situation that occurs when the demand for homes in certain inner city neighbourhoods begins to fall, the rents that landlords can demand reduce, and decreasing revenues and deferred maintenance and diminished services follow. This falling demand, along with the physical deterioration of properties can be identified, therefore, as early indicators of the economic factors and trends in population movements that signal urban decline. Indeed, we can see the words
‘abandonment’ and ‘decline’ as symptomatic of the ensuing problems now evident in many urban areas. However, although processes of neighbourhood abandonment, decline or downgrading are “witnessed all over the world…surprisingly little is known about what it is” (Aalbers 2006: 1061). Clearly, case-studies are needed to find out “what it is” so that a deeper understanding of processes of neighbourhood abandonment and decline can be developed.

It is interesting to note the language used to discuss abandonment because it contains strongly negative connotations and the concept is often associated with the ‘contagion phenomenon’ (Sternlieb et al. 1974; Keenan et al. 1999). This metaphorical connection between abandonment and serious illness is elaborated in the work of Burchell and Listokin (1981: 15), who describe abandonment as:

“both a symptom and a disease – a symptom in that it indicates poverty, selected migration, employment loss and usually a generalised decline of the tax base and resulting municipal fisc; a disease in that it becomes a casual mechanism, exercising a distinct mechanism which accelerates and perpetuates urban decline”.

In this quotation, ‘abandonment’ is indicative of urban disease and the use of such language underlines the seriousness with which the situation is presented. There is an inference here that cities are terminally ill and ‘deathward bound’, as opposed to vibrant, attractive and expanding environments portrayed as synonymous with gentrification. The use of negative language is apparent in the work of other commentators who describe urban decline as a “disturbing...deep-seated deterioration” in the healthy framework and functioning of a city (Clark 1989: 1), whilst some employ a series of negative water images, for example, “confidence in the area begins to seep away…people that can choose to move or drift away [and] property values quickly ebb away” (Keenan et al. 1999: 712).

There are several key indicators of urban decline in a city area - a negative reputation, surplus rented housing and a declining population, disrupted communities and anti-social behaviour - which together form “a clustering of pressures provoking a cumulative crisis” (Power and Mumford 1999: ix). A key aspect of neighbourhood decline is the changing appearance of an area since physical deterioration becomes clearly visible, evidenced by buildings falling into states of disrepair, accumulating
rubbish on the streets and graffiti on the walls. There is a need to establish the extent to which destudentification is ‘nested’ within the wider rubric of urban abandonment and decline.

However, urban decline has a social as well as a physical dimension, expressed in the downgrading of residents’ income and status, a possible rise in criminal activities, and a reduction in local amenities and facilities. As a consequence, some residents dissatisfied with their living environment may develop a wish to leave their neighbourhood. Those who succeed in leaving are likely to be replaced by less affluent groups, who would tend to bring poverty, unemployment and social problems to the area, and where this happens on a significant scale accelerated population changes “can also be part of the spiral of decline” (Feijten and van Ham 2009: 2107). Therefore, the socioeconomic status, desirability and reputation of that particular neighbourhood drops further since people who move to the area but have no intention of remaining there for long, are unlikely to build up meaningful local connections or to participate fully in the local community. In this way, community cohesion can break down.

It has been noted that in other studies neighbourhood decline is suggested to be the result of a ‘natural’ process (Grigsby et al. 1987). Here the argument is that “when neighbourhoods get older, the population inevitably changes and the housing stock ages” (Aalbers 2006: 1061). Wider changes, such as unfavourable economic conditions or suburbanisation, may also have a major impact on change and deterioration in local areas. But perhaps most significant is how the processes of decline can be accelerated by market forces, particularly if there is an overreaction to early symptoms of decay. The ‘natural’ response to urban decay is often seen as gentrification, a process by which traditionally working-class areas of cities undergo major social and physical changes as wealthier inhabitants move into the area with the intention of ‘upgrading’ the neighbourhood (Hamnett 1984; 1991): developers identify the current and potential value of an area – or ‘rent gap’ - as an economic opportunity on which to capitalise (Smith 1987). There is a link between abandonment and gentrification, though not always an obvious one:

“abandonment and gentrification are polar opposites...abandonment results from demand declining to zero, gentrification from high and increasing demand.
Abandonment rises from a precipitous decline in property values, gentrification from a rapid rise” (Marcuse 1985: 1).

It can be argued that while gentrification is described in positive language here, abandonment is perceived as having a negative outcome, and the possibility of regeneration and renewal can be overlooked. Therefore, this researcher calls for more empirical studies to explore further whether urban abandonment always has negative outcomes, or whether there is the possibility for the creation of opportunities for recovery. There is a need to investigate processes of destudentification and the extent to which they relate to theories of urban abandonment and decline, and whether similar outcomes can be expected.

It is important to recognise here that the economic context in which the rises and falls of the housing market occur is always crucial and (for financial and other reasons) not all areas of abandonment will become gentrified. Some commentators argue that those neighbourhoods characterised by a number of vacant and deserted properties will continue to present serious problems and be “increasingly recognised as a significant barrier to the revitalisation” of that area (Accordin and Johnson 2000: 301). Another, highly-significant barrier to neighbourhood revitalisation is the ‘stigma’ or reputation an area can acquire (Cameron 2003), and this researcher argues that this phenomenon can only be uncovered through locally-based, micro-geographic research and its importance as an obstacle to the possibility of regeneration be assessed.

The low demand for housing including, in its most extreme form, the local large-scale ‘abandonment’ of dwellings, is not a new phenomenon. Keenan et al. (1999: 705) describe the abandonment of property as the process by which residential units “become detached from the housing market in a number of ways and eventually fall into disuse, in effect abandoned by their owners”. There are historical examples of whole settlements being denuded of population: for example, housing abandonment has been a major problem in inner-city neighbourhoods of many cities in the north of the USA since the 1960s. There are a number of reasons for these American property desertions: ‘white flight’ from the city to suburban residential areas, physical deterioration of a locale, lack of demand for housing in neighbourhoods marked by social pathologies, declining rental prospects, withdrawal of investment due to red-
lining by banks and mortgage lenders, and stringent rent controls prompting landlords to reduce spending on repairs and maintenance (N. Smith 1979; Marcuse 1985; Wyly and Hammel 1999; Hackworth 2002; Pacione 2009).

One example of US city abandonment which occurred in the 1960s/70s is the population decline in the ‘rustbelt’ city of Detroit. Harris (2009) argues that this metropolis now presents a decrepit, often surreal landscape of urban decline. Several decades of white flight, coupled with the collapse of Detroit’s manufacturing base, especially its world-famous auto industry, have ‘brought the city to its knees’ so that almost a third of Detroit has been abandoned. More broadly, residential abandonment in major US cities in the 1970s has been well-publicised with whole precincts of formerly dense tenement housing (mainly private) being abandoned and afterwards often destroyed by fire and vandalism (N. Smith 1979; Ley 1986; Wilson et al. 1994). In the early 1980s, Slater (2009) observes that the landscape of New York City showed evidence of two apparently contradictory processes – abandonment and gentrification – occurring simultaneously. It is, as Marcuse (1985: 197) states, that “the two phenomena often occur around the corner from one another” that provides justification for exploring the micro-geographies of studentification and destudentification in a local case study.

With its cycle of supply and demand, the complexity of the housing market is recognised as an important widespread phenomenon (often leading to problems) especially in the late 1990s in Britain (Lee and Nevin 2003). At this time, the issue was mainly identified as a problem with council housing where certain estates, areas, or blocks of housing came to be defined as “difficult-to-let” (Bramley and Pawson 2002: 394). Indeed, it was estimated that there were one million homes in Britain classed as ‘low demand’ (Weaver 2003); most of which were in the north of England, where the collapse of industrial employment, economic restructuring and the increasing affordability of new-build homes left a surplus of housing. It is important to realise that an oversupply of housing provision may make an area vulnerable to increasing numbers of empty properties and, therefore, signs of abandonment and social unrest.

In the private-rented sector, as well as in local authority council estates, a low demand for traditional property can lead to dereliction, crime and vandalism and,
eventually (in some cases), the abandonment of entire neighbourhoods. A situation can arise where property owners are trapped by negative equity with unrentable and unsaleable properties since “in such markets, there is little incentive for new buyers to invest or lenders to lend” (Bramley and Pawson 2002: 408). Those tenants who remain in, or move in to, low-demand areas are often dependent on Housing Benefit which can lead to multiple problems, not least of which is that neither tenants nor landlords have interest in property maintenance and the deteriorating external appearance of houses becomes symbolic of the neighbourhood spiral of decline.

In the UK, Liverpool and Manchester have been identified as the cities most affected by large-scale persistent population loss over the last 30 years (Nevin 2003). It has been recorded that the pre-1919 terraced property market in the city of Liverpool, for example, has experienced increasingly low demand, falling prices, high turnover and increasing rates of vacancy due to economic decline and decentralisation. Commentators point out that towards the end of the 1970s, large council estates to the north of the city centre started to show signs of abandonment. This progressed throughout the 1980s with the population falling “to around 8,000 in 2001 from a figure of around 200,000 half a century before” (Lee and Nevin 2002: 7). Similar trends were noted in North Manchester, where falling house prices combined with a marked increase in vacancies. However, there appears to be a North/South divide, since falling demand for houses and the abandonment of whole neighbourhoods persists in the north, contrasts with a chronic shortage of affordable homes in the south (Nevin 2003). It is clear that some areas are “in a more advanced state of decline and abandonment than others” (CABE 2004: 3). It appears that some neighbourhoods are more susceptible to the onset of decline than others, which calls for empirical research into those characteristics which create an area’s vulnerability.

Another further relevant and up-to-date example is that of the ‘ghost’ housing estates in Ireland (Slattery 2008; Whitney 2010). Ireland’s ‘Celtic Tiger’ economy experienced a rapid period of growth from the mid-1990s up until 2008 when it fell into recession and the Irish property bubble burst: “the effects of the international financial crisis...have been felt more strongly and deeply in Ireland than in many developed countries” (Kitchin et al. 2012: 1303). Whitney (2010) suggests Ireland’s legacy of the property boom was the spread of new housing estates across Dublin, but many
houses remain unoccupied as prices in the city have inflated beyond the means of many buyers; these house purchasers subsequently sought homes in locations often quite far from Dublin as a viable option. Slattery (2008) points to a poll by Goodbody Stockbrokers estimating that there were 267,000 vacant dwellings in April 2006, suggesting a vacancy rate of around 11% in Ireland. However, there appear to be few studies detailing the effects on any locality when there is low-occupancy of housing or a widespread exodus of those who previously lived there. Power (1999) argues that “migration from inner cities is not new, but large tracts of viable empty property, both owner-occupied and social housing, is a new problem”. Significantly, this “new problem” is now observable in university towns and cities where areas formerly populated by students appear to be destudentifying. It is contended that destudentification ‘fits’ within the wider conceptual framework of urban abandonment and decline.

3.3 Academic conceptualisations of destudentification

The gradual expansion of university numbers in the 1990s and 2000s saw cheap terraced housing in inner-city enclaves close to the university campus as most attractive for conversion to student-let (Rugg et al. 2002). As university on-campus accommodation struggled to cater for increased student numbers, neighbourhoods such as Headingley in Leeds (Smith, 2002), Lenton in Nottingham, and Storer in Loughborough (Hubbard, 2008) acted as ‘overspill’. Over time, a lack of suitable properties in such areas, a perceived ‘saturation’ of an area by students, and opposition by long-term residents to student neighbours have prompted a movement of students out of these proximate ‘student ghetto’ areas, as the ‘studentification frontier’ is rolled out across new urban neighbourhoods. This is the process identified by Smith 2008 as destudentification. However, since there has been no academic investigation into this aspect of urban change “understandings of the processes of destudentification and population restructuring remain underdeveloped” (Sage et al. 2012a: 600).

Destudentification is a term used to describe an ‘aftermath’ of studentification. Destudentification is identified by Smith (2008: 2552) as:
“the reduction of a student population in a neighbourhood which leads to social (for example, population loss), cultural (for example, closure of retail and other services), economic (for example, devalorisation of property prices) and physical (for example, abandonment of housing) decline”.

This process has been identified as occurring in communities, such as Bournebrook, Birmingham, where there is a marked decrease in the student population as they move to inhabit other ‘cloisters’ (National HMO Lobby 2008). However, it is contended that Smith’s description of destudentification needs the validation of place-specific empirical research, and the lack of such research to date provides justification for the examination in this thesis of processes of destudentification.

Destudentification forms a notable theme in the media where the out-movement of students from established residential communities and the consequent dissolution of clustered HMO is heralded as one of the wider benefits of PBSA developments:

“One effect of these student blocks has been de-studentification. Parts of cities once dominated by students have become the preserve of professional couples instead. This trend has been encouraged by the 2004 Housing Act, which made it compulsory for private landlords offering houses for multiple occupancy to obtain a licence and for them to make the improvements necessary to earn them. So, in theory, everyone is happy: students get plush accommodation, developers invest and residents get their streets back” (The Times Higher Education Supplement 28/07/2006).

However, the “everyone is happy” scenario to describe destudentification is only “in theory”; therefore, empirical research is imperative in order for the complex processes of destudentification to be understood more fully and discussed more informatively.

In Leeds, the development of new PBSA has been seen by some local commentators as a key factor in the oversupply of student accommodation, and the increasing number of empty bed-spaces and voids in the private rented housing sector (Blakey, 2007). The granting of planning permission for numerous developments of student accommodation on brownfield sites away from the existing studentified areas, has facilitated the formation of a new residential geography of students which is dominated by large-scale, high-density, PBSA by private sector developers. One of
the unintentional consequences of this is that some (former) studentified areas are therefore witnessing destudentification, and economic, social and physical decline.

There is some emerging evidence of landlords selling on properties to the market as students move to, or stay longer in, purpose-built accommodation in Leeds. This could provide more accommodation for families and other groups. However, it is important to acknowledge Smith’s (2008) contention that properties put up for sale by landlords do not automatically bring families back into the area. On the one hand, families may be reluctant to locate in areas where they feel overwhelmed by student households, while, on the other hand, the high levels of investment needed to reconvert student HMO to housing suitable for family occupation may be prohibitive, with the additional cost discouraging the in-movement of families to destudentified areas (Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, 2008).

A major concern of established residents when students move away is that less desirable “social groups may replace the out-going students in HMO” (Smith 2008: 2552), and there is growing anecdotal evidence of European (A8) migrants (people from ‘accession eight’ nations which acceded to the EU in 2004) moving into the voids in the private rented housing sector in some destudentified neighbourhoods. However, any evidence does appear to be anecdotal and Smith’s comment is hypothetical. There is a need for research to confirm, indeed, if students are rejecting traditional HMO for PBSA, the presence and scale of this destudentification, and residents’ perceptions of this change.

Academic debate raises the possibility that as a result of destudentification ‘problem’ individuals and families may move in (low-income or benefit-dependent groups, temporary migrants, asylum seekers) causing different kinds of social conflict and leading to the gradual (or rapid) physical deterioration of the area. Similarly, it is argued that the loss of a student population will impact on local retail outlets and other businesses that ‘serviced’ student needs. However, a positive effect of destudentification, it is postulated, is the possibility of the reconversion of student accommodation “into higher-quality, rental accommodation for young professionals” (Smith 2008: 2552), such as housing specifically designated for graduates who choose to remain in towns and cities such as Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham after their studies. In this instance, it is argued that destudentification can lead to
gentrification. Most of this, however, is based on anecdotal evidence and, to date, little research has been carried out into this crucial aspect of contemporary urban change in the UK. One key aspect which remains unexplored is the scale of destudentification. Previous academic discussions have focussed on destudentification of an area, but these fail to engage with the complex micro-geographic expressions of urban change that are unfolding at the street or landlord scale.

When students leave previously colonised streets, these areas are particularly vulnerable to rapid abandonment and decline. Once just a few rented properties remain un-cared for and deteriorate, the situation can lead to a general decline in the standard of housing in an area. While local councils may be keen to regenerate ‘destudentified’ neighbourhoods by making them attractive to other groups, there is a problem with the nature of student housing stock. Since many landlords have altered properties to suit the student-tenant lifestyle (by converting most rooms into bedrooms for example) then such houses are unlikely to be suitable for young professional couples or families. Moreover, these terraced properties lack the bathrooms, garages, off-street parking and sizable gardens that would make them ripe for gentrification. Some abandoned houses can function as perfectly acceptable homes, but when analysing housing abandonment and renaissance in cities, Power and Mumford (1999: 25) point out that many such houses, transferred to an inner London context “...would be gentrified. Yet they sometimes have zero value”. This may well apply to former student housing and emphasises the importance of exploration of the complex expressions of urban change that are unfolding in areas of provincial university towns and cities.

It is interesting to speculate what is likely to happen to low-value houses in streets traditionally dominated by student households if they destudentify. Properties put up for sale may need to be reconverted from HMOs back to family-style accommodation and the cost may be considerable since:

“it has been noted that the high levels of investment needed to deconvert student HMO to housing suitable for family occupation can discourage the in-movement of families to destudentified areas” (Sage et al. 2012a: 600).
In a slow property market many ‘for sale’ signs remain symbolic of a neighbourhood on the cusp of transition. Properties retained to be let to non-students may deteriorate rapidly when they fail to attract new tenants or are inhabited by a series of temporary uncommitted renters.

However, there could be advantages in destudentification if it helps in assisting towns and cities to achieve the objective of ‘rebalancing’ communities; but achieving ‘balance’ in a community is complex and not easily managed. In the context of the current financial situation the short- and long-term effects of destudentification are particularly difficult to predict; owner-occupiers, landlords and tenants may be wary of involvement in the housing market and such a state of laissez faire seems likely to lead to atrophy:

“when the housing market is slow and some of these areas have suffered severe reputational damage and now contain unattractive houses previously multiply occupied and difficult to convert back, even to low-price owner-occupation. This raises the spectre of quite rapid localised decline, with downward pressure on rent levels, increased vacancies and repossessions and forced sales” (Munro and Livingston 2011: 14).

Therefore, there appears to be a clear link between studies which identify property abandonment and the ensuing decline of the area, with the impacts of destudentification on a neighbourhood. Crucially, while there has been recognition of the existence of destudentification, currently there is no academic research or deep analysis of how these processes are key factors in initiating abandonment and decline in certain urban areas. Perhaps the closest indication comes in Rugg et al.’s (2002) study of Middlesbrough:

“Middlesbrough can be characterised as a low demand market. Owner occupation has tended to move towards the edge of town; landlords have bought up properties at relatively low prices in the town centre, which has led to an over-supply. To some degree, this situation has been worsened by the decreasing numbers of students coming to Middlesbrough from outside the locality. A consequence of the low demand for housing is that there is little competition for property amongst different tenant groups. Although landlords favour letting to students, and offer markedly advantageous terms, for example including satellite TV and low rents, any tenant is welcome. Thus, in the centre of Middlesbrough, lettings to households on housing benefit are commonplace in the same areas as student lets” (Rugg et al. 2002: 298).
Also, a key factor, not mentioned above, is that in 2002 the university was in the process of building new multi-million-pound halls of residence to house the projected number of future students. This development created a lower demand for housing in the private-sector and increased the levels of competition amongst accommodation providers for tenants. One result of voids in the property market caused by students was that households on housing benefit moved into the same areas as student lets in the centre of Middlesbrough (Rugg et al. 2002). When landlords face a lack of student tenants then they may offer their housing cheaply to other groups or abandon it altogether. Therefore, the Middlesbrough experience shows that when students (for a variety of reasons) leave a neighbourhood, that area will begin to display characteristics of urban abandonment and decline: but, importantly, this has not been fully researched and conceptualised in the context of destudentification.

The threat of destudentification is clearly not limited to individual cases and is an issue in other UK cities. Indeed, Munro and Livingston (2011: 14) agree that “some areas in Nottingham were suffering from lower demand from students, with a rise in vacancies” with increased commercial development weakening the level of student demand. The term ‘destudentification’ was mentioned by Nathan and Urwin in 2005, (however, it is not developed or utilised in a conceptual way until Smith in 2008) to describe property abandonment is evident in Langworthy (Salford, Manchester) and Kensington (Liverpool):

“if students shift *en masse* to the city centre, traditional student neighbourhoods may empty out. Some student neighbourhoods lie within Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders, and ‘destudentification’ may exacerbate problems of low demand. In Liverpool, for example, there are signs of exit in the Kensington neighbourhood as students head into new halls of residence in the city centre” (Nathan and Urwin 2005: 48).

However, Nathan and Urwin (2005) also suggest a more positive view, emphasising that destudentification, rather than presenting major problems, may well provide new opportunities if the old student HMOs are converted into housing suitable for other members of the population. Interestingly, The Guardian (20/02/2013) reports that abandoned houses in the Kensington area are now up for sale for £1 each, with the declared aim of trying to attract new people to the community.
In a significant study of housing abandonment, Keenan et al. (1999: 705) identify empty living accommodation as a major contributing factor to the downward spiral of some communities:

“landlords both public and private compete with each other for tenants; threats of clearance cause blight; social housing providers think twice before investing in their properties either old or new; residents face high levels of crime and live in an atmosphere of threat; and privately and publicly owned property is abandoned” (Keenan et al. 1999: 704).

The various ways in which the process of abandonment gathers momentum (abandoned houses, decreased desirability, loss of positive neighbourhood reputation) have a clear connection to processes of destudentification. If students choose, for whatever reasons, to reside elsewhere, there could be similar dramatic impacts on neighbourhoods where student communities once flourished.

One significant feature of urban abandonment is a high property-vacancy rate. When the supply of accommodation outweighs the demand, there will be inevitable “competition between potential landlords looking to secure properties to let” (Powell and Barke 2008: 40) which is the scenario in destudentifying neighbourhoods. There are indications that processes of destudentification are unfolding in many UK university towns and cities and, just as a ‘tipping point’ has been noted as crucial in the studentification process (Hubbard 2009), there may well also be a ‘tipping point’ in the process of destudentification when a street is no longer dominated by student residents – perhaps because a “situation of saturation” has been reached (Powell and Barke 2008: 42) and the student tenants have begun to move away. Several factors suggest that neighbourhoods with a high concentration of student tenants are vulnerable once the students begin to move away: students have traditionally rented lower-value housing and this type of property is susceptible to the possibility of abandonment; the student ‘lifespan’ is short and student tenant turnover high.

Destudentification has been recognised in academic discourse but there is no empirical investigation into the process in situ, although we may now be witnessing the evolution of the geographies of destudentification which have a connection with the processes of abandonment and urban decline. Therefore, it is clear, as Sage et al. (2012a) state, there is a lack of understanding of the processes of
destudentification, and these complex interconnections need research to deepen our understandings of current processes of urban transformations.

3.4 National media and local community conceptualisations of destudentification

As noted in Chapter 1, studentification has predominately been conceptualised as a negative process of urban change within national discourses, which have tended to invoke relatively sensationalised accounts of local residents’ experiences of student neighbours. Generally speaking, there has been little media content reporting on destudentification to date, but the identification of processes of destudentification has been presented in The Guardian where Smith discussed his interactions with residents in Nottingham and Coventry: “they expressed concerns about their areas entering a spiral of decline because students were abandoning them” (The Guardian 24/01/2006). These residents’ use of evocative language and their “expressed concern” about the impact destudentification could have if students move away from traditional areas to new cloisters underlines their anxiety. Similarly, the use of the term “spiral of decline” here (used in the literature of urban abandonment and decline) emphasises residents’ fear that a loss of demand will lead to a collapse of the local housing market and a deterioration of the neighbourhood.

The positive and negative impacts of destudentification have become a notable theme among articles published recently, with the development of PBSA given as a key reason for destudentification in some towns and cities as students move away from traditional HMO: “one effect of these student blocks has been de-studentification” (The Times Higher Education Supplement 28/07/2006).

In Leeds, for example, there is emerging evidence that landlords are putting the terraced properties traditionally rented by students on to the market to sell, since that clientele is increasingly choosing to move into, and stay in, halls of residence or other more modern PBSA.

There are suggestions in the media that destudentification may be a welcome process for residents whose experiences of living in a studentified enclave are negative and their comments are reported as predominately pejorative; for example,
the Yorkshire Evening Post (05/03/2007) uses the words “fighting” and “battle” to suggest a war between long-standing residents and the student population:

“Headingly has long been synonymous with students, but is all that about to change? The once student-besieged suburb is experiencing a phenomenon known as “destudentification”. Purpose-built flats nearer the city centre are luring undergraduates away, raising hopes that the families who fled the area may now return. After more than a decade fighting a losing battle are the residents really about to win?” (Yorkshire Evening Post 05/03/2007).

The purpose-built flats referred to in this article include the Sky Plaza, a 37-storey, 557-bed block of student flats built in 2009 (Chatterton 2010), nearer Leeds city centre; these developments encourage students to isolate themselves socially in exclusive landscapes of privilege where they do not have to mix with non-student groups, which is similar to the gated communities marketed at gentrifiers. Local residents’ groups take a positive view of destudentification, the local press indicates, and hope that families who moved out of the area when it became studentified may now return:

“Figures produced last year by the Shared Housing Group… confirmed that [student numbers in Headingly] were indeed dropping … “They [landlords] are in a state of panic because of the competition they are getting from the bigger city centre developers. People are now reporting that families are starting to move back into streets that were almost completely dominated by students. Things are definitely looking up” (Yorkshire Evening Post 05/03/2007).

Another suggestion raised in the media is that increased competition between student landlords and providers, and the oversupply of accommodation, are a major factor in destudentification. The fact that it is being reported that “families are starting to move back” shows the presumption of a positive outcome for long-standing residents. However, the same newspaper also implies that there could be a more negative outcome since it indicates that destudentification is creating problems for the area for which solutions need to be found:

“the student exodus has caused a few problems of its own. Headingly councillor Martin Hamilton, chairman of the Shared Housing Group, says the departure of large swathes of the student population has created a vacuum with large houses close to Headingly cricket ground standing empty. “We are talking about 2,000 to 2,500 empty bed spaces which is equivalent to several
hundred houses. The next step in our strategy is to see how we can speed up the process of returning empty housing back into use. It is clear that market forces alone will not provide the solution” (Yorkshire Evening Post 05/03/2007).

Therefore, it is recognised in the media that an area that is destudentifying can experience many problems. Empty properties are not good for a neighbourhood, and in Leeds the strategy is to turn these into affordable housing in the hope of encouraging young families to return. Whilst local people express concern about escalating social, economic and physical decay arising from destudentification in their neighbourhood, there is as yet no empirical research to show that any strategies implemented at the local level will be successful in halting the processes of decline. The issue is a complex one, as highlighted by The Guardian (16/06/2007):

“Even if families could afford to buy, they would be put off by streets which lack the care that long-term residents give. Many houses are rebuilt internally, splitting rooms into two or turning garages into bedrooms, so restoration to their original family condition is not cost-efficient”.

However, despite the fact that the relationship between students and the community in which they live is not always good, ironically the process of ‘destudentification’ will not necessarily be popular with residents. There will inevitably be concerns about neighbourhoods declining because of students abandoning them. Therefore, a paradoxical situation could develop with residents actually “encourag[ing] students to stay around because they are good for the area” (The Guardian 24/01/2006). Whereas pressure groups were set up to reduce numbers in neighbourhoods with a high concentration of students, now residents fear ‘other’, less-desirable social groups may replace them, for example, benefit-dependent individuals, asylum seekers or the homeless:

“A homeless charity in Loughborough wants to transform a former student housing block into accommodation for vulnerable young people struggling to find a home” (Loughborough Echo 13/01/2010).

It is important to realise that destudentification does not only involve the abandonment of houses but, potentially, the loss of the livelihood of local business people and the sense of a thriving ‘community’. Local facilities used to catering for student needs may not suit other groups: young families will look for nurseries and primary schools and retired people for a community centre, for example, and these
potential residents will rely far less on the bars and fast-food outlets set up to cater for a local student population.

Another possible intensifier of destudentification, partly as a response to economic conditions (the trebling of university tuition fees beginning in 2012 is adding further strain) is for students to opt to live at home with their parents while they study. If this becomes widespread, then it will have a profound impact on student geographies and contribute to accelerated processes of destudentification in some areas. Chatterton (2010: 513) makes this point by predicting that “studentification may also go into reverse in some places as higher education is increasingly localised”, and Munro and Livingston (2011: 14) suggest, “this may well result in neighbourhoods in which there was markedly reduced demand from students for accommodation and a desire from landlords to disinvest rapidly”. It is significant that middle-class parents who, at the time of the property boom, bought houses for their children to live in while at university (apparently safe in the knowledge that this was a sound investment as the properties could always be re-sold for a profit), were being advised by Savills Estate Agents to “avoid areas where studentification has taken place, as it will be tricky to sell afterwards” (Watson 2010: 7). This is another impetus for possible destudentification since houses traditionally rented, year after year, by students will remain unwanted – whole streets and enclaves in university towns may be designated as ‘abandoned’ and in ‘decline’ if this scenario takes hold:

“I was under the assumption that the government were trying to attract people to study at university, not drive them away by placing limits on the choice of student accommodation. With the average student debt now totalling £20,000, we can’t be blamed for wanting to find the cheapest area within reasonable distance from our campus” (The Student Newspaper 12/10/2008).

There is speculation in the press whether universities will be the same if expansion slows and if the attractiveness of British universities starts to fade. The Guardian (24/03/2009) article “What if all the students dry up?” has direct relevance to destudentification and the processes of abandonment and decline. It is argued that in unstable economic times and with the popularity of virtual learning, universities could change into very different foci of learning which would have serious ‘knock-on’ effects for towns and cities. In the same article the writer refers to Smith’s view that university towns that do not have vibrant, internationally-renowned research
establishments could end up with a surplus of mediocre student accommodation for which there is no demand or purpose, the catalyst for processes of destudentification.

Overall, the concept and impacts of destudentification have received limited and largely anecdotal, media attention, with coverage tending to speculate about the possible benefits and disadvantages of the process. Having examined how destudentification is presented in the media it is clear that it raises complex issues for our university towns and cities, and indicates that academic research is essential in order to deepen our understanding of the importance of processes of destudentification and their connections to broader theories of urban abandonment and decline. It is contended that empirical research will form the basis from which strategies can be developed to address the issues arising from destudentification at the local and/or national level.

3.5 Geographies of segregation, exclusion and fear of the ‘other’

Smith (2009) identifies the prominence of the rhetoric of segregation, marginalisation, polarisation and social exclusion within evocative political and media discourses of studentification. Importantly, the quotation below identifies the set of themes underpinning political, policy and media conceptualisations of studentification:

“In tandem with many anti-gentrification movements...debates of the new student geographies in political, policy and media discourses have hinged on evocative and divisive themes, such as social exclusion and increasing lack of affordable housing, marginalisation and polarisation of low income families, the segregation and concentration of social groups” (Smith 2009: 1797).

Similarly, the themes of social exclusion, marginalisation and polarisation have significance for discourses of destudentification; the opposition local residents express towards students residing in the community may be also, possibly more strongly, conveyed towards those groups who replace the students. Munro et al. (2009) substantiate the importance of segregation to understanding the spatial patterns of student residence in relation to non-student residence in the UK, and Hubbard (2008) asserts social cohesiveness, marginalisation and ‘othering’ as key factors underpinning the unfolding processes and impacts of studentification. Indeed, Hubbard identifies a research agenda focused on further examination of the overlaps
between marginalisation, the fear of ‘others’ and studentification, questioning why “discriminatory policies that would be viewed as abhorrent in the context of ethnic difference are acceptable when they are discussed in relation to students” (Hubbard 2008: 338). Thus, an exploration of residents’ fears and community opposition to ‘others’ moving into the accommodation vacated by students should create an awareness of possible problems associated with unfolding processes of destudentification and contemporary urban change.

When students leave this may lead to an influx of ‘problem’ individuals and families into former student housing; such groups may be seen by local residents as more undesirable than the student population they replace. Smith (2008: 2552) notes that destudentification “is often underpinned by aspirations for a more balanced community of students and established residents” and points to the possible influx of low-income families into the accommodation vacated by students which could give rise to new forms of social conflict.

It has been documented that many local communities have come to “resent the changes resulting from the sudden presence of students in their neighbourhoods” (Fincher and Shaw 2009: 1884), and, as a result, these students found themselves subjected to socio-spatial marginalisation from the activities and opportunities in the area in which they reside. Similarly, within a destudentified neighbourhood other ‘alien’ groups who move in are likely to meet uneasiness, if not hostility, from the residents who may feel threatened by the unknown ‘other’.

The racial tensions that became apparent in Bradford in 2001 focused the nation’s attention on what was deemed to be “Britain’s ‘shockingly’ divided communities” (BBC News 11/12/2001). These divisive elements may emerge if DHSS or council tenants do, as predicted, become likely replacements for students, since they are perceived as ‘problems’:

“The moral underclass discourse in relation to housing highlights the cultural and behavioural distinctiveness of two main housing “groups”, tenants of social housing, particularly council tenants, and the street homeless. These groups are linked to a range of social pathologies, including drug-taking, crime, anti-social behaviour and teenage pregnancies. As such, social tenants and the
The concept of NIMBYism is crucial here, which draws on wider literatures of sociospatial exclusion. Hubbard (2005: 53) notes an emergent NIMBY literature that explores:

“not only the ‘rational’ economic basis on which home owners oppose the development of controversial or noxious land-uses, but also the ‘instinct’ people have when faced with the prospect of living in the proximity of ‘Other’ populations”.

In this sense, NIMBYism can be associated with community opposition, via sociospatial processes of exclusion, through which established communities seek to distance themselves from groups stigmatised ‘other’ (Hubbard 2005). The fear and opposition that communities may display towards incoming ‘alien’ groups is a likely manifestation of destudentification should local residents determine that their new neighbours are, for whatever reason, undesirable. If this hypothetical scenario plays out then it has negative implications for community cohesion.

3.6 Sustainable communities and housing renewal

Ultimately, destudentification may have a positive impact on local communities. If houses vacated by student tenants become inhabited by other groups who ‘invest’ in the house and area then it might be possible to achieve more balanced and cohesive communities. New Labour adopted the concept of community as a core theme of political discourse in the UK, constructing ideals of cohesive, homogenous spaces where diverse groups occupy “a common sense of place” (Community Cohesion Review Team 2001: 71). The juxtaposition between these ideals of cohesive communities with shared values and identities, and the emphasis of recent urban sustainability discourses on mixed and balanced populations is summarised by Raco (2007: 305):

“A paradox lies at the heart of the government’s new agendas. On the one hand, they promote community balance, mix and diversity as a vehicle for the creation of more functional and less crime-ridden places. On the other hand, they simultaneously identify diversity as a threat to community safety”.

street homeless are unfavourably contrasted with “mainstream” homeowners” (Watt and Jacobs 2000: 16).
Studentification can create an imbalance in a local community. The conflict between concentrating student HMO – the unintentional clustering and segregation of student populations (Munro et al. 2009) – and the achievement of balanced sustainable communities is reiterated by the following quotation from The National HMO Lobby:

“Concentrations of HMOs present a unique threat to these communities. They tend not only to have a detrimental impact on the character and amenity of the neighbourhood – they also undermine the very prerequisite for a sustainable community, which is a balanced and stable population. By their very nature, concentrations of HMOs distort the population balance and introduce a transient population” (National HMO Lobby 2009).

Therefore, it is hoped that destudentification could help areas that have been seen as ‘unsustainable communities’ resulting from the “transience of HMOs, and the fact that they dominate our neighbourhoods” (Tyler 12/05/2006) to become balanced or ‘sustainable communities’ with the influx of non-student groups. If these non-student groups are perceived by existing residents to manifest some form of commitment to the neighbourhood then they may be welcomed, rather than greeted by suspicion, and this should form the basis on which to build a sense of community cohesion, sustainability and renewal. However, as highlighted in Section 3.4, these areas, for a variety of reasons, may not be attractive to those other groups. It is clear that positive housing renewal policies, or similar strategies are needed (at both the local and national level) to counteract the possible negative impacts of destudentification and to encourage urban renewal.

The Housing Market Renewal (HMR) policy emerged as a key urban regeneration issue at the beginning of the 21st century, particularly in the north of England. The aim of housing market renewal policies, to ‘improve’ neighbourhoods in declining areas, would seem appropriate in destudentifying areas. Cameron (2006: 3) states how, in South Northumberland “neither the rows of private sector 19th century terraced housing nor the large council estates of the 20th century are deemed to match current needs and demands”. In the present context, destudentification raises the issue of how the accommodation previously inhabited by students, primarily terraced housing, can be adapted to meet the “current needs and demands” of those groups who will replace the students.
There is a history in the UK of property renewal projects. In April 2002 the Government announced the creation of nine HRM pathfinders in the North of England and the Midlands (House of Commons Report, 2004-5). All these areas exhibited housing market weaknesses, evident through high vacancy rates, low sales values/low demand and, in some cases, neighbourhood abandonment: significantly, all these ‘weaknesses’ are characteristics of destudentifying neighbourhoods. In order to attempt to reverse this decline, partnerships of local authorities and other key stakeholders (which include English Partnerships, the Housing Corporation and Regional Development Agency (RDA) officials on their boards), developed strategic plans for whole-housing markets, to ensure problems were tackled permanently and not just displaced or deferred. The Sustainable Communities Plan (February 2003) confirmed that funds amounting to £500m would be available and over a 10-15 year timeframe, the HMR “schemes” set out plans for radical and sustained action to replace obsolete housing with modern sustainable accommodation, through demolition, refurbishment and new building (English Partnerships Pathfinders 2002).

One of the government’s HMR pathfinders is New Heartlands – a scheme seeking new ways to tackle the problems of low demand and housing market collapse in neighbourhoods across Merseyside (New Heartlands 2003). This particular renewal policy has relevance to the regeneration needed in destudentified areas elsewhere in the UK. The Stanley Park Zone of Liverpool is characterised by a large amount of terraced properties built before 1919, a low demand for this type of housing and a high number of empty properties. The programme in Anfield/Breckfield includes the demolition of approximately 1,800 residential and commercial properties. Many of the properties have been vacant for years, as the demand for this type of housing has decreased, due in part to families preferring homes with gardens and off-street parking:

“the combination of demand for new-build, and the return of persistent net outward migration, particularly from the inner city has meant that demand for housing has been consistently undermined by a more attractive offer from adjacent and more affluent local authorities” (Nevin 2010: 721).

The projects aim to reduce the number of terraced properties to help ensure there is demand for the retained properties, and to enable new homes with gardens and
parking spaces to be built on the sites from which properties have been cleared. The intention is to provide the area with a mixture of types and sizes of properties suitable for meeting the needs of the local and future populations and to achieve greater residential stability. It is this type of approach that may well be a solution to the problems unfolding in destudentifying neighbourhoods, where a similar oversupply of ‘unwanted’ older properties, which students once inhabited, but have since abandoned, goes along with customer demand for accommodation more suited to the lifestyles they lead.

3.7 Summary

In summary, the chapter has highlighted the emerging recognition of destudentification in some university towns and cities in the UK, and has identified an absence of academic investigation of processes of destudentification and their impacts. It is uncertain whether neighbourhoods experiencing destudentification may possibly regenerate through the gentrification process, or experience terminal decline. Also, clearly the current economic context is an important influence on shifting residential geographies, and may shape how destudentification develops and is ‘managed’. There may be need for national policies since local residents’ groups may have a relatively small sphere of influence (Feijten and van Ham 2009). There are indications, and some embryonic evidence, that the processes of destudentification, since they are closely connected to the processes of urban abandonment and neighbourhood decline, have the potential to create complex problems of which we must be aware if we are to maintain and develop vibrant, cohesive and thriving cities.

Over the last decade studentification has been identified as a crucial process of contemporary urban change (Munro et al. 2009). However, recent developments (for example, decreasing numbers of students attending university, the creation of on and off-campus PBSA) has resulted in lower proportions of students living in off-campus HMO. These shifting student population distributions are leading to void/empty properties in studentified neighbourhoods. Although there has been an acknowledgement that these signs of processes of destudentification are occurring in university towns and cities across the UK, there have been no academic studies of this important aspect of contemporary urban change. Therefore, the phenomenon of
destudentification and its effects remains largely ‘uncharted territory’ with, to date, an absence of research into processes that may have profound and far-reaching implications for towns and cities.

The main aim of this thesis is to examine processes of (de)studentification with the objective of: analysing perceptions of the changing residential patterns of students within Loughborough; identifying the presence and scale of (de)studentification; examining the influence(s) of accommodation providers and higher education institutions in processes of (de)studentification; and investigating the effects of student residential decision-making practices on processes of (de)studentification. It is here that this thesis seeks to make its contribution to contemporary geographical debates on (de)studentification.

It is recognised, therefore, that it is important to develop an understanding of destudentification, thereby constituting a clear agenda for research to identify and analyse the diverse and dynamic nuances of contemporary student geographies. This thesis, taking as its case study the university town of Loughborough, aims to deepen conceptual and theoretical understandings of the ways in which changing student populations and the shifting supply of student accommodation are giving rise to new social geographies in university towns and cities.
4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the rationale for the methodological framework adopted for the thesis. A mixed-methods approach was selected as the most effective way to study the transformations occurring in the student accommodation market, using a combination of interviews, surveys and data analysis. The methods employed address the main aims of the research which are to: examine processes of (de)studentification; analyse perceptions of the changing residential patterns of students within Loughborough; identify the presence and scale of (de)studentification; examine the influence(s) of accommodation providers and higher education institutions in processes of (de)studentification, and investigate the effects of student residential decision-making practices on processes of (de)studentification.

One of the main incentives for employing a mixed-methods design was to consolidate and deepen knowledge from one method to another, thereby reaffirming and/or contradicting findings from a variety of data sources: using a mixed methods approach should “confirm, cross-validate, or corroborate findings within a single study” (Cresswell 2003: 217) and enhance the quality of the research (Hoggart et al. 2002). Indeed, as Graham (2004: 76) contends, a mixed-method research design, such as the one employed here, “offers population geographers the opportunity to break out from the confines of a dormant research tradition and participate with other human geographers”.

The major challenge when researching any form of urban change, albeit gentrification, studentification or destudentification, is the fluidity and rapidity with which geographical shifts often take place. The transience of student populations presents methodological challenges: every year one cohort leaves, others arrive and there is constant locating and relocating within the university town or city as students group and re-group according to their accommodation choices. A further methodological challenge arises from the impact of both local and national policies, such as the Browne Report, and the introduction of an Article 4 Direction in Loughborough. Therefore, research needs to be flexible and ongoing in order to keep pace with, and incorporate seamlessly, the changes brought about by these broader
influences. More empirical research is required urgently to substantiate or contradict the longstanding theorisations, which possibly may become increasingly outdated and less appropriate for understanding the dynamic social relations within twenty-first century university towns and cities. This researcher remains aware of the importance of the methodological challenges that were presented by the unfolding student geographies in Loughborough.

The chapter is structured to reflect the research timetable, which was established before the commencement of research in August 2010. Section 4.2 focuses on semi-structured interviews, and explores the advantages of employing this method, as well as grounded theory. This was the inaugural phase of qualitative data collection undertaken from August 2010, with a view to illuminating how, when and where processes of (de)studentification had (or were beginning) to unfold in Loughborough, a result of which was the identification of a number of neighbourhoods of interest in the town. Atkinson and Silverman (1997) state, interviews are ‘windows on the world’, so conducting semi-structured interviews with key institutional stakeholders – such as local estate and letting agents, landlords and local residents – was undertaken to gain insights into their knowledge about, and perceptions of, the changing residential patterns of students on the private rented sector.

The second stage of the research was to undertake a survey with students in order to explore the extent to which their accommodation preferences were a factor in the processes of destudentification. Section 4.3 considers the use of a questionnaire student survey within the thesis, and explains why both qualitative and quantitative data collection was used. The methods employed here were designed to explore student accommodation needs, preferences, expectations and perceptions as a factor in the unfolding processes of destudentification and in forming the changing geographic patterns of student-living in Loughborough. Building on this analysis in Section 4.4, data on individual student term-time addresses was obtained from enrolment databases at Loughborough University. This was cross-referenced with resident group data on Use Class of HMO, which enabled an identification of the spatial extent of occupancy in the Storer and Burleigh areas of the town to be identified. Section 4.5 considers the use of 2001 and 2011 Census data in examining whether the student population has increased or decreased in specific areas of
Loughborough during this time period. Sections 4.6-4.7 discuss issues of positionality, and the ethical considerations of the research process. The final section concludes the methodology discussion. The advantage of using complementary methods is “that they enhance capacities for interpreting meaning and behaviour” (Hoggart et al. 2002: 67). This researcher decided, therefore, that a mixed methods approach was the best strategy to uncover changing characteristics of studentification and to explore the possibility that processes of destudentification are emergent in Loughborough.

4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews formed the first stage of the research process and were designed to establish some initial insights into where, when and how processes of (de)studentification are unfolding. The first aim was to illuminate how and where (de)studentification may have developed or emerged since Hubbard’s (2008) research, examining the dynamics of student residential geographies in Loughborough and contextualising processes of student-related change in the town by disentangling the various stages that form the studentification process.

During early interviews, interviewees introduced and discussed at length several areas of particular interest in Loughborough which, in part, led to the selection of the case study sites. Five areas of the town: Storer and Burleigh (‘Golden Triangle’); PBSA in the town centre; University halls of residence; Kingfisher Estate; and Forest/Herrick were identified by interviewees as areas of particular interest. Significantly, also, these five areas had either featured in recent news articles in the local press, or were highlighted as key student areas in Hubbard’s (2008; 2009) Loughborough studies. Additionally, all these case study sites are covered by designated Community Wardens (or Subwardens), showing these areas are (or have been) highly student-concentrated areas which would repay detailed investigation into processes of (de)studentification. Although students are dispersed, albeit unevenly, across the town in areas such as the Ashby Estate or the Shelthorpe neighbourhoods, for example, it was decided that focusing in detail on five core areas (which comprise accommodation of different types, ages, and histories) would enable the researcher to explore and establish the changing student residential geographies in Loughborough most effectively.
Principally, semi-structured interviews aimed to explore how key stakeholders construct narratives of the changing student accommodation situation in specific enclaves in Loughborough. A central aim of employing this method of semi-structured interviews was to focus and reflect on the experiences and interpretations of the student accommodation situation in Loughborough with interviewees who would be well-placed to provide relevant and rich insights into the research topic. Themes and questions that were discussed include: any changes the interviewee had noticed, particularly in the market (the role of investors and the University); changes in demand for, expectations and popularity of, different types of accommodation; changes in the popularity of areas from both investors’ and students’ perspectives. Therefore, this research is timely in its identification and exploration of the processes of destudentification as they begin to unfold, and significant in its contribution to ongoing studentification debates.

In this research into the processes of studentification and destudentification, semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to investigate “complex behaviours, opinions and emotions, and for collecting a diversity of experiences” (Longhurst 2003: 128). A valuable benefit of using semi-structured interviews for this research is the multiple opportunities they provide to explore respondents’ rationalities in-depth, and tease out reasons, interpretations, meanings and the significance of acts and behaviour (Hoggart et al. 2002). When planning the interviews the researcher was careful to avoid fixed or rigid questions and endeavoured to create, as Valentine (2005: 111) notes, interactions that will take “a conversational, fluid form” and will vary “according to the interests, experiences and views of the interviewees”.

The interview process is, therefore, imbued with varying degrees of flexibility, yet also with some degree of structure that allows the interviewer to explore the issues and events seen as important in explaining and understanding process, patterns and behaviour in studentified towns. This methodology also encouraged interviewees to pursue topics of particular interest and importance to them (Bryman 2008). In the context of this research, semi-structured interviews also encouraged respondents to explore other avenues, providing an insight into the experiences and issues they view as relevant and important: “allowing interviewees to construct their own accounts of their experiences by describing and explaining their lives in their own
words” (Valentine 2005: 111). The use of interviews is an effective strategy when researching dynamic and fast-paced processes such as studentification: processes which the interviewees themselves may be driving forwards. This particular methodology, therefore, proved to be important in identifying the issues and providing a reference point for what has changed since Hubbard (2008).

4.2.1 Identifying interviewees

Interviews were designed in order to identify and explore transformations occurring in the student accommodation market. Brenner et al. (1985: 7) highlight that “if you want to know something about people’s activities, the best way of finding out is to ask them through the everyday activity of talk”. Three core groups were identified before interviewing began: Loughborough University stakeholders; the student population; and landlords, letting agents and student accommodation providers. This is consistent with research into studentification which is based on interviews with personnel within higher education institutions (Rugg et al. 2002; Smith and Holt 2007), student populations (Chatterton 1999; Hubbard 2008), and with landlords, letting agents and student accommodation providers (Allinson 2006; Hubbard 2009; Munro and Livingston 2011). Rather than focusing solely on a particular group, this research interacted with all three core groups, and then extended its scope by conducting interviews with established local residents and other important stakeholders in Loughborough to gain in-depth insights into the impact of the changing residential patterns of students on the private rented sector, and to uncover the dynamics of the processes driving the changes.

Letting agents and landlords are “the key intermediaries in the encounter between housing taste and price” (Bridge 2001: 87) in gentrification literature and are therefore powerful agents in the student accommodation market. This group was targeted as interviewees to unravel the role of landlords, agents and providers in shaping, driving and managing the processes of studentification in Loughborough. Relevant agents, private landlords and accommodation providers were identified through an internet search, Loughborough University Housing Lists, and from calling on high-street agencies. It was important to target a mixture of experiences in the student housing market: interviewees ranged from long-term (30 years experience of letting), to short-term involvement in the market, and varied in size of accommodation
portfolio – from large scale (over 100 properties), through medium scale to small scale (just a couple of properties). At times during the research process it was difficult to get in contact with potential interviewees – there are many ‘hidden’ actors in the market; several accommodation providers have websites that only have email contact forms – when these forms were completed there was sometimes no response.

However, other targeted interviewees were helpful. A ‘snowballing’ technique was employed to reach contacts, some of whom then put the researcher in touch with another contact, and so “recruiting gains momentum” (Valentine 2005: 117). No absolute number of interviews was pre-defined, and interviews continued until it was felt that saturation point had been reached and a sufficient amount of data amassed. Contact with potential participants relied on an open and flexible framework utilised as part of the ‘snowball’ technique, with layers of contacts being built up and interviewees with particular experiences and insights sought out (Valentine 2005).

Ultimately, 33 semi-structured interviews were conducted with four letting agents, ten landlords, five PBSA providers, eleven established local residents and three Loughborough University representatives. It became clear from interviews with landlords, providers and agents that others were playing an active role in the student accommodation market: local residents who were active in communicating concerns and raising the political profile of the issues of studentification; and Loughborough University, important in terms of the strategic planning and provision of bed-spaces in the town via student halls of residence. The researcher arranged interviews with representatives of several different groups in order to develop as complete an overview of the Loughborough situation as possible. The researcher was aware of the need to adapt and tailor interview questions to suit the respondent; as Valentine (2005: 119) states, “each interviewee is an individual and therefore each interview will be different”. Initial contact was made with individuals who were key stakeholders relevant to the research topic, and these individuals were then used to establish connections with others, for example, the public relations officer at Loughborough University, before interviews commenced at the accommodation office.

Two informative ‘gatekeepers’ ‘opened doors’ – the first, an established local resident first encountered when the researcher attended SARG (Storer and Ashby Residents’
Group) meetings, provided the opportunity to meet with additional local residents; the second, an established private landlord, provided the researcher with a list of contact details for several other private landlords and providers involved in the student accommodation market. This enabled the researcher to embed herself in the field and acquire valuable data. In fact, when the gatekeepers gave the researcher the names of other possible interviewees, it seemed to the researcher that some of these new contacts appeared particularly keen to assist in the research when approached, maybe in order to get their own points across, and ensure that not just one side of the argument was being advanced. The value of creating a ‘snowball’ sample is commented upon by Hoggart et al. (2002: 185) who argue that this approach is most appropriate when there is not an accessible sampling frame for the population, in order to “identify others with the target characteristic”.

4.2.2 Interview structure

Interviews were structured in two stages. The first was largely exploratory, enabling interviewees’ perceptions and personal experiences of how, when and where studentification (or destudentification) was unfolding in Loughborough to be expressed. The researcher inferred from the first few interviews that changes akin to destudentification were occurring in certain neighbourhoods. Therefore, the second stage was more closely-structured, employing a schedule of themed questions and prompts tailored to the specific student-related practices or interests of the interviewee; the questions focussed on the changing residential patterns of students within the town, the diversity and dynamism of the unfolding processes of studentification in Loughborough. Themes covered during interviews with letting agents and landlords included, for example, housing/planning legislation, such as the introduction of Article 4 Direction/HMO licensing in Loughborough (i.e. how this change could/would influence investment practices locally).

This researcher used interviews as a major research strategy in order to construct a non-hierarchical and interactive research process, conducted as conversation rather than interrogation. It is important that interviewers should endeavour to establish rapport and neutrality “so that mutual trust is encouraged” rather than being judgemental or distant (Hoggart et al. 2002: 227). Clearly, the researcher-researched dynamic should be founded on a relaxed and encouraging relationship with
information “elicited in an unobtrusive, nondirective manner as possible” (McCracken 1988: 21). In the context of this research, the use of qualitative research methods facilitates the exploration of distinct themes which, arguably, have been under researched in previous studies of studentification.

Interview questions were examined carefully in order to ensure that key themes were identified, developed and refined before interviews were conducted. Themes raised as discussion issues in interviews included: the changing demand for student housing (with particular focus on the traditional terraced housing area of the Golden Triangle); the popularity of new PBSA in the town centre; the impact of the development and expansion of the University’s on-campus accommodation; changing student demand in terms of the quality of student accommodation; the impact of the current economic situation on the student accommodation market; predicted potential impacts of changes in the higher education sector; the role and impact of key players in the student accommodation market; the role of regulations and governmental changes to the student housing sector. The interviews were guided by ‘prompt’ questions based around these topics and follow-up questions were asked in order to explore all the different angles with the participants. Themes were often addressed in a different order in different interviews as respondents were encouraged to talk freely about the experiences considered most important or pertinent to them and “to discover how the respondents see the world” (McCracken 1988: 21).

The interview schedule evolved as relevant circumstances changed: the findings of the Browne Report, for example, were published on 12th October 2010, and all interviews after this time contained general questions about the possible implications removing the cap on tuition fees would have on student living; after Loughborough University announced on 1st April 2011 that it would be charging the maximum £9,000 a year tuition fees, questions relating to the impact this may have were added to the interview format; the Article 4 Direction came into effect in Loughborough on 12th February 2012, and, whereas prior to this, questions asked about the possible implications this legislation could have, afterwards it became a key theme. The flexibility to adapt interview questions and themes to broader changing circumstances
ensured that this research was constantly current and contemporary, in keeping with the kinetic nature of urban residential geographies.

The researcher was careful not to use academic terms such as ‘studentification’ or ‘destudentification’ in interviews, and only did so if the interviewee first introduced them, in order to ensure that the interviewer was in no way ‘leading’ the interviewee by imposing academic terminology on them. However, several members of the SARG group used the terms freely, early in the interviews, since they are knowledgeable about the impacts of studentification in their neighbourhood and are aware of the academic work of Smith (2002; 2005; 2008; 2009) and Hubbard (2008; 2009).

However, this researcher was aware that there are various aspects of using semi-structured interviews which had to be considered; she was sensitive to the fact that responses of participants are likely to be affected by the characteristics of the researcher, such as personality, age or gender, and, because of the unstructured nature of qualitative data, “interpretation will be profoundly influenced by the subjective leanings of the researcher” (Bryman 2008: 391). For example, interviewees may respond to interviewers through the use of familiar narrative constructs, rather than providing meaningful and subjective accounts and views of their lived experiences. It is also recognised that respondents may “have only limited time and attention to give the instigator” (McCracken 1988: 10). However, Byrne (2004: 182) argues that, when done well, qualitative interviewing “is able to achieve a level of depth and complexity that is not available to other approaches”.

All participants were involved in face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Interviews were informal in style, to facilitate the most ‘natural’ situation and to put the respondent at ease: a flexible approach to data collecting was adopted, and, for the purpose of this research, semi-structured interviews were designed to facilitate an informal tone, which allows for open responses rather than ‘yes or no’ style answers (Longhurst 2003). This also allows for “varying the order of questions, following up leads, and clearing up inconsistencies in answers” by the researcher (Bryman 2008: 456). Interviewees were given considerable latitude to pursue issues important to them, the content of which was often revealed to be of value during the later stages of the research project. The value of this approach is that, as Axinn and Pearce
(2006: 6) state, “an unstructured or semi-structured interview can be much more flexible, allowing the respondent to change the course of the conversation and bring up new issues that the researcher had not preconceived”.

The average length of interviews was 45 minutes: the shortest interview was 22 minutes, the longest was 2 hours, and the majority lasted between 25 and 50 minutes. Interviews were held in a location stipulated by the participant, either his/her home or office. Talking with participants in an environment familiar to them can “facilitate a more relaxed conversation” (Valentine 2005: 118), and often participants were keen to share other materials that were to hand, such as tenancy packs or housing and price listings, which helped them to explain and articulate their experiences of the student accommodation situation more effectively. A list of key themes was kept in mind when talking with participants, in order to keep the interview focussed but flexible so that interviewees could also raise issues that were important to them. As Rapley (2004: 25) states, it is important to “allow them the space to talk” and to tell their own stories in their own words which will often elicit detailed information rather than imposing a rigid regime of questions and answers that can be interpreted as a rather daunting inquisitorial approach. New questions and themes were added to later interviews based on what was learnt from earlier interviews, “pick[ing] up on things said by interviewees” (Bryman 2008: 438).

The researcher obtained permission for the interview process to be digitally recorded; permission was authorised through a consent form (see Appendix 1), and issues of confidentiality and anonymity were (re)explained at the onset. A taped recording provides a detailed record of verbal interaction, and allows interviews to be replayed and transcripts produced which can be drawn on to provide demonstrations of various arguments (Rapley 2004). As Valentine (2005: 123) notes, a taped recording “captures all the nuances of sarcasm, humour and so on”, that can suggest different meanings from those that were actually expressed. The researcher deliberately allowed the pace of the interview to be controlled mainly by the participant; silences were often treated as productive spaces in which respondents could collect and focus their thoughts and opinions, as Bryman (2008) suggests.

Full transcripts of semi-structured interviews produced 229,932 words which were coded according to grounded theory. Full transcripts proved useful since material that
had not necessarily appeared significant at the time of the interview, in the context of data analysis, proved relevant and invaluable. In contrast to quantitative data, in which data and codes are very rigid, coding in qualitative data, in grounded theory, tends to involve the “constant comparison of data” in a continual state of fluidity (Cresswell 2003: 14). In relation to semi-structured interviews, the development of theory out of data is a fundamental feature. The defining components of grounded theory approach include “the simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis” (Charmaz 2006: 5): as data began to saturate each category and concepts and their relationships became significant to other concepts, the next stage was the generation of theory.

4.2.3 Grounded theory

The methodology introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is a well-established orthodoxy. Collection of data and the analysis of it in this research were carried out within a grounded theory framework. This differs from most empirical research, as it is based upon the development of theories to explain the researcher’s observations, and consequent interpretations of these observations, which are grounded in the data collected. As Silverman (2010: 434) states, grounded theory involves three stages:

“an initial attempt to develop categories which illuminate the data; an attempt to ‘saturate’ these categories with many appropriate cases in order to demonstrate their relevance; and an attempt to develop these categories into more general analytical frameworks with relevance outside the setting”.

However, there are also some limitations to using grounded theory. The time taken to transcribe interviews can make it difficult “to carry out a genuine grounded theory analysis with its constant interplay of data collection and conceptualisation” (Bryman 2008: 549). Fragmenting data into large chunks can result in “a loss of a sense of context and of narrative flow”. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990: 256): “If the researcher simply follows the grounded theory procedures/canons without imagination or insight into what the data are reflecting – because he or she fails to see what they are really saying except in terms of trivial or well-known phenomena – then the published findings can be judged as failing on this criterion”. Nevertheless, as Bryman (2008: 550) states, grounded theory “probably represents the most
influential general strategy for conducting qualitative data analysis” and was implemented in this research.

Transcripts of 33 semi-structured interviews were coded according to grounded theory – “coding is one of the most central processes in grounded theory” (Bryman 2008: 542). The interview transcripts produced detailed data which was coded in a framework. As Corbin and Strauss (2008: 163) explain, “a ‘close encounter’ with data in the beginning stages of analysis makes the analysis easier in later stages because there exists a strong foundation and less need to go back to find the missing links”. Coding in this analysis was in a constant state of revision and fluidity with ongoing comparison; this allows the researcher to “compare phenomenon being coded under a certain category so that a theoretical elaboration of that category can begin to emerge” (Bryman 2008: 542). Collection of data was governed by the theoretical saturation principle.

The issues surrounding the student accommodation situation in Loughborough were disentangled and conceptualised under general headings and themes that persistently emerged, and compared with the experiences of other interviewees (Glaser and Strauss 1967). In this situation, the researcher does not, therefore, impose or test theory developed externally to the specific setting of the phenomenon being studied, but inductively derives theory from the phenomenon it represents, becoming ‘grounded’ via a systematic procedure of relating the theory back to the original data (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Grounded theory is based on clear research interests and a set of general concepts, which, in turn, encourage the exploration of certain ideas and sensitise the researcher to ask specific questions about the topic. Once this mass of data was collected and analysed, the second stage of the research began.

4.3 Student questionnaire survey

A second phase of empirical data collection involved conducting a total of 269 student questionnaire surveys (see Appendix 2). The findings of the interviews (Chapter 5) identified a number of themes that warranted further research, and a group that clearly had an important role to play in the changing geographies of studentification and the emerging processes of destudentification in Loughborough,
was students. The survey was used as the main data-gathering instrument for gathering information on students, aiming to classify and establish where students want to live, and the reasons why they want to live there, focussing on students’ experiences, and also their preferences and perceptions, of student accommodation in Loughborough. This analytical survey aimed to focus on the experiences of current students in the Loughborough accommodation market “establishing general trends” (Hoggart et al. 2002: 67) and providing insight into the student mindset. A student survey is clearly useful for “eliciting people’s attitudes and opinions” (McLafferty 2003: 88); it is a technique used by Hubbard (2008) and in other more recent studies into studentification (Thomsen and Eikemo 2010; Garmendia et al. 2011) which establishes the student survey as an effective methodology in the field.

4.3.1 Survey structure

In line with the research rationale of investigating the evolving and emerging processes and impacts of studentification in Loughborough, students were targeted in this survey to ascertain their accommodation preferences and to examine the significance of their role in the formation of student-residential geographies in the town, particularly the processes of destudentification identified in Chapter 5. The aim was to investigate possible connections between student accommodation choices and the complex and diverse geographies unfolding in Loughborough, and to investigate reasons for the evident changes that have occurred since previous academic research was undertaken (Hubbard 2008; 2009). There is a dearth of research on students’ housing preferences and very little is known about students’ real expectations and requirements.

Therefore, the survey was conducted with the aim of establishing the extent to which student accommodation preferences have changed, or are changing, and also to explore the reasoning upon which students base their accommodation choices. The design and wording of a questionnaire survey can have significant impacts on the answers obtained, as noted by McLafferty (2003). Thus, careful consideration was given to the structure, tone and content of the questionnaire survey as “good survey design is partly achieved by attempting to anticipate and minimise various types of error that may ruin the reliability or validity of a questionnaire survey” (Parfitt 2005:
There was constant revision of the survey design and wording through discussion with supervisors to refine it before it was conducted.

The format of the questionnaire was structured to begin with short-answer questions designed to ease the respondent into the questionnaire, before deploying more probing, open questions requiring more thought and consideration. The questionnaire survey was divided into four main sections: the first section explored the student experience of living in halls of residence (such as ‘what have been the three best things about living in halls of residence?’); the second section examined accommodation considerations for the next academic year (such as ‘which of the following facilities/amenities would you expect to be included in the accommodation cost?’ – the facilities and amenities chosen for this question were largely influenced by findings from earlier interviews with local landlords, letting agents and accommodation providers); the third section looked at the significance of the residential location (such as ‘please indicate, in order, the top three places or locations you considered living in during your recent search for accommodation’); the fourth section explored the process of searching for accommodation (such as ‘when did you sign up for accommodation for next academic year?’); and a final section contained socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, such as age and gender. The questionnaire survey was structured in this format to satisfy demands of chronology and also to aid later analysis. This student survey facilitated both quantitative and qualitative approaches effectively, providing statistics and quotations for data analysis and interpretation.

The format chosen provides the necessary grounding upon which to conceptualise and unpack the motivations and perceptions of these populations in Chapter 6, and to explore to what degree it is the student population that is driving changes. There is some indication, intimated by interviewees (Chapter 5), that students are beginning to demand, and enjoy, higher standards in accommodation as the private rented sector around Loughborough University becomes oversupplied with properties, and, in areas where demand for property was generally low (Storer and Burleigh), landlords found they had to offer – in order to make a profit - not only safe and secure, well-maintained and well-decorated accommodation but also washing machines, double beds, and flat-screen TVs in order to attract student tenants.
4.3.2 Sample frame

The researcher decided to impose certain inclusion criteria in order to obtain pertinent information. The population of this study were first year undergraduate students living in halls of residence. This qualification ensured that the participants had experience of living in student accommodation, and would be making a decision as to where they would be living in the next academic year: targeting these students would give the researcher an insight into their accommodation choices, helping to identify present-day student-related urban change and discover the temporal layers of studentification as they happen. Building on analyses of interview data, the questionnaire was designed to illuminate further the conceptualisation of studentification: to explore to what extent any area of the town is being studentified, continuing to studentify or is in the process of destudentifying. The administering of a standardised questionnaire survey, following on from earlier phases of qualitative research with landlords, letting agents and local residents, enabled quantitative and qualitative comparisons to be explored with the student population.

The survey was piloted beforehand to make sure it was clear and thorough (Hoggart et al. 2002) and to test the communication method, so that any alterations could be made. A pilot survey of five questionnaires was carried out, highlighting a number of weaknesses in the design which were eradicated by rewriting some questions in a more simple form; as Frazer and Lawley (2000: 74) state, “the researcher needs to do all that is possible to encourage a better response”.

Stratification of the population was undertaken before selecting the sample in order to obtain, particularly, a fair reflection from the different halls of residence. This began with a stratification of halls of residence, which evolved into a stratified sample of the three different types of student halls: on campus catered, on campus self-catered and off campus self-catered (see Table 1). It is evident, as Axinn and Pearce (2006: 4) note, that “inferences based on large, representative samples are known to be more reliable than inferences based on small or non-representative samples”, and therefore this questionnaire survey targeted representative samples from each different type of hall.
A balanced ratio of male to females, and UK/EU to international students was also sought. The Complete University Guide (2011) states Loughborough University’s male:female ratio is 62:38, and UK/EU:international ratio is 92:8. This survey aimed to reflect the true proportion of individuals with certain characteristics of the population: the response rate in this survey was 58:42 male:female, and 95:5 UK/EU:international.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Halls Population</th>
<th>% of Halls Population</th>
<th>Survey Population (5% sample)</th>
<th>Response Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Campus Catered</td>
<td>2354</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Campus Self-Catered</td>
<td>1672</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off Campus Self-Catered</td>
<td>1321</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5347</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Survey stratification and results

Higgs et al. (2003) suggest a 30% response rate is to be expected from this type of survey questionnaire, meaning the response rate in this instance was slightly higher. The response rate of the student survey (Table 1) was calculated by the researcher tallying the number of refusals between each successful survey. This enabled the researcher to calculate the overall student survey response, as well as the response rate from each category of hall-type (see Appendix 3).

The researcher kept a survey diary throughout the process (see Appendix 3) in order to ascertain the significance, if any, of the location, weather conditions, and time of day in terms of the response rate. Examination of the diary at the end of week one established that, for example in catered halls, particularly during the lunchtime period (11:30-13:30) when a lot of students were around, the number of responses was high. In contrast, most mornings (particularly between 9:00-11:00am) were not as successful, possibly because many students sleep in after a night out. The researcher became aware, when examining the research diary, that the response rate may also have been influenced by the initial contact phrases used and tone of
voice, and she aimed to present herself in a way that would maximise the likelihood of a favourable response. The researcher’s growing confidence throughout the process also played a part. Information from the diary was used to shape the pattern of data collection in later weeks.

This survey methodology was felt to be most appropriate in terms of gleaning the optimum amount of detailed data (Denscombe 1997). The survey was framed as an investigation into ‘student accommodation’, this being the title of the survey, and formed the foundations of the context provided by the researcher in the opening blurb (see Appendix 2). It was felt that introducing the primary concern of the questionnaire survey as a general needs, preferences and expectations issue, would allow a range of opinions to be expressed by the respondents. The selection process was to take a random sample in which each individual in the population had an equal probability of being selected, which is generally held to be the most efficient sampling procedure since “with randomisation, a representative sample from a population provides the ability to generalise to a population” (Cresswell 2003: 156).

The survey questionnaires were conducted by the researcher ‘on the doorstep’ face-to-face with the respondent. Each questionnaire was filled out by the researcher and space was left on the questionnaire sheets so that, when it was gauged that a respondent was particularly forthcoming with information, the researcher could write comments down verbatim. These longer quotations captured detailed information that proved invaluable in enhancing the detail and depth of discussion presented in Chapter 6. Each questionnaire took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete and 269 surveys were collected. No data was collected which could subsequently be used to identify individual respondents (i.e. names, addresses etc.), thus enabling the researcher to assure respondents that the survey was anonymous.

4.3.3 Analytical framework

In terms of the treatment and analysis of the data, all closed-ended questions were coded by the researcher prior to the completion of the survey. A coding schedule was constructed by allocating a number to each possible response, ultimately enabling the data to be analysed quantitatively. On the completion of data collection, open-ended questions were also coded. This involved categorising open-ended data into a
range of codes, categories and themes, aligned with the Grounded Theory approach of open-coding (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The resultant coding schedules were used to code numerically the qualitative data, enabling it to be analysed in a similar manner to the closed-ended responses. Closed and open-ended data was input into an Excel work-book in its raw pre-coded form, and, subsequently, coded according to the schedules generated. The data was subject to a quality assurance protocol (10% random sample) to check the validity of the data input. This coded data was imported to SPSS, which was used to generate frequency distributions and, following this preliminary stage of analysis, more complex cross-tabulations.

4.4 Data analysis of student residence: Storer and Burleigh

A central theme underpinning the research aims set out in Chapter 1 was to establish the degree to which the residential patterns of students are changing. Previous research (Hubbard 2008) suggested that student residence is generally clustered in the Storer and Burleigh wards of Loughborough:

“The unevenness of studentification across the town, with the rise of the buy-to-let market most notable in a number of terraced streets located immediately west of the town centre, while areas to the east and south of the town centre remain largely free of student housing. Excluding halls of residence, the highest levels of student occupation are therefore in Storer ward, which is one of the most studentified wards in England and Wales [at 17% student occupation]” (Hubbard 2008: 330).

Thus, it was crucial to establish the extent to which students are still concentrating in these areas. Several key stakeholders in the student accommodation market acknowledged in interviews that the Storer and Burleigh areas were suffering student depopulation, even estimating that there were around 2,000 empty bedspaces in this part of the town. It was also important to analyse whether destudentification was occurring in these areas, particularly after Charnwood Borough Council imposed tighter restrictions on HMO property conversion in neighbourhoods where student properties exceed 20% of the total (Charnwood Borough Council 2005) and the introduction of an Article 4 Direction in February 2012.

Munro et al. (2009: 1808) addressed the key question of “whether growing student numbers increase the extent to which students are concentrated into particular
neighbourhoods, with the attendant potential for positive and negative effects”, using an index of dissimilarity derived from 2001 Census data. This analysis concluded that “statistically the population of students shows a high degree of segregation from non-students” (Munro et al. 2009: 1805). It was noted, however, that “much local variation” (p.1823) was present within the primary urban areas (PUA’s) studied, making the case for a fine-grained approach to analysing the spatial patterns of residence of the student population. Additionally, Duke-Williams (2009) explored the in-migration and out-migration characteristics of the wards where students were mostly clustered. Therefore, analysing the spatial patterns and transformations in student settlements is of significant importance.

Following a presentation of the researcher’s student survey findings at the Campus and Community Liaison Committee meeting at Loughborough University in May 2012, former/retired academic University Warden’s and SARG’s data on the history of house sales and Use Class Order/HMO for the Storer and Burleigh area from 2000-2012 was made available. This data shows the Use Class (specifically if the house is a C3 family or a C4 house), any changes in this class, and the year of any sales for each individual property in the Storer and Burleigh area. It also shows the number of bedrooms each property has, enabling the capacity to be identified (see Appendix 4). The researcher was granted access to individual student records, denoting students’ term-time addresses, from Loughborough University’s database (this information was treated as highly-confidential). This data was analysed to identify the occupancy of HMOs (how many students reside in each property, the number of bedspaces in each property) in order to uncover spatial patterns of student residence to establish the extent of student occupancy in Storer and Burleigh.

The SARG data was collected by active local residents who have monitored house sales, change of use and the occupancy of households in their local area. A degree of human error may be involved due to some assumptions of change of use on the part of residents; however, the data is from 2000 onwards when residents’ memories are not too distant and details of house sales are available on internet sites. Also, the group has worked in conjunction with Charnwood Borough Council to corroborate the use class of households and the number of bedrooms each property has, thereby ensuring that the data is as reliable as it can be.
Unfortunately, at the commencement of the research process the researcher was not aware that these datasets existed. It was only through the researcher embedding herself in the field (by presenting survey findings, attending local resident meetings and conducting interviews) that this data became available for sourcing and analysis. On reflection, had this data been to hand at the start of the research process it would have assisted the researcher when conducting interviews. However, the current nature of this data (student term-time address data from January 2012 and Warden/SARG HMO data accurate up to June 2012) was most valuable when the researcher was exploring student occupancy rates using data collected within the last year.

The lack of historical data from Loughborough University of student term-time addresses over previous academic years (the researcher only had student address data for the 2011/12 academic year) has limited the analysis of student residence, de-studentification and the changing popularity of student HMOs over time. Similarly, had HMO/Use Class data, of the kind collected by Warden/SARG, existed for other areas (such as the Kingfisher Estate) it would have enabled a comparison of student areas to be undertaken, which would deepen understanding of the temporal and spatial dynamics of student residence.

Data was input into an Excel work-book, before being imported to SPSS, which was used to generate frequency distributions and, following this preliminary stage of analysis, more complex cross-tabulations in order to uncover the extent of student occupancy in Storer and Burleigh. This process was repeated as the original student address dataset obtained did not include 116 PhD, MEng and DPhil students residing in Storer and Burleigh. The repetition of this process and the inclusion of these students, enabled the researcher to check the validity of the data input, and to ensure a more robust level of analysis. The results of these analyses are discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.2.

4.5 Data analysis: 2001 and 2011 Census data

In February 2013, two weeks prior to submission, data from the 2011 Census was released. With this information an analysis of total full-time students in both 2001 and 2011 was undertaken to establish whether student populations increased or
decreased over this time in specific areas of Loughborough. This was deemed particularly important, as previous research suggested that Storer was one of the most studentified wards in England and Wales (Hubbard 2008) and the publication of the 2011 Census data was to be an indicator of the extent to which students continued to concentrate in this area.

In this context, preliminary analysis of the Census data focused on the total number of full-time students at lower super output areas (LSOA). Boundary data was sourced from Digimap, and data on the number of full-time students residing in Loughborough was sourced from the Office of National Statistics (ONS). This data was input into ArcMap 10 Geographic Information System (GIS) to show student residence in Loughborough in both 2001 and 2011. As Pickles (1995) and Martin (2005) warn, it is “incumbent on the user of GIS to think broadly around their research questions in order to understand whether their results will be fundamentally limited because the data or analysis do not capture some of the most important dimensions” (Martin 2005: 286). Similarly, analysis of Census data on the number of full-time students residing in specific output areas (OA) of Loughborough (the ‘Golden Triangle’ area of town) was undertaken to try to identify any emerging signs of destudentification and student population loss at the lowest geographical level, and is presented in map form.

While proving to be a useful indicator, there are a number of incumbent limitations of GB Census data in terms of its potential to inform this thesis. First, it is not possible to differentiate between Higher Education (HE) and Further Education (FE) students (Munro et al. 2009; Duke-Williams 2009). This limits its usefulness to analyses seeking to illuminate processes linked to the expansion of HE in the UK. Second, all Census data is released at restricted geographies. The smallest is the Census Output Area (COA) which represents approximately 125 households and has the potential to mask student residential patterns at a smaller, micro-geographic scale. Third, very limited detail is available on students enumerated in the Census. This prevents analysis of key nuances such as their housing types (e.g. private-rented HMO, University managed) or year of study, both of which were key variables in this research informing a conceptualisation of studentification and destudentification in Loughborough. Finally, from the Census data it is not possible to know what the rise
and fall of student numbers was between individual years in specific areas of Loughborough between 2001 and 2011. In addition, the Census statistics are already out of date since there have been two cohorts of students since 2011, and up-to-date information is vital when researching dynamic and fast-paced processes of student geographies. Notwithstanding these limitations, when placed alongside the Warden/SARG data on student HMOs, the Census data is a useful tool to indicate student population change (see Section 5.2.2).

4.6 Positionality

In order to undertake robust and ethical research it is important to pay attention to issues of positionality, reflexivity and power relations. This researcher, as a Loughborough undergraduate, had no experience of living in rented accommodation off-campus since she spent her three years living in a university hall of residence, which meant she had no history of interaction with letting agents, landlords and other student accommodation providers in the town. She could therefore approach these groups with no preconceived prejudices. When conducting the survey with students currently residing in university halls of residence, on the contrary, this researcher was careful not to disclose any negative or positive aspects of her own hall experience and to retain an academic objectivity throughout. An advantage of the researcher’s biography - born in Leicestershire and having visited Loughborough regularly before she attended the university - is that she was familiar with the town and the town’s geography before she embarked on this research. The researcher remained aware that considering her position within qualitative and quantitative research is fundamental to understanding how the relationship between researcher and research subjects is negotiated, and knowledge produced (Hoggart et al. 2002). It is crucial to remember that interviewer and interviewee are seen as “actively and unavoidably engaged in the interactional co-construction of the interviewer’s content” (Gubrium and Holstein 2002: 15).

It is important to realise that the position of the researcher within the research process, and the observations and interpretations from a particular point of view, can easily influence the research itself. As Valentine (2005: 113) asserts, it is essential to “reflect on who you are and how your own identity will shape interactions that you have with others” throughout the research process - it is crucial that any researchers
take account of their position and social location with the research process, as well as that of the interviewee, and continually reflect on their actions and observations throughout the research process in order to grasp how these might affect the research relationship. Peake and Trotz (1999: 37) contend that acknowledging positionality “can strengthen our commitment to conduct good research based on building relations of mutual respect and recognition”. It is important to note, however, that constantly being aware of one’s positionality throughout the course of the research is often difficult. McDowell (1992: 409) states that “we must recognise and take account of our own position, as well as that of our research participants, and write this into our research practice”.

The role of the researcher can be viewed through two scenarios: insider and outsider research. Those who share the same identities with their informants are positioned as ‘insiders’ and may “have a closer, more direct connection with their informants” (Valentine 2002: 117) thereby encouraging interviewees to reveal a more accurate interpretation of their lives. Taking into account the issues and dynamics of inclusivity and exclusivity, it was felt that, in some sense, this researcher’s position as an ‘outsider’ shifted power to participants, who assumed authority on many issues and concerns discussed during semi-structured interviews with letting agents, landlords and local residents - they have deep knowledge and experience of the Loughborough market. This researcher often deliberately assumed a naive identity as an outsider on the issue of the student accommodation market in order to encourage a more fluid interaction. In the context of this research, it was often local people acting as ‘gatekeepers’ who had ‘control’ by being able to endorse the research, and the researcher as an interviewer, thereby legitimising the researcher’s presence in the case study area. As Sultana (2007: 382) confirms, “positionality and subjectivity are tempered both spatially and temporally, and are unstable and not fixed. Dynamics change with context, and the insider-outsider boundary gets blurred”.

This researcher’s status was that of an unfamiliar individual seeking information from people – and the researcher was conscious of this. Semi-structured interviews often took place in the homes or offices of participants, as this was a familiar environment for them – facilitating “a more relaxed conversation” (Valentine 2005: 118). Rather than the researcher remaining objective and detached, the emphasis within semi-
structured interviews was on openness, engagement with participants, and the
development of a trusting relationship. To ensure the respondents felt comfortable
and at ease with the situation, time was spent developing a positive rapport, often by
beginning the conversation by speaking informally about their personal history and
their experiences of the student accommodation market in Loughborough.

It was fundamental throughout the interview process that the researcher was aware
of approaching participants, and framing the ensuing conversation with them, in an
appropriate manner. An impartial and neutral stance was maintained throughout any
encounter, both through verbal and non-verbal actions, to ensure that any responses
were not influenced, and to obtain as accurate an account as possible (Silverman
2010). Often, respondents asked this researcher’s opinion on local issues, but, rather
than give an answer which could risk influencing how the respondent then replied,
the researcher maintained a naïve persona which usually encouraged respondents to
speak in more depth about their experience and interpretation of particular issues, as
well as shifting power to them as being ‘in the know’.

It was acknowledged that there are multiple possible ‘influences’ on the interaction
between the interviewer and interviewee, and allowing silence and pauses gave
participants the opportunity to reflect before answering; allowing the respondents
adequate time to form their answer and fully convey their points was an important
part of the research process – creating “the space to talk” (Rapley 2004: 25).
Maintaining a neutrality and consistency when asking and phrasing questions was
vital, and partially mitigated any bias on the part of the researcher or tendency to
influence any responses. Just as the researcher may potentially affect the research
process when data is collected, the influence of the researcher during data entry and
analysis must also be acknowledged and minimised. For example, accurately
recording data and paying detailed attention to language was important in allowing
data to be scrutinised and the interpretation and data analysis to be thorough
(Bryman 2008).

When the researcher was conducting interviews with key stakeholders she was
aware of being an ‘outsider’. In contrast, when the student survey was being
conducted the researcher’s position as a recent undergraduate who had experience
herself of living in halls of residence at Loughborough University, perhaps placed her
as more of an ‘insider’. However, it was important to be aware that student respondents may have perceived the interviewer as more knowledgeable due to her age and status. This researcher was alert to the potential of influencing responses at all times.

Any apprehension the researcher felt about first going into halls of residence to conduct the student survey, was lessened once she obtained a permission letter approving her research and enabling her to gain access to halls of residence from the Loughborough University Public Relations Officer. The researcher adopted the strategy of conducting the first questionnaire surveys with students at Royce Hall: this was the researcher’s hall of residence when she was an undergraduate, and the familiar environment (the layout of the hall) and personnel (certain staff and committee members) gave her initial confidence. When the researcher went to unfamiliar halls later in the process she had gained, therefore, assurance, experience and expertise.

Reflecting on self, process, and representation, and critically examining power relations in the research process should occur from the “beginning to the end of the research process” (Sultana 2007: 376). Reflexivity is defined by Charmaz (2006: 188) as “the researcher’s scrutiny of his or her research experience” and allows the researcher to assess to what extent the researcher’s “interests, positions, and assumptions influenced inquiry”. Although reflexivity is generally advocated as a strategy for situating knowledge, Bryman (2008: 683) contends that “reflexivity is a notoriously slippery concept” as there are difficulties, anxieties and ambivalences surrounding doing it - reflexivity has to be used with a degree of caution.

Throughout the course of research, from initial research design to final analysis, it was crucial that this researcher was aware of positionality and was reflexive wherever possible, always acknowledging that a researcher’s role forms part of the construction of knowledge. The conduct of semi-structured interviews and the data collection process was informed at each stage by a conscious reflexivity and an awareness of positionality by the researcher: for example, when asking and phrasing questions she was careful to ensure participants were fully aware of what was being asked. This researcher paid attention to, and gave time to reflect on, the complex
implications of “methods, values, biases, and decisions” (Bryman 2008: 682) throughout the research process.

4.7 Ethical considerations

It is imperative that ethical considerations should permeate the entire research process (Sultana 2007), as these issues will undoubtedly emerge between the researcher and research participant; it is the responsibility of the social researcher, therefore, to reflect on, and respond to, ethical matters throughout the course of the research, in both collection and analysis of data (Hoggart et al. 2002). As Denscombe (1997: 144) asserts, researchers are “expected to be open and explicit about what they are doing – to let people know that they are researchers and that they intend to collect data for the investigation into a particular topic. Furthermore, they are expected to tell the truth about the nature of their investigation and the role of the participants in that research”. It is important to note the inherent institutional power-relationships bound up in the research process: this research programme was funded by a full-time university studentship, provided over a three-year period by Loughborough University. It warrants acknowledgement that Loughborough University was the institution funding the research, although it did not impose any direct influence on the research design, implementation, analysis or key findings. The research was approved by the Loughborough University Ethics Advisory Committee.

A primary ethical consideration in this instance was that the research process did not carry negative connotations for participants in any way: they were given as much information as required for them to make an informed decision about whether or not they wished to participate in the research, and were informed fully about the research process, without this information being likely to influence answers to questions (Bryman 2008). Respondents were never forced or coerced into participating, and the voluntary nature of participation, as well as the “right to withdraw” (Silverman 2010: 153) from the research at any time without explanation, was reiterated at the beginning of each encounter. In addition, it was made clear to participants that they were free to refuse to answer any questions on whatever grounds they felt were justifiable, and they could stop the interview at any time.
Interviewees who were tape-recorded were informed that only the researcher, and possibly a supervisor, would listen to the interview, and that all identifying information would be removed during transcription (Bryman 2008). Confidentiality and the right to privacy were fundamental ethical tenets of this research (Silverman 2010). To protect anonymity, all participants were reminded that any information would be treated confidentially, and that they would be referred to by the use of pseudonyms in transcripts and beyond. All participants were assured that information, such as transcripts and contact details, would be treated in the strictest of confidence, and stored in password-accessed files. All participants would remain anonymous. Once permission was gained, a consent form containing information about the research project (see Appendix 1) was produced and explained by the interviewer, and then, once it was clear that each participant fully “understood the nature of the research” (Cresswell 2003: 64), signed by the interviewee.

4.8 Methodological reflections

This chapter has explored the methodological approaches adopted in this thesis and has demonstrated how, and for what reasons, a mixed-method approach was utilised to obtain the best contextual and empirical data. The methods employed address the main aims of the research which are to: examine processes of (de)studentification; analyse perceptions of the changing residential patterns of students within Loughborough; identify the presence and scale of (de)studentification; examine the influence(s) of accommodation providers and higher education institutions in processes of (de)studentification, and investigate the effects of student residential decision-making practices on processes of (de)studentification.

The researcher’s familiarity with the literature of studentification led to the decision that semi-structured interviews would be the most effective methodology in illuminating how, when and where processes of studentification and destudentification had (or were beginning) to unfold in Loughborough. These interviews were undertaken to gain insights into respondents’ knowledge about, and their perceptions of, the changing residential patterns of students on the private rented sector. In stage two of this research a survey with students was undertaken, perceived as the most effective way of exploring the extent to which student accommodation preferences were a factor in the processes of destudentification and
the changing geographic patterns of student-living in the town. Finally, the sourcing and analysis of data on student term-time addresses and Use Class HMO, enabled the researcher to explore the spatial extent of student occupancy in the Storer and Burleigh areas of the town. A mixed methods approach was seen as the best strategy to gather relevant data on studentification and the emergent processes of destudentification in Loughborough.

Over the last decade, studentification has become a leading-edge process of contemporary urban change on a national scale in the UK, with a robust literature focussing on the patterns, processes and impacts of sociospatial concentrations of students: there has been a marked intensification of academic interest in the emergence of increasingly diverse ‘geographies of students’. The contributions of Smith (2002; 2005; 2008; 2009), Smith and Holt (2007), Hubbard (2008; 2009) and Munro et al. (2009) witnessed the firm establishment of studentification in the geographical lexicon. However, as Smith (2009: 1802) states:

“Looking into the ‘crystal ball’, it is clear that the relationships between contemporary urban restructuring, student populations, and expanded systems of higher education are dynamic, and offer an exciting, albeit unstable, research agenda for geographers”.

Developments in recent years mean that new processes, such as destudentification (identified by Smith 2008), have implications for established academic conceptualisations of studentification. There is a need for further research in order to uncover and explain the diverse and dynamic nuances of student geographies, and how these concepts link to broader theories of urban change.

This research uncovers new and significant patterns, and provides fresh insights into the fast-changing geographies of student-living. The processes of destudentification have largely gone unexplored and yet are key elements in developing new conceptual and theoretical understandings of the ways in which student populations and the changing supply of student accommodation are connected with contemporary processes of urban change. By using the university town of Loughborough as an in-depth case study, this research delivers original findings which will be of relevance to other university towns and cities. With this in mind, and drawing on Freeman’s (2006) assertions regarding the value of researching
processes of gentrification as they unravel ‘in situ’, as opposed to entering the research site in the wake of the progressing gentrification frontier, Loughborough offered an ideal setting for exploring the unfolding processes of studentification and changing residential patterns of students within the town. It is believed that, based as it is upon empirical (rather than anecdotal) evidence, the findings of this research contribute to the existing literature, extend our knowledge of the complex processes of studentification and destudentification, and broaden the ongoing debate.
5. The dynamic residential geographies of students

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the dynamics of student residential geographies in Loughborough, contextualising processes of student-related change in the town by disentangling the various stages that form the studentification process. This research is timely in its exploration of the processes of destudentification as they begin to unfold, and significant in its contribution to studentification debates. The perceptions drawn from interviews with a range of different stakeholders in the town serve to demonstrate how the processes of both studentification, and, most significantly destudentification, are seen to be unfolding in unique ways, as well as the possible causes, conditions and catalysts for this. The research has implications for established academic conceptualisations of studentification and destudentification, raising questions about how successfully these terms capture the diverse and dynamic nuances of contemporary student geographies.

To achieve this, Chapter 5 presents findings from 33 interviews with letting agents, landlords, accommodation providers and established residents, as well as relevant statistical data of HMOs and student term-time addresses, and an analysis of Census data. The chapter is formed of four main parts. Section 5.2 provides significant evidence of destudentification in specific Loughborough enclaves, using case study examples of Storer and Burleigh, and the experiences of PBSA in the town centre. Section 5.3 then critically explores continuing studentification using a case study example of the Kingfisher Estate. Section 5.4 investigates emerging studentification using the case study of the Forest and Herrick area of Loughborough. Section 5.5 discusses the possible conditions, causes and catalysts for destudentification to unfold. The diverse experiences and complexities of the changing student population distributions is then addressed in Section 5.6, before the final concluding section connects these findings to our understandings of studentification and broader issues of urban transformation. The aim is, therefore, to analyse critically the identification and assessment of the role destudentification plays in the changing student geographies of Loughborough. It is contended that this will deepen our understandings of the ways in which student population shifts are connected with contemporary processes of urban change.
5.2 Destudentification

A distinct temporal and spatial frame of reference to the emerging of processes of destudentification is expressed by interviewees in Loughborough, indicating that an out-movement of students from Storer and Burleigh has been occurring since 2008, unfolding gradually at first, but more rapidly since 2010 in these neighbourhoods. The following quotation, from an interview with a Storer resident, highlights these recent changes to the neighbourhood:

“Demand for student housing has fallen in this area. There has been a gradual decline in student numbers, more noticeable in the last three years” [Storer resident 4].

Hubbard’s (2008: 330) case study of Loughborough emphasises that the Storer ward is “one of the most studentified wards in England and Wales”, and the area has been perceived as the heart of studentification in Loughborough since the early 2000s. However, a specific set of processes of urban change has been recognised and articulated by the local population:

“It was probably at least ten years ago that studentification really started I would say … Maybe slightly more than that, maybe twelve years ago. But now, they [students] are moving out” [Storer resident 3].

This quotation suggests that studentification began to unfold here twelve years ago, implying that Storer’s history presents an example of a mature studentified area. However, there has clearly been a perceived shift – no longer is Storer experiencing an in-movement of students, but is undergoing an out-movement, which confirms Smith’s (2008: 2552) assertion that destudentification involves the “evacuation of a neighbourhood by students leading to a reduction of their population” – students are evacuating or “moving out” of Storer, leading to a noticeable loss in student population. This depopulation of a once established studentified area is also evidenced by Loughborough University statistics recording the decreasing number of students residing in the Storer and Burleigh wards (Figure 11), showing the loss of 441 students from this area over a four year period. Student population loss, therefore, is an indicator of destudentification processes taking hold in an area.
However, interviewees perceive differences in the unfolding geographies of destudentification between the areas of Storer and Burleigh suggesting destudentification processes are complex and diverse, and differ both spatially and temporally. The following quotations suggest that an out-movement of students is judged to have begun in 2010 in Storer, slightly earlier than in Burleigh (2011):

“I would say that there’s definitely not as many students in the streets in and around Storer Road in the last two years” [Letting agent 1].

“I think there’s been a decrease in Storer and Burleigh … Perhaps more so on that side [Storer] than this” [Burleigh resident 2].

In Storer, the perception is that student population loss is more pronounced. There are indications that a saturation point has been reached; just as Duke-Williams (2009: 1844) questions the proportion of student population needed in order for an area to become studentified, so this research questions the degree of student evacuation necessary in order for an area to be identified as destudentifying; although the notion of a ‘tipping point’ is “deeply problematic” (Hubbard 2008: 338), local residents certainly claim that point has arrived:

![Graph showing decreasing numbers of students residing in Storer and Burleigh]

Figure 11: Decreasing numbers of student residing in Storer and Burleigh (source: Loughborough University 2012)
“I think the number of students [living in the area] has reached a peak and it has just tipped over the edge now … in the last year or two I would think. It would be interesting to see whether it continues to slide down or whether it is just a slight dip and then it rises back. I think there will be less and less [students] though” [Storer resident 3].

It is suggested that processes of destudentification are now very much engrained in these areas. Not only has this phenomenon been noted by residents, but the “slide” of decreasing student numbers in Storer and Burleigh (often referred to as the ‘Golden Triangle’ area) is something that has come to the attention of letting agents:

“The Golden Triangle, one hundred percent certain … in three, four years, it won’t be anything like it is now. The number of students living there has begun to decrease and will continue to, I think” [Letting agent 2].

Several respondents predict that not only will the depopulation of students from this area continue, but they feel there is little chance there will be a reversal back to studentification processes or the in-movement of students to this enclave (see Section 5.2.5). Perceptions are that student population loss since 2010 indicates that destudentification processes are now firmly embedded in Storer and, to a lesser extent, Burleigh. Informed residents use the word ‘destudentification’ to describe the changes happening around them which indicates the pervasiveness of the term:

“This coming year will be very interesting to see what happens so it will be the year of destudentification” [Burleigh resident 1].

In summary, student population loss is slightly more accentuated in Storer than in Burleigh, but both areas display, and residents and letting agents acknowledge, that there are new unfolding geographies taking shape. Interviewees have recognised the signs these enclaves are undergoing the early or initial stages of destudentification. But whilst population loss is an important early sign of destudentification, it is vital to remember population loss is not the sole indicator of destudentification. Rather, it is a crucial factor in determining destudentification, and this research identifies student population loss in the Storer and Burleigh enclaves of Loughborough.
5.2.1 The destudentification of Storer and Burleigh

The unfolding geographies of destudentification can be visually evidenced through the housing stock itself and this section considers the physical signs of destudentification throughout Storer and Burleigh. Observant and concerned residents in Storer and Burleigh monitor the sales and lettings activities around them, noting the increasing local “voids and vacancies in the housing market” (Keenan et al. 1999: 704). The following quotation highlights their perceptions of the recent out-movement of students due to the increase in housing stock that is un-let or sitting empty:

“In all the streets around here you will see houses where they have got no students whatsoever. It has been noticeable for two, if not three years ... there are these empty houses popping up” [Storer resident 4].

It is clear that empty properties are symbolic of student decolonisation and this phenomenon is perceived to have been increasing over the last two years by Storer and Burleigh interviewees. This perceived shift in changes to the urban landscape in this part of Loughborough, where properties are now empty when in the past they would not be, has also been identified by accommodation providers:

“Your Golden Triangle property has kind of been hit this year in particular, just by the amount of properties that have been left empty down there … Having an empty house is not beneficial at all for a landlord” [Landlord 6].

The extent of destudentification in the Storer area is apparent from the struggles of landlords to let properties that have been left empty in a neighbourhood previously densely-populated by students, something that did not occur when the area was experiencing studentification. Clearly, the increasing number of empty student houses, and a high property vacancy rate, is therefore symptomatic of destudentification processes. The evident findings of this research into the change to the urban landscape in parts of Storer and Burleigh, Loughborough, confirm anecdotal speculation about student depopulation and empty student accommodation in Bournebrook, Birmingham (Smith 2008) and Kensington, Liverpool (Nathan and Urwin 2005) - speculation based on signs of an exit of students and increasing numbers of empty houses.
However, residents who monitor student numbers as part of the Loughborough Storer and Ashby Residents’ Group (SARG) have noted a stage before student properties become completely empty: that is, crucially, when a student house is not full to capacity and therefore experiences a loss in tenants; this stage precedes a house becoming totally empty:

“What I have noticed is that many houses have now had a spare bed, for example, having three students living there rather than four … so they are not to full occupancy. There are a very small number of empty houses, I think that comes afterwards … I am talking about in the Storer area, it is definitely going on” [Storer resident 1].

This demonstrates that some local residents perceive a larger number of partially-empty houses than there are student properties with zero-occupancy in both Storer and Burleigh. Indeed, part-empty properties are a common phenomenon. This aspect is interpreted as an initial sign that destudentification processes are taking hold, a stage which has not been identified or explored in the existing literature of student decolonisation and also it is not immediately visible.

It is hypothesised that this phenomenon marks the initial stage, then the desertion may gather momentum in depopulating areas. There is clearly a fear on the part of housing providers that once a student property suffers partial-occupancy, a completely empty house is the next step. There is a relevance here to the literature on urban abandonment and decline, a situation when “confidence in the area begins to seep away…[as] people that can choose to move drift away” (Keenan et al. 1999: 712). If the word ‘students’ is substituted for “people” here, then this summary of the accelerating processes of abandonment and decline in towns and cities can be applied to the processes of destudentification in Storer and Burleigh.

5.2.2 Student HMO occupancy in the Storer and Burleigh area

A central question underpinning the research aims set out in Chapter 1 was to establish the degree to which the residential patterns of students are changing and whether students are beginning to destudentify certain enclaves. Previous research by Hubbard (2008) suggested that student residence is generally clustered in the Storer and Burleigh wards of Loughborough, which he identified as one of the most
studentified wards in England. Thus, it was crucial to establish the extent to which students are still concentrating in these areas since interviewees estimated there were 2,000 empty bedspaces in across the town (see Section 5.5.1).

Whilst interviewees appear to suggest that there is no identifiable spatial pattern to the proliferation of empty properties, with destudentification in the Storer and Burleigh neighbourhoods appearing to be uneven and scattered across the areas, analysis of data on student HMO/Use Class of houses and University data on student term-time addresses suggests patterns and clusters of student HMOs without student occupants are apparent.

When Warden/SARG data on student HMOs in the Storer and Burleigh area (noting the number of bedspaces each property has) is compared with University data on students’ term-time addresses, it shows that there are 1,069 bedspaces with no students residing in them. 28% of student HMO bedspaces in Storer and Burleigh are therefore empty. Figure 12 shows that three-bedroom student HMOs are the most likely type of house to sit empty and suffer total destudentification. This suggests that small terraced housing is least popular with students, who are increasingly looking for more luxurious student living, a trend that has been noted in national media (Bawden 2009; Paton 2009; Kollewe 2010; Shah 2010):

“If it is a standard three-let terraced house, I don’t think they are as popular at all because one of the bedrooms is off the street and you have to go round the back and all the rest of it. The kitchens are very small and, of course, not really that modern either” [Landlord 6].

Figure 12 indicates that the more rooms a house has, the more likely it is to suffer partial occupancy (at least one empty bedroom). It also shows that the bigger the house, the harder it is for a landlord to fill it completely: this suggests groups of six or seven students wanting to rent a house together is not common, and that, in Loughborough, students tend to group in fours or fives:

“There are not many really large properties for student let … generally you get three, four and five-bed properties which are easier to fill because students tend to want to share with three or four other students” [Letting agent 1].
“One of the problems with big houses is that it is not one cohesive group of students. It is not you and two mates, you often have a few groups that do not even know each other in the same house” [Letting agent 4].

In the Storer and Burleigh area, 44% of all student HMOs are partially-occupied:

“I know that some of the houses on this street are not full to capacity. I think they can often be like that for a couple of years before the landlord gets no interest in it” [Burleigh resident 2].

“I think it often starts with not being able to fill the house in its entirety – for example, you can’t get five people for a five bed, but you manage to get three, and then it carries on from there” [Landlord 9].

Therefore, there is a widespread perception that partial occupancy is an early sign of the processes of destudentification as Keenan et al. (1999: 706) state, “it is commonly the case that property that has been abandoned will have been vacant or void for some time before the owner becomes unable … to find an inhabitant”. However, there is a possible scenario in which landlords and providers upgrade their accommodation and let the property to a lower number of occupants (reducing their tenants, for example, from five to three) who are prepared to pay higher rent for
higher levels of quality. However, it appears that, currently, in Storer and Burleigh, partial occupancy is associated with processes of abandonment. Indeed, 15% of all student HMOs in the Storer and Burleigh area sit completely empty of student tenants, whilst only 41% of student HMOs are filled to capacity with student tenants (Figure 13). This high percentage of empty housing is significantly larger than interviewees claimed:

“I don’t think there are many empty properties in the Golden Triangle, maybe just a very small number in this area” [Landlord 6].

![Student HMO occupancy in the Storer and Burleigh area](source: SARG 2012)

When examining each area separately, destudentification is more pronounced in Storer than it is in Burleigh. This appears to be due to housing in the Storer area being formed of smaller terraced properties. By contrast, Burleigh, with its marginally larger houses and wider roads continues to appeal to a higher number of students. There are 758 empty bedspaces in Storer, more than double the 311 in the Burleigh area, which equates to 19% of student HMO bedspaces being empty in Storer, compared to 7% in Burleigh. This suggests that residing in Burleigh is a somewhat more attractive proposition for students than Storer, due to the quality and size of the accommodation in this area (see Chapter 6 for the findings of the student survey). Three-bed properties are the most likely housing-type to be empty in both areas, but
there is a higher percentage of four, five, six and seven-bed empty properties in Storer (Figure 14).

Figure 14: The occupancy of student HMOs in Storer and Burleigh separately (source: SARG 2012)
Therefore, the Burleigh area appears to be more popular than Storer, with a higher percentage of student HMOs filled to capacity in all sized houses. This supports the perception of interviewees that Burleigh houses are a more attractive accommodation option for students:

“The houses [in the Burleigh area] are generally that little bit bigger, the streets are a bit wider, and I think it’s a little bit more successful” [Landlord 6].

Only 38% of student HMOs in the Storer area are filled to capacity, meaning 62% are either empty or have partial occupancy (Figure 15). Loughborough landlords openly admit that the Storer area is suffering:

“But there are a significant number of houses with a spare bed … for example, having three students living there, rather than four … there is definitely a reduced demand, but I don’t think there are any particular hotspots” [Landlord 8].

The notion that there are no “particular hotspots” [Landlord 8], suggests that there is no identifiable spatial patterning to void bedspaces and empty houses in the area. Local residents have also suggested there is no pattern:
“I think the empty properties tend to be quite haphazardly spread around Storer and Burleigh” [Burleigh resident 1].

However, data analysis of individual roads and streets in the Storer area shows that, in the same way “studentification occurs on a street-by-street basis rather than at the ward level” (Hubbard 2008: 331), destudentification too occurs on the micro-scale. Paget Street (26%), Station Street (25%), Hastings Street (25%), Cumberland Road (24%) and Oxford Street (21%) have the highest percentage of empty student HMOs. In contrast, several other streets tend to have the highest percentage of partially-occupied student HMOs: Fearon Street (57%), Storer Road (47%) and Leopold Street (47%), whilst Cumberland Road (52%) has a high partial occupancy rate as well as a high number of empty properties. George Street (64%) has the highest percentage of student HMOs that are filled to capacity. Therefore, this analysis proves that destudentification has a distinct spatial pattern at the street/road level. Streets composed of smaller terraced housing appear to be particularly vulnerable. Several local landlords and letting agents also perceive this patterning, highlighting particular streets they note are experiencing the most voids:

“Leopold, Paget, those streets, on-street terraced ones, people are tending to walk away from that because it is harder to get tenants I think” [Letting agent 4].

“All the terraced ones, now, are not as popular: Station Street, Paget Street, Leopold Street, Oxford Street … the rooms are very small and of course, they are quite old, they are Victorian terraced houses” [Landlord 5].

Similarly, destudentification patterns are apparent in the Burleigh area, though destudentification is less pronounced here (Figure 16). Only 7% of student HMOs in Burleigh are empty; indeed, interviewees clearly perceive that a Burleigh landlord has a better chance of successfully filling a house with student tenants than a Storer landlord:

“I think that the higher demand that we see at the moment is probably on this side of Ashby Road … the Radmoor Road side of Ashby Road [Burleigh area] rather than the Storer Road side of Ashby Road [Storer area], to a degree” [Letting agent 3].
No streets/roads in the Burleigh have more than 16% empty student HMOs, whilst Storer has seven streets with over 20% of student HMOs empty. Burleigh Road (58%), York Road (57%), Curzon Street (57%) and Frederick Street (54%) have the highest percentage of partially-occupied student HMO. The highest percentage of student HMO that is filled to capacity is Caldwell Street (83%) and Chestnut Street (68%), and five other roads have over 40% of the student HMOs filled to capacity.

Towards the end of the research the publication of Census 2011 data provided a further indication of the changing residential patterns of students in Loughborough. An analysis of the total number of full-time students as recorded in the Census (2001 and 2011) was undertaken to establish whether student numbers in Storer and Burleigh increased or decreased during this time. At the ward level, 1,800 students resided in Storer in 2001, whilst 2,223 students lived there in 2011 – this signifies a 23% increase over ten years. It is a confirmation that Storer in 2011 remained the studentified area recognised by Hubbard in 2008 but, knowing what we know about student numbers in Loughborough (a rise from 13,495 students in 2000/01 to 16,120 in 2010/11 – an increase of 2,625 students), it is reasonable to expect that the Census data masks a peak of student numbers in this area around 2007, and a subsequent slight decline would indicate destudentification in the years thereafter.
Figure 17: Number of students in Loughborough (LSOA) (ONS Census 2001; 2011)
Analysis at the lower super output area (LSOA) (Figure 17) shows that the student population in Loughborough increased between 2001 and 2011 in all but three areas of the town. It is clear, given the increase in students at Loughborough University at that time, that student numbers will be recorded as increasing in all areas of the town which would potentially disguise patterns such as destudentification, which may have been unfolding at the smaller, micro-geographic scale.

Hubbard (2008: 327) points out that “finer grained analysis of census data suggests that the impacts of studentification are more evident at a neighbourhood level”, and therefore an examination of Census output areas (COA) may indicate more evident signs of destudentification. Indeed, Figure 18 shows that three output areas in the Storer and Burleigh (or Golden Triangle area) have suffered a reduction in student population between 2001 and 2011: this population loss is located in Station/Paget Street (a loss of 10 students), Oxford/Leopold/Fearon Street (a loss of 44 students) and Radmoor Road (a loss of 95 students). Warden/SARG data on empty/partial-occupancy student HMO confirms, as do interviews with landlords, that these areas are the ones most affected by student depopulation. Paget Street (26%) and Station Street (25%) have a high percentage of empty student HMOs according to SARG/Warden data, whilst Fearon Street (57%) has the highest level of partial-occupancy. Therefore, Census data supports both Warden/SARG data and landlord perceptions that indicate that destudentification is occurring in specific areas of Loughborough; students are beginning to abandon student HMO in parts of Storer and Burleigh in favour of accommodation in other areas of Loughborough.
Figure 18: Number of students in the ‘Golden Triangle’ (OA) (ONS Census 2001; 2011)
In response to this depopulation of students from the housing stock, landlords and agents are taking measures to stall these processes. Crucially, advertisements of properties and rooms to let are remaining on websites and in agents’ windows for longer than they used to, often after the term begins and throughout the academic year (Figure 19):

“This year, there seems to be many empty properties … lots that still have boards and signs up saying ‘rooms available for this academic year’ in the window, even though we are well into the term. That is quite common in a few streets in the Golden Triangle … properties in the Triangle seem to have been hit pretty hard” [University stakeholder 1].

This is a clear and visual indication of partial or un-let housing - a sign of destudentification. These unfolding geographies document the subtle shifts that indicate a movement towards student abandonment of the Storer enclave. This has prompted landlords to admit that they are now involved in a struggle to make sure their properties do not sit (partially) empty:

“There are so many to let signs and posters up advertising rooms even though all the students will have got somewhere sorted by now. There are plenty of offers going on as well, especially down Storer Road last summer” [Landlord 4].

Certainly, landlords and agents are trying actively to counteract this depopulation in Storer and Burleigh. Interviewees detailed a number of measures that have been taken to deal with a destudentifying neighbourhood. Landlords, agents and providers are offering price reductions, deals and special inducements to try to halt an out-movement and encourage and attract students to the Storer and Burleigh area:

“Where they have not been letting there’s been big deals going on, such as reducing the rents by half over the summer recess. In most cases, most landlords up to now have been able to get fifty-two weeks of the year, but that has changed. Again, I think that is the Golden Triangle sort of area that has really suffered the most on that basis” [Letting agent 4].

“The rental rates have decreased quite markedly, probably over the last two or three years. I mean, at one stage the average was probably around £85 per week, not all in. And now, it seems to be about £70 all in now. So dropping the price is one method employed, as is the growth in all-inclusive packages, because that makes it easier for the students” [Letting agent 3].
Figure 19: A series of photographs of 'House/Rooms To Let' advertisements in empty windows in the Storer area. All photographs were taken six months after the academic year began, showing that accommodation remains unoccupied (author's photographs)
However, despite these resistance strategies to destudentification, agents are admitting that it is becoming more difficult to let housing to students in the Storer and Burleigh areas:

“… at the moment our portfolio’s down” [Letting Agent 1].

“As a landlord, you would rather put your price down and rent your property than stick at a higher price and have your house empty … so there have to be compromises” [Landlord 5].

The dilemma facing landlords is summarised in these comments; however, the various deals and reductions offered do not appear to be slowing the drift of students away from Storer and Burleigh houses, since landlord and letting agent portfolios are, by their own admission, “down”. Responses from interviewees indicate that destudentification processes are occurring across the wards of Storer, and to a lesser extent, Burleigh:

“Fortunately, in this area, there have not been many empty houses clustered together so it has not really created much of an impact” [Burleigh resident 2].

The data presented in this section shows that destudentification is occurring in both the Storer and Burleigh areas, but is more pronounced in Storer. High-levels of voids are apparent in both areas with evident spatial patterning: destudentification is occurring at the street/road level. Lee and Nevin (2003: 74) suggest that “increasing numbers of vacant properties tends to generate longer periods of voids … This situation leads to the supply of new residents decreasing and therefore the trajectory for voids will be upwards over time”. Empty and partially-occupied housing may lead to a greater number of voids in the future. Keenan et al. (1999: 795) discuss abandoned property as “a contagion effect which, unless reversed, can lead to whole neighbourhoods becoming devoid of social and economic activity, a twilight zone in which crime and social malaise abound”. The next section will now consider the effects of voids and empty and abandoned student HMO in Storer and Burleigh.
5.2.3 The neighbourhood post-student: deterioration and decline

This section provides accounts of property deterioration and neighbourhood decline associated with the out-movement of students from Storer and Burleigh. Respondents perceive there to be a marked deterioration of property when it is not let, particularly property remaining empty for some time. For this reason much concern was expressed by residents over the length of time that former-student property was remaining un-let:

“There are some that have been sitting empty for over a year that we have been watching” [Burleigh resident 1].

“Some properties have been empty up to eighteen months” [Storer resident 4].

Properties sitting empty for “over a year” are symbolic of a neighbourhood on the cusp of transition. Housing which remains empty is perceived to deteriorate, often quite rapidly. Local residents express concerns about the state of houses when students live in them, but significantly, they appear more concerned about the rapid deterioration when students leave:

“All houses that get left empty deteriorate very quickly. I have never quite worked out how, but they do. I guess, when you have got someone in there it looks more like a home, it looks like it is lived in. Empty properties are not attractive, they just look uncared for and one problem with it leads to another and no one seems to care enough to sort it out. For some, a lick of paint would do a world of good, but for others, they are in such a bad state that they need so much work to them. The landlords often cannot be bothered to sort them out, so they just get left to get even worse” [Burleigh resident 1].

Just as in Powell and Barke’s (2008) Newcastle study, this Storer and Burleigh case study suggests that, in some instances, a stage may be reached when the lack of students willing to take up a tenancy leads to landlords abandoning the property altogether. A number of houses in the Storer and Burleigh areas have been boarded up which indicates abandonment (Figure 20); residents are clearly concerned that an empty house reduces the physical attractiveness of the area, affects the value of their property, and impacts on the ability of the area to attract potential investment:

“I think that having an empty house can have a negative impact on the whole neighbourhood, there is no doubt about that” [Burleigh resident 2].
Residents fear that houses in Storer and Burleigh that have been left empty for a period of time will take on the characteristics of abandoned houses, which are lack of maintenance and ‘care’ leading to buildings falling into a state of disrepair:

“I went to have a look at some houses that were empty on Radmoor Road and they looked very dilapidated. Not derelict, but certainly very dilapidated. The paint was peeling and they looked very dirty and drab, the front gardens were unkempt … the classic empty house syndrome” [Storer resident 4].

Property abandonment clearly “signals the loss of value and use of an area” (Power and Mumford 1999: 25). Residents express the view that just one or two empty properties may well accelerate further deterioration or initiate a “spiral of decline” (Feijten and van Ham 2009: 2107). In consequence, it is feared that other residents, dissatisfied with the urban landscape, may then develop a wish to leave themselves, accelerating further change. Therefore, destudentification is a trigger for further abandonment, not just by the student population, but by its community. The literature of housing abandonment uses the imagery of disease which is liable to spread decline “in a contagious fashion” (Wilson et al. 1994: 493):
“I think there could be a transition stage where you might get a few that really deteriorate if landlords are really struggling and want to sell, but no-one else wants to buy them” [Storer resident 3].

Residents also fear that prospective buyers and renters, looking at a street with several empty properties, will not be inclined to invest, or live, in the vicinity. These houses are in danger of becoming eyesores and attracting vandalism, thus impacting adversely on the attractiveness and reputation of the neighbourhood:

“...like piece-meal dereliction. Not whole streets being abandoned, small-scale, piece-meal dereliction based on the occasional house that is staying empty” [Storer resident 4].

In Loughborough destudentification is still at an early stage, but residents are beginning to see (and crucially predict) a further increase in abandonment and the associated problems of student-induced decline. Respondents perceive empty properties as having negative effects on the neighbourhood, impacting on potential buyers, the prices of other houses, and on the status of the area as a whole. The Storer and Burleigh example highlights residents’ fears that once unrentable and unsaleable properties proliferate the result is that “in such markets, there is little incentive for new buyers to invest or lenders to lend” (Bramley and Pawson 2002: 408). The empty properties seen in the Storer and Burleigh area are signs that destudentification is underway, and the residents’ expressed concerns about the resulting deterioration when students leave underlines the perceived significance of this process to the future vibrancy of the town.

5.2.4 The ‘not so Golden Triangle’: landlord abandonment

Reports from residents and agents of the out-movement of students from Storer and Burleigh show respondents also note that landlords are leaving these areas. In the same way that destudentification is described as a “reduction of a student population in a neighbourhood” (Smith 2008: 2552), there are landlords who are abandoning the Storer and Burleigh areas of Loughborough (Figure 21): this researcher has coined the term ‘delandlordification’ (the evacuation of ‘smaller’ landlord investors) for the phenomenon that is occurring in these enclaves:
“There are suddenly quite a lot of houses for sale which there were not a couple of years ago, streets that have never been for sale or were like gold dust” [Landlord 3].

Figure 21: Window advertisement offering accommodation from July 2011 in an empty house. This photograph was taken in October 2011 showing the house remains empty and is now up for sale (author’s photograph)

Figure 22: Five houses ‘for sale’ or ‘sold’ on Paget Street – photograph taken October 2011 (author’s photograph)
Thus, there is an identification of change in Storer and Burleigh. While studentification processes involve not only an in-movement of students, but also of landlords buying up housing for conversion to student HMO, destudentification processes, as described by respondents, show an out-movement of landlords as well as of students (Figure 22):

“Before, it was always landlords buying up properties here ... but now, I think that lots of landlords are selling. Last year [2010], I would say, that was when we really started to see houses for sale ... there were suddenly several boards up around here” [Storer resident 1].

There is a perceived reduction in the landlord population in the Storer and Burleigh area, as some have decided to put their houses on to the market. This represents a significant shift because, prior to 2010, ‘Golden Triangle’ property was a high-value and sought-after commodity. Since then, it is noted, the ‘golden’ aspect of the Triangle has tarnished: the area’s value and desirability for both student tenants and landlords has dropped and much housing remains un-let. This supports the Keenan et al. (1999: 705) assertion that a major contributing factor to the downward spiral of some communities is empty living accommodation. The “gold dust” factor has gone; once a house becomes empty it is vulnerable to landlords selling up:

“There is a house round the corner there for sale that has been empty this year so the landlord has obviously decided to sell up because he hasn't been able to get the students” [Burleigh resident 1].

Another phenomenon observed by respondents is that smaller-scale landlords are the most likely to sell their student housing and are the first ones to leave a destudentifying area if their accommodation remains un-let; interviewees give examples of this type of landlord, who appear to be most likely to sell to established landlords with larger portfolios, access to finance, and the ability to run their operations as a large-scale business:

“When it no longer became profitable to have a mortgage which renting to students paid for you, then a lot of little buyers, the smaller landlords who had just one or two houses, they got out. They often sold them onto the bigger landlords who want to establish themselves and their portfolio ... general market forces would appear to indicate that” [Storer resident 2].
“A landlord friend of mine, he had just the one house as an investment, he struggled to get students for the past three years. He felt it was too much hassle and he couldn’t advertise in the way the bigger guys and agents can, so he sold up” [Landlord 6].

Interviewees argue that larger landlords and agents see this as a good time to increase their portfolio and their market share, and take advantage of the struggles of their competitors:

“If, for instance, I was considering adding to the portfolio, then I would be doing so on the basis, and in full knowledge that, to fill those houses I would be taking tenants from somewhere else … you have got to steal market share to increase your business. There are quite a few houses on the market at the moment, I haven’t looked at who is buying them, but I suppose many of them will be sold to your bigger-scale landlords” [Landlord 1].

However, it appears that the selling of property by ‘smaller’ landlord investors is taking place. There is an awareness of this process influencing population dynamics in the Storer and Burleigh areas:

“There are definitely some [landlords] that are leaving the market, one went bust, a couple are on the brink and some of the bigger landlords have been buying up … those landlord to landlord sales have been increasing, that is quite a new phenomenon” [Letting agent 3].

It is perceived that there are still landlords or investors coming into the private renting student market, but not as many as a few years before. In a time of decreasing student population in Storer and Burleigh, established landlords seem bemused as to why prospective speculators want to invest in a market where there is an imbalance between students looking to rent and the accommodation available:

“I don’t think there are many new landlords coming into the market. There are a few, but I don’t suspect they understand the supply and demand scenario. If I was a would-be landlord and I knew the statistics with regards to student population forecasts, and the oversupply of accommodation in the town, you think why would you be wanting to get into, and expand, a market where it is already difficult? I don’t think it makes any sense at all” [Landlord 3].

In summary, student depopulation in Storer and Burleigh is tied to the overlap of specific population and housing dynamics (whereby an out-moving student
population has produced a burgeoning devalorised housing stock left struggling or empty). When both students and landlords abandon properties (students easily, landlords less so since they have financial ties that may be hard to sever) then there is the danger of houses remaining empty on a long-term basis and deteriorating, making the neighbourhood look uncared for and unkempt. Therefore, destudentification processes and the actions of landlords are perceived to be crucial components currently shaping urban change in this Loughborough neighbourhood.

5.2.5 New groups: “That’s when good neighbours become good friends”? 

The previous sections of this chapter have taken a considered approach to issues of student depopulation. This section explores perceptions of the implications to the social environment of processes of destudentification in Storer and Burleigh. Indeed, respondents from this case study site were keen to discuss what is happening to houses that have been, or are in the process of being, depopulated by students. Empty houses, and the acknowledgement by all groups that students are moving away from areas traditionally dominated by student households, raises important questions about what happens once destudentification processes take hold, in particular which “social groups may replace the out-going students in HMO” (Smith 2008: 2552).

Several interviewees suggest that the increase in landlords putting their student houses up for sale signifies the changes associated with destudentification; however it is seen as a complex issue which raises many questions:

“How easily are they going to be able to sell these properties in the meantime? If other landlords won’t buy them, then who will?” [Storer resident 2].

“Private landlords in Loughborough are pretty worried right now because the main market for selling in that area [Storer and Burleigh] would be to another landlord investor. But I don’t think landlords are looking to expand their portfolios at this present time. So they have got to ask themselves “who is going to buy it?” because I don’t think it would sell easily to anyone” [Letting agent 2].

In the light of residents’ responses to their awareness and knowledge that students are leaving, this section discusses their dwindling confidence in the likelihood of
successful re-colonisation of their neighbourhood by previously displaced groups, namely families:

“It is a question of: what do you do with the houses? Landlords don’t want to buy the houses because they would not be able to get them filled, and normal residents don’t want to buy the houses because of the association with students” [Storer resident 3].

“It is not going to be the simple case of “oh, the students are leaving so families will come back”. I don’t think people would consider buying here because of this ‘student Triangle’ stigma … they wouldn’t have the confidence to buy because it has been seen as a student area for so long” [Storer resident 2].

Residents also state that they believed that there is, as yet, no evidence that there has been selling of student housing back to traditional residents in Storer and Burleigh:

“In the last ten years there has not been a house sold from a landlord to a non-landlord in the Burleigh area - that tells you something. It will be interesting when that first sale is. I think that may be coming, but we just don’t know” [Burleigh resident 1].

It is being suggested by local residents that there has been a shift in the market – that the depopulation of students from the Storer and Burleigh area has led to agents and landlords beginning to consider letting to the non-student market, rather than selling their property or continuing (and struggling) to find student tenants:

“I’ve looked in letting agent windows … even the good companies have had some empty places in the last two years. This year they are advertising to rent to non-students as well. So that tells you something about the change in the market” [Burleigh resident 1].

The first option perceived to be open to landlords in the early stages of destudentification is dual marketing; advertising property to both students and other groups in the hope of securing tenants. Letting agents admitted dual marketing property, aiming particularly at young professionals and graduates due to their similarities with the student population (namely their limited budget and lifestyle):

“We obviously speak between ourselves and between the landlords, and if we think that there may be a chance, then we also dual market the property through our professional office. That way, obviously, we can advertise it through
both areas. But, as far as landlords are concerned, any let is better than no let at all. So, first priority would be to get students in there, then if they can’t it will go to the professional office as well, but we will continue to advertise it to students just to try and get whoever we can in there really” [Letting Agent 1].

This dual marketing strategy shows a degree of desperation by accommodation providers, implying they will exercise little, if any, discrimination when looking for potential tenants because “any let is better than no let at all” and they will “try and get whoever we can in there really” [Letting Agent 1]. Letting agent and landlord willingness to consider letting student housing to other groups supports Smith’s (2008) suggestion that other social groups will begin to replace the outgoing students when destudentification processes are occurring. Interviewees acknowledge that change has occurred in the student accommodation market in the Storer and Burleigh area of Loughborough, and accept that landlords are now looking for these “alternative tenants” to fill the voids left by vacating students:

“They go to professional let for a smaller period of time, waiting for the next financial year to come in so they can probably let it for six months then reconsider, because income-wise they are obviously getting a tremendous amount more out of student let … I think student let had its day, but is now not quite as good as it was” [Letting agent 4].

“We are talking to landlords … if they have got properties suitable for other renters then we will say ‘have you considered offering and advertising it to other people?’ But at this stage there is still a reluctance to do that mainly because of the income. They have got to realise, got to come to terms with the fact that they are going to have to accept a much lower income for that property … The student market certainly is not the only market within Loughborough” [University stakeholder 1].

Although some landlords may show “reluctance” to look for tenants outside the student market, other respondents insist that the changes that are taking place mean that landlords “have got to realise” and “come to terms” with destudentification and its aftermath. It is obvious to many that the rental market in Loughborough is now not the same as the one most landlords went into, and flexibility is needed for survival. Some accommodation providers, sensitive to the changing market, have already reacted to it either by changing business strategies or by an early exit:
“One landlord, he has about ten houses, and he has just moved away from that [renting to the student market] completely, his view is “I can see the problem coming and I am going to get out of it and be early on in renting to the normal market”’ [Burleigh resident 1].

This confirms the possibility that in Storer and Burleigh there may be the reconversion of student housing into “rental accommodation for young professionals” (Smith 2008: 2552), such as housing specifically designated for graduates remaining in towns and cities like Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham after their studies.

Smith’s reference to growing anecdotal evidence of European (A8) migrants moving into the voids in the private rented housing sector in some destudentified neighbourhoods, does not apply currently in Storer and Burleigh. However, while there is no perceived evidence that migrant workers are moving into former student houses currently, it is something residents clearly believe may happen:

“I think there is a general fear that migrant workers might be put in to these properties by landlords. People are always anxious how it might affect their house and their prices” [Burleigh resident 2].

There is concern that letting to migrant groups may have negative implications on the social, financial and physical make-up of Storer and Burleigh. In a similar way that studentification processes shape the whole fabric of an area, so residents believe that an in-movement of migrants as a result of destudentification would have a profound impact on the neighbourhood.

Although Storer and Burleigh show no signs of migrant workers moving into the voids left by students, there is evidence that ‘problem’ individuals and families (low-income or benefit-dependent groups, such as DHSS tenants) may move in:

“There are properties that landlords are not able to fill to capacity, there are the scatterings of empty houses out there, we have situations where landlords are letting the property to other groups of people, particularly for social housing” [Storer resident 4].

However, such tenants might cause different (or even worse) kinds of social conflict than those created by student residents - supporting the premise that “destudentification is a problem” (Nathan and Urwin 2005: 2):
“I’m sure the long-standing residents would say it would be far more desirable for them if there were no students living in their area. But perhaps if they thought a little bit further about who might move into those properties then maybe they would consider the students to be no less or more desirable than the tenants that might replace them, such as young people sharing or migrant workers or DHSS tenants. These are generally small houses at the lower end of the housing scale, you are not necessarily going to get big families or those with lots of money buying in those areas, you are talking about the lower end of the housing chain. If students aren’t living there, who is going to live there? It is going to be those people, people who are unemployed maybe. So is that group of residents necessarily any better or worse than students? - I don’t know. One would hope that students at least are well-educated" [Landlord 1].

There is already a belief that these types of groups are moving into former student housing, and are causing problems; just as Smith (2008) suggests, these groups are perceived to be worse than students by local residents:

“There are two [houses with Council tenants] and one of them has been a nightmare … rumours of stealing, some really bad anti-social behaviour going on. You would much rather live next door to a group of students than that particular bunch” [Burleigh resident 1].

This section outlines a range of issues associated with destudentification in Storer and Burleigh, particularly the concerns of local residents that low-income and undesirable groups may replace students in destudentifying neighbourhoods, possibly giving rise to new forms of social conflict. The identification of social housing tenants moving into these areas, and generating anti-social behaviour, provides some evidence of the preliminary and possible effects of destudentification in the case study sites, with the negative impacts dominating the overall tone of the interviews.

5.2.6 Destudentification of town centre PBSA

This section explores perceptions that destudentification processes are also unfolding in other neighbourhoods, not just in the Storer and Burleigh enclaves. There has been a marked growth of PBSA in Loughborough, developed primarily on brownfield land in and around the town centre (Hubbard’s (2009) study of Loughborough shows 899 PBSA bedspaces have been developed between 2005-
2008). These take the form of cluster flats, apartments and studios, as is apparent in the following quotation:

“The town centre is certainly an area that has really grown in the last eight years, you can see that just by the number of blocks here now” [PBSA provider 3].

However, in contrast to Hubbard’s (2009: 1911) findings that “take-up was very good in the first year (2007/8)” in Loughborough’s purpose-built blocks, with “98% occupancy” in one given example, the perception in Loughborough now is that these blocks have not pulled students away from HMO in traditional areas, but have, themselves, suffered from student population loss. The out-movement of students is seen to be occurring from Loughborough’s town-centre PBSA:

“The student blocks in the town are definitely struggling to fill their accommodation. I know that a lot of them are worried by the voids that they have” [Landlord 2].

“We are half full” [PBSA provider 4].

![Total number of students residing in PBSA](source: Loughborough University 2012)

This depopulation from PBSA contradicts Hubbard’s (2008) suggestion that purpose-built developments in Loughborough are perceived to be popular. It appears that the
blocks were sought-after by students when first built but have begun to struggle in recent times (Figure 23):

“I think they were popular when they were first built, but after a year or two they begin to lose their appeal, because you hear that they are all really struggling at the moment” [Letting agent 1].

“All rooms aren’t full and they haven’t been for several years” [PBSA provider 2].

These quotations show that studentification and destudentification are dynamic processes. Respondents believe that the struggles of PBSA to attract student tenants are not just a temporary trend, but that the depopulation of students from town centre blocks will continue. This view appears to be supported by PBSA providers themselves who describe their struggles and worries for the future:

“Up until about two years ago we managed to fill … we are trying to fill it, we are keen to fill it and we are keen to survive … survival is the key for us this year. But I would hazard a guess that no, we won’t fill. I think we will do worse than we have in previous years” [PBSA provider 5].
The level of voids and vacancies in PBSA is recorded as increasing and, like student housing in Storer and Burleigh, has empty rooms. The problem facing providers arises from too much PBSA in the town, resulting in too many rooms and too few students to fill them:

“I would say that there would not be a need for any more student blocks. There are five that I can think of in this area and I think that every single one will struggle. If you could take all of them, all of the blocks, you would be able to put all the students from them all in one building … all the tenants that we are going to get, all the tenants all the blocks are going to get, interspersed between all of them, you could fill one block with the amount of students we are all going to get. Now, we are going to get a bit like confetti … there will be a few there in that block, a few in that block, a few here in this one” [PBSA provider 5].

In contrast to the processes emerging in Storer and Burleigh, where former-student housing is being dual-marketed or let to other groups of tenants, PBSA is restricted in its letting options:

“Rooms that are not full … we probably wait until about Christmas time and we make them available perhaps on a short let … but not to non-students because, basically with the Council, we are not allowed to let them out to non-students” [PBSA provider 4].

Due to the lack of student take-up of PBSA, one block decided to change strategy entirely, advertising rooms which would once have only been offered to students, to guests. This has led to the conversion of the student block into bed and breakfast or hotel-type accommodation:

“We did try the guest accommodation because we didn’t fill with students. So, I think it was about eighteen months ago, we got a lot of voids in the building so the gentleman who owned it, previously, his saying was “bums on beds” and he did not care how you got them there, but if you were getting money from one bedroom, from who, it didn’t matter who it was, where the money came from, just get people in … anything is better than nothing. And we took off with this guest accommodation with twenty-one rooms let out to construction workers at the power station. We advertised on loads of different websites … it did tide us over in that period where we didn’t fill it with students” [PBSA provider 5].

Other PBSA providers assess that moving away from the student market may be the most viable option if student take-up of accommodation in these blocks does not occur:
“Perhaps a possible avenue in the future would be to get change of use and a small portion of the building would be allowed to be rented out to non-students” [PBSA provider 2].

This reference to alternative tenants, and the claims that PBSA is already being used as bed and breakfast accommodation, underlines the fact that destudentification is well established in this part of Loughborough. Certainly, students are not moving into this type of accommodation. The purpose built blocks, although constructed specifically with student-renters in mind, are experiencing a decline in the number selecting them as their accommodation of choice.

5.3 Continuing studentification

Discussions of the processes of destudentification in certain case study sites have a central focus on the depopulation and out-movement of students from these enclaves. However, whilst unfolding processes of destudentification are occurring in some areas of Loughborough, in other zones of the town the processes of studentification are identifiable. The perceived continuing processes of studentification – recognised as ongoing in the Kingfisher estate area for some time – underline the kinetic nature of urban change and support Smith’s (2008: 2552) statement that “the changing complexion of studentification demonstrates that studentified areas do not merely transmute, or follow pre-ordained paths and trajectories”.

Empirical evidence ascertains that studentification processes are occurring in the Kingfisher estate. Kingfisher residents describe witnessing a change in the profile and balance of the population of Kingfisher over a ten year period since the building of the estate (comprised of a variety of detached, semi-detached and townhouse properties) in 2001/2002. Shifting local populations were perceived to have resulted from a net out-movement of older people and families from the neighbourhood, and an in-movement of students since 2004, unfolding gradually at first, but more rapidly since 2007:

“Up until 2004 you still had a majority of residents, but with enough student presence to somehow be annoying. The last four years has seen more residents leave and more investors coming in. It started four years ago [2007] … more and more selling, landlords buying and students coming in. It has
become more and more rapid since then because three houses on this road went within months of each other” [Kingfisher resident 1].

This local resident describes the changes to the population and the tenure profile witnessed in the area - suggesting that studentification processes began to unfold earlier in Storer and Burleigh than in Kingfisher. However, the rate of studentification experienced here (Kingfisher) has been much faster than that experienced in any other enclave in Loughborough:

“When they built the Kingfisher Estate it was meant to be just an ordinary family estate, but it has not turned out that way. That particular estate seemed to be very popular, no one was expecting landlords and students to move in there ... it all happened so quickly” [Storer resident 3].

As noted by Smith (2002) and others, studentification creates displacement of traditional residents: the Kingfisher estate experience confirms this, as the area has become dominated by student inhabitants, with non-student Kingfisher residents now in the minority:

“I would say we are twenty percent, at most thirty percent residential. Students have taken over, they really have taken over” [Kingfisher resident 1].

“Kingfisher Way is massive student let with a big M. In fact, I would have said probably eighty-five percent of that development now, if not more, is student” [Letting agent 4].

The high percentage of student occupation and concentration in this area (estimated by interviewees to be approximately 80% students to 20% residents) suggests Kingfisher has reached the ‘tipping point’, becoming “dominated by a large number of rented properties occupied largely or exclusively by full-time students” (Duke Williams 2009: 1827). In Kingfisher, property owners and developers have seized the opportunity to recommodify these new build ‘executive’ houses and make them suitable for student occupation, thereby setting in motion, and subsequently accelerating, the processes of studentification. The area has continued to studentify with the numbers of students residing in this enclave increasing over the last four years (Figure 25).
One particular trend noted in this area is the phenomenon of parents buying houses for their children, as well as traditional landlord investors for whom letting property to students is the “most profitable option” (Bromley 2006: 6):

“This estate seems to be very popular with parents buying up houses for their son or daughter who would then put their friends in there as well. And so you have got lots of individual, one-off landlords as well as your bigger investors” [Kingfisher resident 2].

The presence of landlords and students in the Kingfisher area has accelerated, “driving up the property values” (Macintyre 2003: 12), often beyond the reach of the local inhabitants, particularly local first-time buyers:

“You would be paying £160,000 for the townhouse in 2001. By the time they were finishing in 2003, you were paying over £200,000 for the same townhouse. So that was something that totally amazed me. How had they gone up in value so much so quickly? But they were going like hot cakes, and it was all because the investors must really have wanted to get in here. Then they were selling like hot cakes again when some of the original people couldn’t bear the students” [Kingfisher resident 1].
“We’ve had to accept that our house has probably lost value … we would have to sell to an investor if we choose to leave so we would probably lose about £25,000-£30,000 on the value now” [Kingfisher resident 2].

“I mean, you keep dreading every time you hear of someone leaving because you know that only a landlord investor is going to buy it, and that means only one thing – more students” [Kingfisher resident 3].

The use of the word “dreading” by this Kingfisher resident clearly signals that locals ‘dread’ studentification (in the same way the established residents of in Storer and Burleigh ‘dread’ destudentification). It is interesting to note how residents appear to have identified three distinct phases of studentification in Kingfisher: the initial phase, when it was noted the population remained balanced despite the presence of student renters in the area; followed by the second phase when the expansion of the student population, tied to the completion of the development and the in-movement of landlord investors, drove up prices; the third phase, which is the situation currently, with a dominance of student renters, residents in the minority and falling house prices due to the fact that only investors will now buy into the area.

5.3.1 Effects of studentification in the Kingfisher Estate

This section considers Kingfisher residents’ perceptions of unfolding processes of studentification in their neighbourhood, largely outlining a range of negative impacts as a result of social change in this case study site. The Universities UK (2006: 8) studentification report underlines “profound cultural, social, physical and economic transformations” to the urban landscape and the quality of life; perhaps unsurprisingly, these were a key theme of the interviews with residents of Kingfisher, who identify noise nuisance and anti-social behaviour as particularly pervasive:

“It has been getting worse and worse … We have had people over the road that would cause a lot of problems with noise, especially going out quite late at night … drinking all evening and going out at about eleven or twelve o’clock and coming back at about three am. A lot of shouting, a lot of swearing, a lot of fighting, weeing in the street. You name it, we’ve got it … it is like living on a campus” [Kingfisher resident 2].

The consumption of large amounts of alcohol, especially, is seen to be at the centre of the modern student lifestyle and a major issue of conflict in Kingfisher. Invariably,
the student lifestyle has led to a clash of cultures with the way of life of established residents. A primary example of this conflict identified by local residents is the disparity between the typical lifestyle of students - “the late-night party culture” - and that of their own - “early to bed, early to rise” (Bromley 2006: 6):

“I mean, last year there was a very unsavoury boy who came back so drunk one night that he kicked down his door. He obviously wasn’t thinking about his neighbours that might work nine-to-five or the family with young children who were trying to sleep across the road” [Kingfisher resident 1].

It appears that the Kingfisher community are beginning to “resent the changes resulting from the sudden presence of students in their neighbourhoods” (Fincher and Shaw 2009: 1884). Alongside increased disturbance from noise nuisance, residents also describe a sense of intimidation by groups of ‘rowdy’ students and residents often lack the confidence to confront the disturbers:

“One of our neighbours, she got pushed by some of her student neighbours when she asked them to turn their music down. There has actually been physical aggression which is just really shocking. She has got a baby, why shouldn’t she ask them to turn the music down? But mostly they will turn it down and then turn it back up again when she has gone away because they know they outnumber her, and, like I said, she was threatened” [Kingfisher resident 3].

Residents note the increasing physical dilapidation and state of disrepair of the local area resulting, in their view, from the increased proportion of private rented student HMO let by absentee landlords. These changes observed in Kingfisher confirm Smith and Holt’s (2007: 148) idea that “the effects of studentification have been largely perceived as detrimental, spurring a physical downgrading of the urban environment”. Respondents give examples of the neglect of the area, such as a lack of repairs to properties:

“There is a house when you drive onto the estate where the fence has been knocked down and it’s not been repaired by the students or the landlord. It has been like that for at least a year, probably more. Things like trimming hedges and stuff – it makes the whole estate look uncared for” [Kingfisher resident 2].
The disposal of waste and refuse is cited by Kingfisher residents as a particular problem in their neighbourhood, where it is felt that there is limited space available to store refuse bags and bins awaiting clearance (Figure 26). The following quotation confirms the notion that studentification involves “generally unkempt properties, squalor and dereliction” (Universities UK 2006: 19) for Kingfisher residents:

“The amount of rubbish these young people produce... the bins are overflowing. Students don’t read the stuff the Council puts through the doors so they put the bins out on the wrong day. And they don’t take it in, so the foxes get it and rubbish goes all over the road and nobody picks it up” [Kingfisher resident 1].

Hubbard’s (2008: 323) view is that student colonisation is connected to problems with student parking. This is clearly evident in Kingfisher, exacerbated by the high student population density (many of whom have brought cars with them), since the estate, with its narrow, enclosed streets, was not designed to accommodate them:

“Cars are a problem, there are just too many cars on the estate. If you have got six people in a house and four of them have got a car, then there are only two spaces per house, so you are going to get cars parked all over the place. It’s a nightmare” [Kingfisher resident 3].

It is therefore suggested by respondents that issues of noise nuisance, car-parking and the decaying urban landscape result from an imbalance caused by students and student HMO dominating the local demographic and tenure profiles. Undoubtedly,
residents perceive their locale to be going ‘downhill’. Munro et al. (2009: 1805) argue that turnover is “sufficiently high to cause significant neighbourhood and community disruption”, something noted by Kingfisher residents:

“I saw new students coming last week and I thought “oh no”. You hold your breath. This is what happens as a resident, you are holding your breath and you think “now, who is coming next year?”. It is the constant turnover and change … every year, student after student after student” [Kingfisher resident 1].

Kingfisher residents observe the negative effects of studentification on the physical landscape of the estate and their quality of life. This has led to the recent formation of a residents’ group. Storer residents recognise the Kingfisher experience of studentification and its associated problems:

“I know that they have huge problems with noise, with parking and with rubbish collections. They ended up setting up their own residents' association because they started experiencing similar problems that we had been facing due to the mass influx of students there” [Storer resident 3].

This interviewee speaks of problems that “we had been facing” referring to the early years of studentification in Storer: an area which is now perceived to be undergoing destudentification. Clearly, it is Kingfisher that currently is undergoing core aspects of studentification; namely “the takeover of the area” by students (Tallon 2009: 213) and the “characteristic clustering” in this neighbourhood (Hubbard 2008: 235). These findings show that the spatial and temporal processes of urban change tied to Kingfisher amount to an unique expression of studentification (in a new-build estate with a rapid colonisation) compared to those observed elsewhere in Loughborough in earlier stages of studentification. Thus several different and distinct geographic processes that are shaping Loughborough enclaves simultaneously have been identified.

5.4 Emerging studentification

This section details perceptions of unfolding and emerging processes of studentification in the Forest and Herrick areas of Loughborough (an area where houses are predominantly traditional detached or semi-detached with sizable gardens). In line with the previous case study of the Kingfisher Estate, the
studentification characteristics in this area are associated with an in-movement of a student population:

“Forest … that is the area experiencing studentification now” [Burleigh resident 1].

The view of local institutional actors is that the Forest and Herrick area of Loughborough is the enclave most likely to be affected by the processes and impacts of studentification, with several respondents suggesting that the “formation of exclusive geographies” (Chatterton 1999: 117) is already taking place.

A distinct temporal and spatial frame of reference to the emerging processes of studentification is expressed by interviewee respondents, indicating that student numbers in the Forest and Herrick neighbourhood have increased substantially from 2009 (Figure 27). The conversion of housing stock to student HMO, and the settlement of students in this enclave of Loughborough, is illuminated by one respondent’s response to the recent in-movement of student residents to the neighbourhood:

Figure 27: A house let to students on Forest Road (author’s photograph)
“I had a phone call the other night from a lady who lives on Forest Road who says that there are houses just disappearing in her street right now, being bought by landlords - that is quite a new thing” [Kingfisher resident 3].

Parts of Forest and Herrick are now acknowledged as newly emerging student areas. The quotation above suggests that studentification in this area is occurring rapidly and is symbolic of what Allinson (2006: 87) terms the “changing nature of the student ‘hub’”. Respondents describe the initial colonisation as creating new studentifying clusters and forming new student patterns:

“There are certainly specific pockets in that area [Forest and Herrick] that are growing” [Letting agent 2].

Hubbard (2008: 235) suggests that Loughborough displays the “characteristic clustering of student residences in particular neighbourhoods”: at the present time, one specific area that is now perceived to be studentifying, and seeing a change in demographic, is a small cluster of properties in the Forest Road area:

“We have properties on Westmorland Avenue, Rydal Avenue and Coniston Crescent [Forest area] and we have started to see other landlords investing in these areas as well” [Landlord 4].

“We have got a property on Oaklands [Avenue] and we have never, ever had any problems since we have had it, it always fills” [Landlord 5].

“Oaklands Avenue, which is the first one up Forest Road, that is almost all students there now. That sort of area has definitely sprung up in terms of the number of students living in that area. They have not really pushed up Forest Road much more, not yet anyway” [Letting agent 3].

Hubbard (2008: 331) states that studentification occurs “street-by-street”: studentification in specific roads (Oaklands Avenue, for example) appears to support this contention. The emerging studentification of Forest and Herrick shows that the demand for student accommodation in this part of Loughborough is growing and, as Rugg et al. (2002) observe, student market landlords are likely to buy up properties in areas of high demand:

“We are seeing increasing investment in the very prime locations like off Forest Road. Landlord investors are increasingly looking beyond the Golden Triangle area now” [Letting agent 4].
Letting agent descriptions of Forest and Herrick as a “very prime location” [Letting agent 4] suggest that this is the emerging area for student letting, and use of the word “prime” illuminates the possible influence local letting agents may have on the formation of residential geographies of students in Loughborough. The above quotation conveys an important theme: the historically successful Golden Triangle is destudentifying (Section 5.2) as the primary source of landlord investment moves into new parts of the town.

5.4.1 Unfolding processes of studentification in Forest and Herrick

The impact of expanding student populations in Forest and Herrick areas is identified by landlords, agents and residents, notably the profound transformations that are emerging:

“There’s been some conflict in certain pockets off Forest Road, where clearly people have been more or less driven out by the fact that they cannot stay there any longer, because of all the students coming in, and it has affected their prices” [Letting agent 2].

This acknowledgement that residents are being “driven out” and unable to “stay there any longer” establishes that an in-movement of students and landlords to this area is “generally depicted as having strongly negative consequences” (Munro et al. 2009: 1808) because it is accelerating the out-movement of established residents. Use of the word “conflict” in the above response points to the issues arising from opposing lifestyles (e.g. noise nuisance, car parking) and socio-spatial changes to the community due to shifting population dynamics and the negative impacts of incoming student populations:

“The area deteriorating because of students moving in is probably the posh area around the University” [Storer resident 3].

“There is a house on Forest Road that has hosted some rowdy parties over the last few months … music blaring out the windows late at night, cans and bottles and pizza boxes all over their front drive … I know the couple who live across from it and they are getting really fed up” [Forest/Herrick resident 1].

It is suggested that more and more residents are “getting really fed up”, and may also leave. Identified impacts include physical changes to the urban landscape, and
brewing tensions resulting from conflicting behaviours and lifestyles. The following paragraphs underline social changes in parts of Forest and Herrick that indicate processes of studentification here, despite their relative infancy, may be embedding in the local context. The following quotation illustrates the perceived threat of the displacement of established traditional residents:

“People living here [Forest area] are worried because more and more students are coming in … they don’t like having student neighbours because of all the problems. So people are selling up while they can get a good price, but that just encourages more landlords to come in … people there are worried about how the community is changing because student houses are replacing families” [Forest/Herrick resident 1].

The influence of students on community decay is intimated in reference to a shifting population balance away from families. It is clear respondents fear further displacement and the “transformation of social composition” (Fincher and Shaw 2009: 1884), the core characteristic of studentification. It is perceived that once an in-movement of students and landlords begins to take shape, this will lead to a cycle, so encouraging further studentification, leading to the rapid substitution of a local community by a student community.

However, there are only small clusters of dense student inhabitation in the Forest and Herrick area. This emerging studentification in specific clusters is perceived by respondents to be linked to the continuing studentification of the nearby Kingfisher Estate:

“Kingfisher has reached eighty-five percent student, if not more … I think that is why there is spread to the areas nearest to that, sections of Forest Road, off Beacon Road, all those areas are also becoming student let. I think the vast majority of the residents there are very upset with that, because I would have said ninety-five percent of them are owner-occupied with no student let in them at all” [Letting agent 4].

Processes of studentification, then, the onset of which are perceived to be relatively nascent in Forest and Herrick in comparison to other case study sites, appear to be becoming entrenched, signalled by the awareness of Loughborough locals that social change is underway in Forest and Herrick. This ‘emerging’ process illustrates the
5.5 Conditions, causes and catalysts of neighbourhood change

This section seeks to explore reasons for the unfolding of processes of destudentification and studentification in specific Loughborough enclaves. Perceptions of student-related change are unpacked further to illuminate a diverse and complex set of processes within Loughborough, and it is demonstrated that the catalysts and conditions for, and accelerators of, destudentification and studentification are shaping specific Loughborough locales. The processes of destudentification and studentification are complex and this section aims to disentangle the various interwoven elements in order to deepen our understanding of contemporary urban change.

5.5.1 The role of accommodation providers

This section examines the role of landlord, letting agent, purpose-built and accommodation providers as drivers of change in the unfolding processes of studentification and destudentification in Loughborough enclaves. Clearly, studentification and destudentification processes are unfolding in specific parts of Loughborough. This urban change has, in part, been driven by substantial growth of the perceived lucrative student accommodation sector, with an increasing number of landlords, agents, providers and developers operating in the student accommodation market in Loughborough (Bline Housing Report 2008). Accommodation providers state that the buy-to-let student housing market has increased significantly in Loughborough, with letting to students being seen by a number of investors as a very favourable option due, primarily, to the high income student tenants provide, particularly when compared to letting to traditional families. However, there is a perception amongst some landlords that the student letting market is now a less viable investment, because of an oversupply of student accommodation in the town:

“Loughborough has a lot of student accommodation now ... I don’t know anybody that would deny that. It [Loughborough] is over-populated with student accommodation which was caused by so many people wanting to make money from buy-to-let” [Landlord 2].
“What seems to have changed is that everybody has got on the bandwagon in terms of wanting student let … that has probably led to the current situation we are in” [Letting agent 4].

The Loughborough market is now perceived to have become unbalanced with the supply of student accommodation outweighing demand. Accommodation providers maintain that the reason for an oversupply is primarily due to the expansion of the buy-to-let market, ironically, by landlords who have “jumped on the bandwagon” [Letting agent 4] because they are “wanting to make money from buy-to-let” [Landlord 2]. Processes of destudentification are underway in certain enclaves (particularly Storer and Burleigh, see Section 5.2.1) as a result, in part, of oversupply of student accommodation. This change to the Loughborough student accommodation market is detailed by the following quotation:

“It’s taken ten years from the situation where there was not enough supply in Loughborough to, I reckon, past the equilibrium which was probably in about 2006, and probably in the last four or five years, just far too much. That’s why we are seeing landlords struggling and properties up for sale, because there’s an oversupply now” [Letting agent 3].

Accommodation providers perceive there to be a ‘tipping point’ in the process of destudentification, when an area goes from being undersupplied, then to being balanced, before it tips into a situation of oversupply. Now, however, this oversupply of student accommodation is established in Loughborough with “far too much” accommodation added in the “last four or five years” [Letting agent 3]. This agent also perceives oversupply as a reason “why we are seeing landlords struggling and properties up for sale”. Rugg et al.’s (2000: 25) study of student housing in Middlesbrough, where “landlords bought up properties at relatively low prices in the town centre” which then led to an oversupply, describes a similar situation: it is clear that oversupply of accommodation in Loughborough, which is a catalyst for processes of destudentification, has been partly caused by an increase in student accommodation provided by landlords, agents and developers.

The supply of student accommodation in Loughborough has shown continuous growth over the last decade, coinciding with significant increases in the number of students studying at Loughborough University over that time – from 10,596 students in 1995/96, to 16,025 students in 2011/12 (HESA 2011). However, whilst student
accommodation provision in Loughborough has continued to expand, student numbers have stabilised (there were 17,015 students at Loughborough University in 2006/07, whilst only 16,025 in 2011/12 – a reduction of 990 students). It is clear that demand for student accommodation has fallen, putting pressure on all suppliers:

“Student numbers are not increasing very much anymore, yet the number of landlords, the number of blocks and flats and accommodation has continued to grow … It is very much a case of the supply and demand ratio being out of balance” [Landlord 8].

“In the grand scheme of things it comes down to the fact that there is an oversupply of accommodation in Loughborough … there are not enough students to go around” [Landlord 7].

Oversupply is also perceived to have been caused by the development of PBSA blocks - especially those in Loughborough town centre - which is “triggering concurrent processes of studentification and destudentification in different parts of the town” (Hubbard 2009: 1904):

“I think there is now a huge oversupply. That is down to huge growth in landlord investors buying up houses for buy-to-let and is also aggravated by the fact that there have been a lot of blocks of flats built in town” [Storer resident 3].

“Over the last five years, there have been four extra blocks added to the private sector which, with an increase in landlord investors with student houses as well, has obviously led to the downturn in the number of students – basically an oversupply” [PBSA provider 4].

Interviewees perceive oversupply to be more than a nascent problem. Williams et al.’s (2010) assertion that problems of oversupply are now clearly evident in many regional markets where supply exceeds demand is clearly applicable to this study of the Loughborough student accommodation market. There is a belief amongst Loughborough residents and providers that there are thousands of beds too many now in the town:

“Competition in Loughborough has of course increased. I think the current situation is all down to supply and demand … It is a well known fact amongst established landlords that there is generally an oversupply of private rented housing … very difficult to quantify but I would estimate a couple of thousand beds too many in town” [Landlord 1].
“There is an oversupply of two thousand empty bed spaces” [Storer resident 2].

“We have calculated amongst ourselves, with the help of the University as well, that there are something in the region of two thousand surplus beds now” [PBSA provider 1].

There is a consensus that oversupply of accommodation has made the market unsustainable, creating an increasingly competitive arena, as providers battle to make sure their properties are not the ones remaining empty. It is a very difficult time for landlords as “the result of oversupply is falling prices, reduced occupation demand and decreased investor demand, leading to lower building activity and profitability” (Williams et al. 2010: 1). As Leyshon and French (2009: 454) suggest, there is evidence that the over-supply of property “and the subsequent decline in prices may be seen as a form of property ‘neutron bomb’ … it may have ‘killed’ many investors”. In the Storer and Burleigh areas, it is clearly perceived by accommodation providers that oversupply of accommodation causes empty bedspaces and houses:

“We have now reached a stage of oversupply and something is going to have to give, because there are not enough students out there for all the accommodation on offer. So something is going to have to give. There are landlords struggling and others selling up … it has all become totally unsustainable” [Landlord 8].

“There are empty properties, that’s quite common in a few streets in the Golden Triangle. The reason, I think, that it’s more difficult for them to get them filled because there’s this oversupply of property and not the amount of students to fill them” [PBSA provider 1].

“It is a very interesting time, actually, because I think the terraced row, street-wise, has become not the right thing to do … In a time when there is an oversupply, it’s the terraced Triangle properties that are struggling the most I would say” [Letting agent 4].

The oversupply of student accommodation is clearly the main catalyst for the onset of processes of destudentification. What can be inferred from this is that in such a scenario, it is students who have the options of choice, shifting the power from providers to the students as ‘consumers’. The above quotations show that in the fierce competition between providers to attract student tenants, it is the traditional terraced housing (Storer and Burleigh) which is the hardest to let. As Keenan et al. (1999: 715) state, “abandonment is, in the end, an inevitable consequence of over-
supply in some parts of the housing market”, and there are signs that both students and landlords are abandoning certain areas. The Loughborough situation supports Rugg et al.’s (2000) claims that there is a tendency for the student housing market to become oversupplied with properties:

“There’s a lot of pressure on accommodation in Loughborough because there are a large number of places to live and not enough people to fill them … there are empty spaces because of this” [Burleigh resident 1].

“When there is so much accommodation out there then it is obvious there will be empty beds … that is happening in parts of the Storer area” [Landlord 9].

This supports Bramley’s (1998: 13) assertion that “in the typical surplus area … a more likely consequence, down the chain of moves, is that more dwellings will fall vacant”. The landlord and accommodation provider investment that caused a situation of oversupply has now ceased as these providers disinvest and abandon traditionally student-inhabited areas, although in some cases there will be re-investment in other areas.

Respondents perceive the Loughborough student accommodation market has matured: there is a surplus of accommodation with considerable elasticity on the demand side: students now have a wide choice of where to live because of the range of accommodation on offer in the town. Ultimately, an oversupply of student accommodation equates to empty bedspaces and empty properties. It is clear that accommodation providers, through their influence in the market, play a major role in the evolution of the student residential geographies in Loughborough.

Local residents notice that providers use their power in Loughborough to encourage students to sign up for accommodation very early (whilst taking large deposits from them) by suggesting that if students do not sign up to rent their accommodation quickly, they would struggle to find anywhere else:

“Two weeks into the term they start advertising … They would corner first years saying “oh, have you got your accommodation for next year yet? You’ll be left out in the cold if you don’t book in now”, using those kinds of tactics” [Storer resident 3].
Christie et al.’s (2002: 230) suggestion that some providers take advantage of the “annual supply of potential tenants who are not well informed about the market” may have applied to the Loughborough situation when student accommodation was in short supply. However, the market is now very different:

“It has taken time for the rump of the student body to realise that this panic situation, that was brought about by several unscrupulous landlords 10 years ago, doesn’t exist” [Landlord 3].

Another way in which accommodation providers shape the residential patterns of student living is their tendency to use various marketing devices to attract students, such as free gifts or financial incentives, to try to secure potential tenants under contract earlier:

“One of the agents, he goes that extra step to try and get the students to sign up with him ... he uses the ‘give them a crate of beer’ tactic” [Storer resident 2].

Landlords, agents and accommodation providers have had, and continue to have, a major influence on where investment (and disinvestment) takes place in Loughborough. Whilst studentification is emerging in certain areas (Forest and Herrick), and continues in others (Kingfisher Estate), destudentification processes are occurring concurrently elsewhere (Storer and Burleigh). It appears that as accommodation providers invest in an area they ‘milk it’ for maximum profit and this encourages further investment from other landlords. Then, when profits begin to decline, they will disinvest (selling up and abandoning the area) and many will invest in a new area (for greater profits, value extraction and easier letting) and the process begins again. There is no doubt providers still have the power to shape and influence the trajectory of studentification and are catalysts for the shifting spatial imprint:

“Rents have stayed static to a degree, but we have seen little bits of increases in the very prime locations like off Forest Road” [Letting agent 4].

The phrase “very prime location” in the above quotation reveals letting agents see the Forest and Herrick area of Loughborough as the emerging area for student letting, and illuminates the possible influence local letting agents may have on the formation of residential geographies of students in the town:
“We would encourage investment in the Kingfisher estate, purely because there’s not a lot of supply of that kind of property. It’s a relatively small area, that type of new-build property is in low supply, so they are at a premium” [Letting agent 3].

Providers are therefore shaping not only the location in which students will live, but also the standard of the accommodation as they compete with each other for student tenants. As Leyshon and French (2009: 457) state, “the days of rapid expansion in the buy-to-let market appear to be over given that it now requires individuals with significant capital to be able to enter the market from scratch, and the now limited ability to leverage debt”. Landlords must now think carefully about how they go about securing their investments:

“Landlords do have to keep the pace with the market … we say to our landlords that if they invest some of their income back into their properties then their investment should be secured in the future … I think that if you go above and beyond that level then you will be successful in attracting tenants” [Letting agent 2].

“I think that when someone starts to do something then all the landlords think ‘oh God, I am not going to let my house if I don’t have that’” [PBSA provider 4].

This section discusses important changes in the student accommodation market: the historically highly successful Storer area (or Golden Triangle), in terms of landlord investment and returns, is now slowing down (or destudentifying), as landlord investment moves into new parts of the town (studentification). This underlines the fact that providers have played, and continue to play, a major role in processes of studentification, destudentification, and the formation of student residential geographies in Loughborough.

5.5.2 The role of Loughborough University

This section details the role of Loughborough University in the unfolding processes of studentification and destudentification in specific enclaves of the town. As discussed, student residential geographies are being shaped, in part, by the perceived growth of the student accommodation sector, with an increasing number of landlords, agents, providers and developers operating in the student accommodation market in Loughborough. This section aims to examine the role Loughborough University plays
in expanding the market, notably the impact that an increase in campus bed spaces has had on student living patterns.

Working in partnership with University Partnership Project (UPP), between 2008 and 2011 Loughborough University developed approximately 1,300 new bedspaces on campus under private finance initiative (Figure 28). The University has also secured planning consents to provide an additional 2,500 bed spaces on the campus site, although it has no immediate plans to deliver these schemes. The reasons for this development are outlined by one of the key decision makers in Loughborough University’s on-campus accommodation office:

“ Basically, it was because of the demand … there was a demand from students. The University knew that there was a demand from students and there was also some recognition that over the previous years that there had been a growth in student numbers, but the provision of accommodation had not kept pace with that. So there was some catching up to do, if you like, in terms of what the University wanted to offer. And so, we had a proposal to do a certain amount and we have completed that. The extra that we built was about 1,300, and they are in the new student village. We worked with a company called UPP to
provide those blocks, and there are 1,300 new beds there now” [University stakeholder 2].

A King Sturge (2008: 14) report states that the development of student accommodation is “moving into a new phase of university-led refurbishments and redevelopment projects of their existing halls of residence”. This expansion has had a major and wide-reaching impact on the Loughborough student accommodation market. It is perceived that this University development, coinciding with a mass-increase in buy-to-let housing and the building of PBSA in the town, has led to (even exacerbated) the supply and demand ratio. Crucially, this ratio is now out of balance since there is a plethora of accommodation from which students can choose. This has important consequences for letting agents:

“I think the main change really has been the increase in the supply of accommodation. Certainly, this year versus last year the feedback has been, you know, landlords have sort of struggled for the first time in the private sector, and I think we see that as, basically, a supply of accommodation from the University” [Letting agent 3].

“The University accommodation on campus has increased with all the halls that are being built, so we have let less this year than we have done previously” [Letting agent 1].

Providers clearly perceive the University expansion as adding to the oversupply of student accommodation in the town. One key theme that interviewees highlighted and several spoke of at length, was the profound impact and the far-reaching consequences of the University development, which they perceive to be the major factor in the increased in competition to fill spaces with students:

“We are all competing to get students. For us, we have some competition between the student letting agencies, other landlords, the blocks and certainly the University – particularly since their building has created more rooms on campus … We all want the students” [Landlord 4].

“Proportionately there are fewer students off-campus, the figures will show that because of the increase in campus accommodation. Now they have got more beds than they have got first years, so proportionately they have got a higher percentage of accommodation in the market place. They are competing with the private sector for the first time for returning undergraduates, your second and third years and your postgrads” [Letting agent 2].
“The campus development has had an impact because it has taken a large chunk of undergraduates who would, traditionally, have lived off-campus in their second and third years, onto campus ... they have come out of the housing stock” [Landlord 2].

“I do think that because the University have opened up new accommodation they have basically taken over a lot of our market” [PBSA provider 1].

Off-campus providers clearly perceive (and even fear) that with an increase in University-based accommodation provision, students are choosing to live on campus, rather than renting a house or PBSA block in the town. There is a conviction amongst providers that University development is a key reason why they are struggling to fill their accommodation with students. The University is recognising students’ needs and preferences and is aware also that it is profitable to tailor provision in this way. The University expansion of its accommodation is arguably a catalyst for the destudentification observed to be occurring in Storer and Burleigh:

“I think the empty rooms in this area coincided with the University building more halls on campus actually. I think it is obviously the perfect location for the students because all their needs are catered for and the quality of the new halls they have built is supposed to be really really good” [Storer resident 3].

“If the University provided enough accommodation there would probably be fewer [students] in town. Students who would traditionally have had to move off-campus now choose to live there. So it [campus expansion] has definitely pulled some students back onto campus” [Burleigh resident 1].

It is clear that the location of campus based accommodation, combined with the provision of new, high quality student accommodation (as well as the refurbishment of some traditional halls) has begun to create vacancies in the traditional student lets of Storer and Burleigh. Interestingly, however, there is a perception that University accommodation expansion has had a more significant impact on the PBSA in the town than on the traditional housing market, perhaps as the blocks developed on campus are similar in design to the PBSA developed in the town centre:

“They have hurt us, big time. The university have always said that they will never have postgraduates on campus, and then they started building John Phillips [University hall of residence for postgraduate students]. The first year they took 180 odd [students], the next year they took 600 [students] which was over fifty percent of the postgraduate market. So the university automatically fills
that hall with postgraduates now, and the pool that is left is much, much smaller than it has ever been before. So, the university building the new halls hurt us financially, one hundred percent” [PBSA provider 1].

The language used by this PBSA provider, who has been “hurt”, indicates the severity of the blows to this aspect of the student accommodation market by the University’s successful accommodation development programme. This University initiative has added to the oversupply of student accommodation in Loughborough and increased the competition amongst accommodation providers to attract student tenants. An additional important result of the new campus blocks is that they have forced other providers to consider the quality of their accommodation. Since traditionally first year students have lived on campus, their experiences of residing in high-quality, newly-built campus blocks may have raised their expectations in terms of the standard they expect when making subsequent accommodation decisions. The University building project has ‘raised the bar’ and other providers must respond:

“My understanding is that the quality of the new on-campus accommodation is very, very high” [Landlord 1].

It is perceived by interviewees that the Loughborough student accommodation market has changed as a result, at least in part, due to the competition injected by the campus development:

“What happened was – in about 2005 – before they built the new campus accommodation, I can remember that we didn’t do our business in December or January. It was not that early that we had to start. We would just have to work in the summer. We would do our work signing up tenants with about three or four months left before the new [academic] year would start. All we can do now is to start in November for next year. So we are having to start working a lot earlier and for longer, working in the November sorting accommodation for the next September. This is to make sure our properties get let. We are having to do this because we are competing with the other landlords and the University, this is what everyone is doing now, starting a lot earlier to try to get the student tenants in” [Landlord 5].

It is perceived that this key change results in accommodation providers having to start working earlier (and harder) in order to secure student lets – a possible indicator of destudentification. It is interesting to compare this market change with the findings of Rugg et al.’s (2000: 29) findings in Cardiff “where students started to look for
accommodation as early as February and placed large deposits on properties for the next academic year”. In Loughborough, where there is an oversupply of student accommodation it seems that students should not have to worry about committing themselves early for the next academic year. Yet providers report “having to start working a lot earlier and for longer, working in the November” [Landlord 5], perceiving that students may choose to remain in University accommodation. Their strategy is to work hard to pre-empt and prevent this trend. In Loughborough, one strategy some landlords and accommodation providers are considering is the option of letting to non-student tenants because the popularity of campus leaves them with empty bedspaces:

“I think it [campus expansion] has had a huge impact on Loughborough. I think campus will always be very popular, they will always be able to fill their blocks successfully … they have monopoly on the market really. And they have added to the oversupply situation that has been building over the last two or three years. So if they are getting them filled, and I am pretty sure they are, that probably means that there is an empty room somewhere else in Loughborough really. So the campus expansion has had that knock on effect on everyone else in the market” [Landlord 8].

Loughborough University has power and influence to shape the student accommodation market and student living patterns. This is manifested firstly through the University advertisement service (Loughborough Student Pad www.lborostudentpad.co.uk), a University-approved landlord accreditation scheme for the private rented sector. The landlord accreditation scheme gives the University the opportunity to exercise control over the standards of accommodation and landlords. A landlord who fails to meet the requirements of the accreditation scheme will be disadvantaged, since his/her property (or properties) will not appear on any University-approved housing lists, and will not be backed by any University-based advertising:

“We have been providing an advertisement service. We register landlords, advertising for a 12 month period from the 1st of December through to the end of November. It is compulsory, if they want to be advertised they have to be accredited with EMLAS … and we also have the housing bazaar” [University stakeholder 1].
“I decided to sell my house because the standard required to be accredited with the University was rising all the time. They were building more halls of residence and also private companies were building blocks of student accommodation too. I began to feel the market for private student houses was diminishing because of that” [Landlord 2].

Secondly, the University is able to influence student accommodation decisions through its own ‘Housing Bazaar’, which allows approved accommodation providers to advertise. Clearly, this puts the University in an advantageous and dominant position. Some providers, therefore, attempt to ‘steal a march’ by pre-dating the University’s Housing Bazaar in December by admitting “all we can do now is to start in November for next year” [Landlord 5]. Loughborough University encourages students not to rush into renting which is perceived to have far-reaching impacts on the wider market:

“I think the University need to recognise that not all the accommodation outside their gates is poor, inferior, and risky for students to live in. They should become more fair in their marketing and their approach to it. Last year for example, when people were starting re-marketing campaigns, the University were, we believe, sending out an email to all first years saying, “don’t book your accommodation for next year, it is way too early, book at the back-end of the summer term”. Now that ripples through the accommodation market” [PBSA provider 2].

Indeed, there are some Loughborough letting agents and PBSA representatives who are prepared to claim that the University has too much control over the student accommodation market which has even led rise to talk of a ‘conspiracy theory’:

“They try and restrict us in terms of our advertising stuff” [Letting agent 2].

“The conspiracy theory amongst people that are outside the University is that the overall plan of the University is for them to one day house everyone on site … people outside, they fear that they are building too much” [PBSA provider 5].

Clearly, Loughborough University has always played an important role in the provision of student accommodation; however, the recent campus development providing a wide variety of high-quality student accommodation is having a far-reaching impact on the shaping of local geographies. The University influence is exemplified by the Loughborough Scholarship Programme (LSP) for student entrants from 2012/13 whose household income is below £22,000 per annum, which enables
students to claim a £1,000 ‘accommodation discount’ if they opt to live in University-run accommodation, which is a powerful incentive. The University is perceived and feared by other providers as a formidable competitor, exerting a dominant influence over the formation and evolution of student residential geographies in Loughborough. In effect, Loughborough University is perceived as setting the ‘rules of the game’, forcing other providers to develop new strategies in order to compete.

5.5.3 Finances, fees and legislation

This section considers other influences operating in Loughborough. The current financial austerity situation, cuts to the public sector, tuition fee rises and changes to planning legislation may accelerate processes of studentification and/or destudentification in specific Loughborough enclaves.

Smith (2009: 1801) postulates that “the economic recession is likely to have major ramifications for the UK student housing market and student geographies”. In an unstable market landlords and investors may withdraw, which makes it likely that the number of students in private rented sector housing (HMOs) may decrease. Therefore, the financial crisis may impact on student urban population movements, “perhaps leading to the ‘death of studentification’ in some local neighbourhoods” (Smith 2009: 1801). The financial recession “has had significant implications for the buy-to-let market, in ways that are still being worked out” (Leyshon and French 2009: 440). This situation has brought about a cautious attitude to lending with buy-to-let becoming a riskier market and as many Loughborough investors perceive, the current adverse economic conditions and the turbulence of financial markets are having implications for the future of their student letting businesses:

“There are economic reasons that are preventing buying [landlords buying for student let] at the moment. There is no access to good finance” [Landlord 3].

“Access to finance is just not available at the moment. Three, four, five years ago, there were two or three thousand buy-to-let mortgage products on the market and it was just a case of choosing which lender to go with, whether you wanted a fixed rate or a variable rate, how long you wanted to fix, how much deposit, there were thousands of products to choose from. I think there are probably a handful of products on the market now, and none of them are deals that you could make money out of; very low values, very high fees, very high...
interest rates. These aren’t the kind of financial products that investors can make money in. Unless you happen to be sitting on a big pile of cash then I don’t think there is any opportunity to expand a portfolio and make money out of it at the moment” [Landlord 1].

The current economic situation clearly is having a profound influence on the Loughborough student accommodation market, with a lack of access to finance perceived to be having major implications on buy-to-let investment (and disinvestment). Leyshon and French (2009: 456) suggest that the economic recession has brought “a fall in the value of the assets upon which loans are secured, something that is particularly problematic for some landlords as lenders have dramatically reduced their loan-to-value ratios”, something noted by landlords in Loughborough:

“Of course with the current economic trends, there is pressure … it’s a difficult business – it involves huge amounts of money and it relies on steady rental streams to maintain it as a business” [Landlord 4].

In some instances this perceived pressure has led to landlords leaving the market due to financial difficulties. Leyshon and French (2009: 454) found that “a flight to quality was also under way in the buy-to-let market, with lenders favouring investments where income flow can be guaranteed”. The current Loughborough experience, where landlords are choosing to invest in the Kingfisher Estate and Forest Road areas which have become increasingly popular with students because of the facilities they provide that some traditional terraced Storer houses do not, signifies this “flight to quality”. It may be that some landlords who have disinvested in the Storer area have grasped the opportunity to reinvest in Kingfisher and/or Forest.

Leyshon and French (2009: 457) also mention the effects of “slump landlordism” when landlords are unable or unwilling to sell in a deflated market. These absentee landlords attempt to maximise profit by minimising spending on the property and charging lower rent than the market average. This can lead to further property decline, often in deteriorating neighbourhoods; something that is pertinent to the Storer and Burleigh areas of Loughborough. Moreover, landlords are also experiencing increasing compliance costs, as new regulations on HMOs and energy efficiency have recently been implemented which makes renting to students a much
more costly exercise. As a result, buy-to-let landlords are beginning to withdraw from the student housing market:

“Now, especially with the recession and things, we are getting a lot of people that are tending to put the houses up for sale … it’s a different market all the time” [Letting agent 1].

“Investors are selling up because, financially, it is much, much harder” [Letting agent 3].

In Loughborough it is clear that “the wider ramifications of the economic recession” (Smith 2009: 1) are impacting on the student accommodation market. There is a perception in the town that falling prices, reduced occupation/demand and decreased investor activity all lead to lower building activity and profitability in the market.

Another perceived factor in the formation and evolution of student residential geographies in Loughborough is the increase in tuition fees. The Government’s response to a review of higher education funding by Lord Browne (Browne Report 2010) meant that from September 2012 universities can charge up to £9,000 per year - raising the cap from its 2011/12 level of £3,375. Loughborough University will be charging the full £9,000 for all undergraduate programmes for entrants from 2012/13 onwards (BBC 01/04/2011). The government will pay the upfront cost of education, with graduates repaying through a new Student Finance Plan (SFP). As Chatterton (2010: 511) states, “the introduction of student tuition fees and loans, and the elimination of automatic state-based maintenance grants, are a hallmark of change”. Such changes leave many unanswered questions about how students’ accommodation decisions will be affected and the implications for the student residential geographies in university towns such as Loughborough.

Media commentators predict that the increase in tuition fees will deter many students from attending university because of the huge debt they will accumulate (Watson 2010). Loughborough respondents suggested that an increase in tuition fees would certainly have an effect:

“It will mean a general downturn in the student population … there won’t be as many students coming to University and there will be an increase in competition to accommodate those students that do” [PBSA provider 1].
“It is going to have an effect on student numbers and their accommodation decisions. Higher tuition fees or the limitless cap on tuition fees is going to have an effect, an effect that you can’t really quantify at this stage” [Letting agent 3].

Chatterton (2010: 511) argues that as student debt continues to rise much of the money borrowed is “used to maintain the high costs associated with student life (such as housing, travel, and fees), but also to fulfill the increasing amount of consumer options available specifically for students within the student-oriented consumption city”. In contrast, interviewees perceive that students are already becoming financially ‘savvy’ and, as tuition fees rise, will continue to seek bargains, deals and offers - particularly when it comes to their accommodation:

“I think it [the introduction of higher tuition fees] will mean they [students] will be searching for bargains. They will want value for money” [Landlord 3].

“Students are looking for lower prices, I think rents will come down further because of that [introduction of £9,000 a year tuition fees at Loughborough University]. In that situation you might get landlords considering selling up because it wouldn’t be a financially attractive proposition for them” [Letting agent 1].

However, at this stage, the extent to which higher tuition fees will effect student enrolment, accommodation preferences or their spending power, is unknown because, despite the media-induced hysteria, “higher education is a sufficiently powerful brand for which students…are willing to make significant sacrifices” (Maringe et al. 2009: 157).

One trend which may accelerate is the increase in the number of students who choose to live at home and study at their local university in order to avoid accommodation costs whilst studying. In Loughborough, there is some evidence of an increase in the number of students who study at the University but who do not live in the town (Figure 29). This supports Chatterton’s (2010: 509) assertion that, “many more students are staying at home due to the rising costs of student living” and this notion is also argued by Holdsworth (2009: 1849) who predicts that “a greater proportion [of students] will choose to study at local higher education institutions (HEIs), rather than move away”. The rise of the stay-at-home student is perceived to be a great threat to landlords and providers of student accommodation with fears in
Loughborough that it will make it harder for providers to fill their student accommodation:

“I think it [the introduction of higher tuition fees] is going to starve us of having a UK further education system society, sadly. It is going to be down to the fact that the fees are too high for the students to live, and you are going to get a lot of students in that situation going to university in their home towns and they are going to be living at home. The living at home population is going to grow a long long way” [PBSA provider 2].

![Figure 29: The number of students who are not residing in the town (source: Loughborough University 2012)](image)

If increasing numbers of students choose “to stay at home for financial reasons” (Christie 2007: 2445), this could potentially lead to an acceleration of destudentification processes as student accommodation is left empty. If students do decide to live at home and commute into their nearest institution, then a new set of problematic processes may unfold: parking, traffic and congestion issues, for example.

Recent legislation is also relevant. On the 7th July 2011, Charnwood Borough Council confirmed the introduction of an Article 4 Direction removing permitted development rights for the change of use to a House of Multiple Occupation (HMO) Class 4 from a dwelling Class 3 within Loughborough - making such a development subject to the
specific grant of planning permission. This came into effect from 12th February 2012. Landlords perceive this legislation will have negative consequences, not only for their businesses. There is a fear that this will remove the flexibility to switch between letting to families or groups of sharers, damage the local economy, and cause house prices to plummet (as expressed in a letter from a landlord, Loughborough Echo, 12th August 2011). Interviewees perceive that this legislation has already made many landlords and investors consider their future in the market and will limit further potential investment:

“Changes in the use class would have massive implications for the landlords because at the moment they are running scared of the legislation. They are not prepared to risk it because could be left with a property that they cannot get students in to, in which case it is not earning them any income” [Letting agent 4].

“I think these changes will maybe make it harder for new people wanting to join the student let business and make it harder to expand your business” [Landlord 4].

“It has become a very expensive business to get in to, and certainly if I knew now and wasn’t in the business, I would have second thoughts about getting into it just because of the huge amount of costs and hassle associated with complying with all of the legislation” [Landlord 1].

Landlords clearly believe that excessive legislation will impose too many restrictions, making the student letting market an unattractive investment proposition and leading to an exodus of investment out of private sector student housing. Under Article 4 there is a very real danger that landlords will simply stop investing in HMOs on the basis that HMOs could potentially revert back to a dwelling house with a resultant loss of income and devaluation of the property:

“What impact is UCO changes and Article 4 going to have? A very slow, very, very gentle reduction in the number of houses in multiple occupation. I think some of these houses will be rented to families as the landlords fail to get planning permission for HMOs, and they will be forced to either sell, or let to families” [Burleigh resident 3].

“If landlords want to convert in the Storer area for example, they would not get planning permission to do it. Whereas, in contrast, if a new house came on the market in an area where there isn’t such a domination of students, such as the Forest area, then they might well get planning permission to do it. So there
might be a spread as landlords choose to invest in other areas where they would get permission” [Storer resident 1].

Local residents clearly hope that Article 4 legislation will lead to the rebalancing of communities, and to an introduction of families back into these areas; however, the unintended consequence may be that properties are left empty and those that are not HMOs and are occupied by families and couples become impossible to sell. The implication therefore, is that the introduction of Article 4 may accelerate destudentification processes in some areas, whilst encouraging investment and studentification in others.

It is clear that Loughborough has been experiencing large scale change over the past ten years, due to various factors: a continuing, but now declining, growth in student numbers; changes in the financing of students from grants to loans; changing legislation; provision of specialist student accommodation by private developers, landlords, agents and the University; growth of the buy-to-let market and house price inflation; an increase in commercial and university accommodation services; an increasingly business-like and profit maximising approach to accommodation; and a greater focus on customer choice within a free market. All of these factors affect the evolution of processes of studentification and/or destudentification which are evident in the town.

5.6 The dynamics of neighbourhood change

The comparison of the effects of an in-movement of students on Kingfisher and the subsequent changes to the urban context with those emerging from Forest and Herrick, reveals the extent to which the processes and impacts of studentification differ at the micro-geographic or enclave scale. Student in-movement is perceived to have occurred at a much earlier juncture in Storer and Burleigh (a now-destudentifying area) than in Kingfisher, which began to experience (and continues to experience) studentification at an earlier juncture than Forest and Herrick:

“I think they [Storer and Burleigh] experienced the slumification first, and now it has spread into this area. And it is spreading to other parts as well, you know” [Kingfisher resident 1].
Therefore, respondents are aware that student residence is temporally and socio-spatially uneven in the town. It is important to emphasise that whilst some areas are characterised by the increasing production of student housing, and are witnessing an in-movement of students and landlords, other areas are experiencing an out-movement. Interviewees suggest that such processes are inextricably linked:

“I believe the Kingfisher estate has, along with parts of Forest area, taken over from the Golden Triangle” [Landlord 9].

“The Forest Road area is definitely growing. But not because student numbers are growing, it’s because the students are moving from Triangle houses to Kingfisher or Forest ones instead” [Letting agent 2].

“I think they [Storer and Burleigh] experienced it [studentification] first – the anti-social behaviour, the rubbish, the cars - and now it has spread into this area” [Kingfisher resident 1].

“We hear from a couple of the estate agents that the demand from landlords is to buy houses up the Forest Road area, the bit round the University on the south part of the campus … There is a drift of students away from traditional parts to these newer areas” [Burleigh resident 1].

“It [studentification] will move to a different part of the town. I think it is spreading in a south westerly direction if you are looking at it on a map. It is an inevitable social development, I think” [Storer resident 3].

In a market where investment has declined there is evidence of some investment in the Forest Road area, whereas the long-term ‘for sale’ signs in the Golden Triangle confirm interviewees’ assertions that the days when this was the most desirable student neighbourhood, and when a property came onto the market there always seemed to be a landlord ready to buy it up quickly, are over. A significant finding of this research is that processes of studentification and destudentification are occurring simultaneously: the Golden Triangle (Storer and Burleigh area) is experiencing the most obvious and extensive student desertion, whilst other areas, such as town centre PBSA, are also undergoing the early stages of destudentification. Simultaneously, student accommodation in the Kingfisher Estate and the Forest and Herrick area, is becoming highly desirable and densely student-populated. These findings highlight “a dynamism of the geographies of studentification which may have been previously understated” (Smith 2008: 2552).
Therefore, popular student-colonised zones do not necessarily remain static as, year on year, some groups of students may move elsewhere, and these pioneering studentifiers create gradual shifts which alter the ‘map’ of student habitation. The result of this is that new popular living places develop and acquire the ‘buzz’ of a lively social environment, eventually becoming the new studentified place to be. Hubbard’s (2008: 330) assertion that the Loughborough experience has involved “a number of terraced streets located immediately west of the town centre, while areas to the east and south of the town centre remain largely free of student housing” is challenged by this research. However, those “distinctive geographies of student occupation in the town” (Hubbard 2008: 325) have inevitably changed since his 2008 study, underlining the kinetic nature of studentification and destudentification as these processes are rolled out across new urban neighbourhoods. The findings of this study produce significant evidence that there is a discernible movement of the studentification frontier in a south-easterly direction in Loughborough.

5.7 Summary

The final section of this chapter seeks to synthesise findings from the examination of the spatial and temporal patterns of unfolding processes of studentification and destudentification in Loughborough enclaves. It has been demonstrated (sections 5.2-5.5) that the processes of both studentification, and, most crucially destudentification have unfolded, and are continuing to unfold, in unique ways, depending on the urban context. The complexities of studentification and destudentification processes have been explored, along with the ways in which a transient student population shapes the Loughborough landscape. These findings have implications for established academic conceptualisations of studentification and destudentification, raising questions about how successfully these terms capture the diverse and dynamic nuances of student geographies, and how these concepts link to broader theories of contemporary urban change.

This study has found, based on the perceptions outlined earlier in the chapter of the individual urban histories of the case study sites in Loughborough, that destudentification processes form a significant element of the changing patterns of student living. These findings contribute to the literature of studentification by producing empirical (rather than mere anecdotal) evidence that destudentification
processes are taking hold in specific Loughborough locales, and examine possible conditions, causes and catalysts of change. On a broader scale this research invites further academic exploration: if destudentification is beginning to occur in other university towns and cities, then this process may well prove to be an important part of those urban population shifts which shape the modern urban landscape, both now and in the future.

Chapter 6 presents significant findings from a student survey undertaken with the aim of establishing the nature and importance of student residential preferences in forming the changing geographic patterns of student-living in the town, which further unpacks the complex and diverse geographies identified in this chapter.
6. The residential decision-making practices of students

6.1 Introduction

The primary aim of this chapter is to explore student accommodation needs, preferences and expectations as factors in the unfolding processes of studentification and destudentification in Loughborough. Student perceptions of the accommodation market are explored with a view to establishing the nature and importance of these residential preferences in forming the changing geographic patterns of student-living in the town. When commenting on the changes that have occurred when students make their accommodation choices, Chatterton’s (2010) account of the modern ‘student city’ is particularly important in that it notes how:

“No longer do students choose from grotty ‘digs’ let by slum landlords … With the introduction of contemporary luxury student living this is no longer the case” (Chatterton 2010: 509).

Any research into studentification and destudentification needs to take into consideration the range of options students now have in the accommodation market, and the rationale upon which they make their decisions. This chapter presents findings from a questionnaire survey of 269 students residing in Loughborough University halls of residence, undertaken between February 2012 and May 2012.

Chatterton’s (2010) ideas on the commodification of studenthood provide a conceptual framework within which student preferences and expectations can be explored. He states that when students select their accommodation they have come to represent “a monetarised and commodified, as much as an educational persona” (Chatterton 2010: 512). This survey provides a valuable starting point for unearthing, identifying and assessing the extent to which student preferences and expectations drive processes of studentification and destudentification. It is contended that this will establish the connection between, and deepen our understanding of, student preferences, student residential decision-making practices and destudentification.

This chapter is divided into 4 main sections. First, Section 6.2 identifies students’ experiences of residing in University halls of residence. Section 6.3 investigates respondents’ motivations for their accommodation decisions: their perceptions of the
attractions and drawbacks of living in different types of accommodation. Section 6.4 examines respondents' residential location for next academic year, with some distinctions being made between different student enclaves. Section 6.5 unravels the search processes in acquiring accommodation, and explores and analyses the role students play in the processes of destudentification in the town. Finally, Section 6.6 summarises the main survey findings, and draws some overall conclusions.

6.2 The ‘hall of residence experience’

This section seeks to explore students’ experiences of residing in University halls of residence, as reported by student respondents when asked how they rate the experience of living in halls (in terms of accommodation, amenities, layout of rooms, management of halls and location), what have been the three best things, and what have been the three most negative things about living in halls of residence. The survey was undertaken not only to explore student perceptions and experiences of, and attitudes towards, hall of residence living, but also to examine the significance of halls of residence in shaping future accommodation decisions, particularly how this may link to processes of destudentification in certain parts of the town, as identified in Chapter 5.

![Figure 30: How students rate their experience in University halls of residence](image-url)
Hall accommodation, amenities, layout, management, and location, were rated as either ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ by students residing in University halls of residence, indicating a high level of satisfaction (Figure 30). This reveals a largely positive view of students’ current experience of halls of residence in Loughborough; this is in direct contrast to statements in the national media that indicate that “traditional university halls of residence are ‘in decline’” (The Daily Telegraph 24/03/2010). The locational benefits of residing in halls of residence are considered to be a major factor leading to a positive hall experience, with 98% of all respondents stating the location of halls of residence was either ‘excellent’ or ‘good’; as one student residing in an on-campus catered hall commented:

“The accommodation is pretty good actually, better than some of the other universities I visited. But living on campus was the big selling point, it just makes everything so much easier” [ID 19].

This respondent’s statement that living on campus makes “everything so much easier” (emphasis added) is an appreciation that the large campus successfully satisfies students’ academic and social needs, with students frequently underlining the positives of being in close proximity to lectures, the Students’ Union, the library, sports facilities, friends, town, clubs and societies.

However, there were slight differences between replies from respondents in different halls of residence. Students residing in on-campus catered halls rated all categories highest: accommodation (88%), layout of rooms (84%) and management (81%), marginally higher than both their on-campus self-catered and off-campus self-catered counterparts (see Figure 30). It seems that students who choose to reside in on-campus catered accommodation are seeking a ‘hassle-free’ lifestyle, where everything is provided for them (including catering), and ultimately making their life easier.

Students residing in the newly-developed halls of residence, such as Hazlerigg-Rutland and Robert Bakewell, rated their experience more positively than those residing in traditional, non-renovated halls (such as Falkner Eggington). Therefore, it appears that well-equipped accommodation, particularly kitchen and bedroom facilities, coupled with an on-campus location, is highly significant to a positive
student experience (see Figures 31 and 32); as this student living in on-campus self-catered halls remarked:

“I wanted accommodation that was modern, in good condition, clean and safe … that is very important in helping to get used to living away from home” [ID 210].

Figure 31: Royce Hall, a catered hall at the heart of the campus student village (author’s photograph)

Figure 32: Hazlerigg-Rutland Hall, a self-catered village campus hall developed with UPP and opened in 2009 (author’s photograph)
The location of halls was rated as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ by 98% of students residing in on-campus catered halls and by 100% of students residing in on-campus self-catered halls, suggesting that an on-campus location is preferable to off-campus living (see Figure 30). There is a strong conviction that this will lead to a better student experience, as illustrated in this response by a student living in on-campus self-catered accommodation:

“The best thing is definitely being on campus. You are only ever five minutes away from anything … lectures, Union, library” [ID 236].

It was noticeable that students residing in off-campus self-catered halls rated the location of their halls marginally lower than students in on-campus accommodation (see Figure 30). Here, a more disparaging perception of the location of off-campus halls was more common, with the benefit of being situated on-campus perceived to outweigh any immediate benefit of residing off-campus:

“You do sometimes feel a bit separate living off-campus … the fifteen minute walk up to the library is a bit of a pain, especially if it’s raining. That’s where on-campus halls are maybe a bit better, because they are on-campus” [ID 169].

This perception of ‘separation’ suggests that some students residing in off-campus halls feel less of a ‘sense of belonging’ than those who reside on-campus. Students residing in Falkner Eggington, Butler Court and William Morris rated these halls the three lowest (28%, 29% and 30% respectively), stating their hall accommodation was ‘average’, ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’. William Morris is off-campus, and, although Falkner Eggington and Butler Court are on-campus, neither is located in the ‘student village’ area. In support of Thomsen and Eikemo’s (2010) claim that living near to the place of study has a positive effect on satisfaction, students place great emphasis on the value of location in their student experience, as the following quotation by a student in William Morris hall indicates:

“I definitely think there is more of an atmosphere in the student village … all the halls are next to each other, whereas we are off-campus” [ID 262].

Women rate the location of halls of residence higher than men, with 67% of women saying the location was ‘excellent’ compared to only 53% of men. This suggests that women have higher expectations and requirements when it comes to halls of
residence accommodation, and that prime location is also very important for them - one possible reason for this may be that females feel ‘safer’ living on-campus:

“Campus feels safe ... when you leave the Union after a night out, obviously you have to be careful, but I feel ok walking back to halls with a couple of friends. When I go out in London, I would never do that” [ID 36].

Similarly, EU and non-EU international students rate location highly, suggesting that international students have higher expectations and requirements when it comes to halls of residence, and that a prime location is also crucial for them. The following quotation exemplifies that students who are unfamiliar with the country/town find it helps them to adjust to their new environment by living on campus:

“It is important to be close to the buildings where my lectures are, and to be close to the library for study. The campus is well-structured and this has helped me to settle in Loughborough” [ID 52].

This section has demonstrated, therefore, that the ‘student experience’ is more than just academic courses and teaching. The ‘hall of residence experience’ has a major part to play, with the role of accommodation, amenities, layout, management and location of halls forming an essential part of students’ satisfaction.

6.2.1 The appeal of halls of residence

The next two sections consider survey respondents’ perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of living in University halls of residence. When asked what have been the three best things about living in halls of residence, 32% of respondents highlighted halls of residence helping them settle into, and adapt to, University life. This was significantly higher for non-EU international students (43%), who felt that halls also helped them adapt to life in the UK. Residing in halls of residence was seen as particularly beneficial in meeting new people and making friends when they first arrive at university, with the forming of friendships considered to be of central importance to students as they embark upon their undergraduate life:

“The best thing about halls has to be all the people you meet and all the new friends that you make. I think most people would say the social side of halls is the best thing” [ID 241].
90% of students gave meeting and making friends as one of their three best things about living in halls of residence, suggesting that halls are the perfect environment for forming friendships. This supports Hubbard’s (2009: 1914) findings from a previous Loughborough study where students surveyed “all confirmed that where one resided in the first year of studies was vital in shaping in-group out-group relations”. Other social-related factors also formed an important part of the hall of residence experience: the atmosphere/ethos/spirit of halls of residence was significant to 52% of students. Clearly, the social aspects of halls of residence are judged to be significant positive factors in student experience:

“I’ve met so many people in halls, I’ve made friends for life. That is definitely the number one thing about halls … the people, the atmosphere, the hall spirit, the nights out. I know that when I’m eighty years old, I’ll look back at my year in halls as some of the best times of my life!” [ID 192].

The social aspect of halls of residence was most important to students residing in on-campus catered halls, where making friends (86%), nightlife and socialising (25%), and hall atmosphere/ethos/spirit (43%) were given as positives of their hall experience. Again, this suggests that on-campus catered halls have a unique character, atmosphere and social life. Respondents from all halls noted that events such as the ‘Sing-Off’ competition (an event in Freshers’ week celebrating hall and Loughborough spirit and tradition) were a highlight of their Loughborough experience, and contributed greatly to their sense of belonging to their hall, and to the University as a whole:

“It [the Sing-Off] was so good, we didn’t win but it was the best night of Freshers’ … it brought the whole hall together, and all the other halls … the atmosphere in the Union was incredible” [ID 170].

“The Sing-Off was absolutely amazing, we won it [Cayley Hall] … it was all anyone was talking about the next week … I don’t think any other uni has anything like that” [ID 212].

The second quotation above “I don’t think any other uni has anything like that” suggests that the student-in-hall experience, particularly in Loughborough, is perceived to be unique. Students also noted other social events, such as the Freshers’ Ball, Halloween and inter-hall competitions (sports and raising money for charity, for example) which make Loughborough halls special. This, coupled with the
large campus, and a Students’ Union owned and managed by the students themselves with over 100 clubs and societies, may be the reason Loughborough University won The Times ‘Best Student Experience Survey’ for five years in a row (2006-2010). Such a positive social experience in halls in students’ first year may contribute to the processes of destudentification in other parts of the town, since a number of students wish to remain in halls and experience the atmosphere of these events again:

“The social events and nights out ... halls has the best atmosphere and I want to experience that again next year” [ID 77].

Hall accommodation and amenities (particularly bedrooms, kitchen and bathroom facilities) are vital components of student satisfaction. The quality of the accommodation and amenities was given as “one of the best things about living in halls of residence” by students living in on-campus self-catered accommodation. This was particularly valued by those residing in the newly-developed halls of residence (built since 2007 in conjunction with UPP) where the quality of accommodation and amenities was cited as a major positive by 21% of students in Robert Bakewell and 33% of students in Hazlerigg-Rutland. This is higher than any other hall and suggests that the newly-developed halls of residence are examples of “contemporary luxury student living” (Chatterton 2010: 509) which have a positive impact on student satisfaction, as the following two quotations by students residing in on-campus self-catered halls illustrate:

“It’s really modern, stylish ... I went for the ensuite” [ID 182].

“There’s a desk, a bed, the room is quite spacious really, it is actually bigger than my room at home! The kitchen has a fridge and cooker and plenty of space for all your stuff. I’ve got an ensuite as well, that was what I wanted, I didn’t want to share ... it’s all of a really good standard” [ID 213].

Students’ increased expectations are illustrated by this respondent’s desire for an ensuite, and supports the view of accommodation providers that students are increasingly demanding high-quality facilities, and also supports Thomsen and Eikemo’s (2010) study of accommodation satisfaction since students seem to have developed clear expectations about how they want to live. This clearly shows students are expecting more amenities and services through their accommodation
providers to contribute to their overall experience (confirmed by interviewees in Chapter 5). This trend can perhaps partly be explained by the characteristics of the millennial generation, that is people born between the years 1980-1994, who are defined as a generation brought up on technology and enjoying a higher standard of living than generations before them (Chan et al. 2011). Also, student acceptance of the high-cost of a university education may be a factor. It is evident that the characteristics of the student population and their patterns of consumption and lifestyle choices are playing an increasingly significant role in driving forward processes of studentification (and destudentification), in a similar way that the characteristics of gentrifiers are important in the understanding of gentrification (Ley 1985).

Among the factors considered crucial to a positive hall experience, the excellent location of halls of residence was cited often: living on campus (22%), close proximity to lectures (20%), close proximity to sporting facilities (13%), close proximity to the library (7%), close to town (5%) and close to the Union (3%) were all seen as positives. The following quotation highlights the most common responses students gave when asked of the three best things about halls of residence: the social aspect, the high-quality of the accommodation, and the prime location of halls of residence:

“I absolutely love living in halls … the accommodation is top, and the fact you are on the campus means you're close to lectures, the library, the Union, it is perfect … you can’t beat hall atmosphere and all the friends you make, it has just been brilliant” [ID 14].

The unique experience of living in halls of residence has led to the University becoming like a community within itself, known as the ‘Loughborough bubble’. The university has created a cosseted, confined, and safe ‘bubble’ where students feel protected from the wider world. Only events going on in Loughborough seem to matter: Label magazine, Loughborough Student Union’s official publication (www.lborosu.org.uk/media/label) states, for example, how it will keep students informed on current affairs, world news and “everything going on outside the ‘Loughborough bubble’”. Students in this survey frequently referred to ‘the bubble’:
“Most nights we end up going to the Union or town. But obviously there is only what, four clubs in Loughborough? It’s the bubble thing … everyone knows everyone, you always see everyone when you’re out” [ID 92].

“I only came back to the bubble yesterday [interviewed at the start of the semester] … it’s weird coming back after being at home for a week, it’s like nothing outside of Loughborough matters when you’re here” [ID 55].

These quotations emphasise that students enjoy being part of the student community of a small university town, where “everyone knows everyone” – living in the Loughborough bubble, particularly the campus-bubble, is a huge part of the student experience and the attraction of halls.

In summary, there are many reasons why students enjoy a positive hall experience: the social aspect, the quality of accommodation and the location of halls are all perceived as fundamental to its appeal. It appears that those students who move off-campus after their first year in halls of residence tend to seek accommodation which provides a similar experience, and the traditional terraced houses in Storer and Burleigh, students perceive, cannot replicate the combination of social attributes (for example, the inter-hall Sing-Off competition), high-quality accommodation standards (in new and/or refurbished blocks) and the prime location (on or close to campus) provided by Loughborough halls. It is difficult for the private-sector to reproduce this ‘total experience’ which is a factor in destudentification of certain areas. In contrast, enclaves such as Kingfisher, just off-campus, function in a similar way to halls - one Loughborough landlord describes Kingfisher as having an “American-campus feel” and as being like another “little bubble”.

6.2.2 The disadvantages of halls of residence

When asked what have been the three most negative things about living in halls of residence, many responses focused on hall of residence accommodation and amenities, namely kitchens (18% of all negative responses), bathroom facilities (of all negative responses 19%) and bedrooms being “small” or “basic” (33% of all negative responses). A lack of quality (particularly of kitchen and bedroom facilities) in accommodation was also cited by non-EU international students (29% of all negative responses), perhaps reflective of international students’ role in driving up the quality
of accommodation as they “generally demand premium quality accommodation” (King Sturge 2008: 7).

The extent of students’ satisfaction with halls of residence living is emphasised by only 20% of survey respondents giving three negative aspects of living in halls of residence. 24% of respondents could not give an answer to the question about the three most negative things about living in halls of residence. Such positive responses to halls of residence may be why Loughborough University was voted 4th equal for ‘best for accommodation’ in The Times Student Experience Survey (The Times 26/04/2012).

In traditional or older halls, such as Falkner-Eggington, however, negative comments about accommodation were particularly strong, with 38% of respondents from this hall stating that ‘basic’/‘small’ accommodation has been a disappointment:

“The bedrooms are quite small and cramped and there isn’t that much storage space. The bathroom feels pretty old and dirty, and the kitchens aren’t very well equipped either” [ID 262].

These negative comments about the standard of accommodation were in the form of complaints: no respondent to this survey drew a positive along the lines of Smith and Holt’s (2007: 151) suggestion that students living in older hall accommodation may find that the experience of “residing within ‘scummy halls’ fosters a sense of cohesiveness and sociability between students”. This research also uncovered no evidence that poorer living conditions were enjoyed by students since they are less concerned about damaging accommodation which is already in a bad state of repair. In contrast, student respondents residing in the newly developed halls of residence had fewer complaints about the quality of accommodation, facilities and amenities: only 11% of respondents in Hazlerigg-Rutland stated rooms were ‘small’ or ‘basic’. This relatively high level of satisfaction confirms that the new/newly-refurbished halls are providing the quality of student accommodation that is important for students and appears to be crucial to their satisfaction.

Respondents cited social aspects as a negative part of their halls of residence, with 24% of negative responses suggesting mess, damage and noise caused by fellow students was a disadvantage. Interestingly, this was significantly higher among non-
EU international students (43%), perhaps pointing to socio-cultural differences between UK students and their international counterparts. These findings also support Hubbard’s (2009: 1914) assertion that “the experience of living in hall was regarded with a degree of ambivalence, with many speaking of their need to leave halls to get away from an intense form of sociality” which results from a lack of independence and freedom under the University’s watch. Set mealtimes (9% of students in catered halls stated that hall food was one of the negatives of their experience), and not having social space were frequently cited as negative aspects of residing in hall accommodation:

“There’s always something going on in halls, there’s always someone to talk to or go out with. I think the social side of it is important in your first year, but living in a house next year will make it easier to relax and get work done because there won’t be as many distractions” [ID 118].

“I hate having to share the bathroom and the kitchen with other students. They will make a mess, use your stuff and eat your food without asking. You feel you don’t have that much space in halls sometimes” [ID 93].

“The main thing that annoys me about halls is the set meal times … you basically have to plan your day around that. In a house you can cook and eat whenever you want. I’m looking forward to not having to have a jacket potato everyday!” [ID 34].

There were fewer such complaints from those students residing in self-catered accommodation, perhaps because this style of living allows them to be more flexible in their daily routines. In contrast, some students even professed to prefer the ‘campus bubble’ and relatively “cosseted experience of living in a catered, regularly cleaned hall” (Hubbard 2009: 1914):

“You don’t have the hassle of cooking or shopping, or sorting out bills and stuff which people in a house will have. And we have a cleaner who pretty much cleans up after us so we don’t really have to worry about the mess” [ID 177].

Significantly, 6% of all respondents perceived the management of halls (particularly the slow response to some of their issues) was a negative aspect of their halls experience. This statistic indicates that students increasingly see themselves as “consumers or clients” (Macintyre 2003: 110) who want value for their money, something which was also highlighted by accommodation providers in Chapter 5:
“The toaster in our kitchen broke so I filled in a repair form so someone would come and get it fixed or replaced. The repair man didn’t come until three days after we had complained. I had hoped that they would get it sorted within 24 hours … so that wasn’t very good” [ID 49].

This expectation that a problem will be addressed “within 24 hours” underlines that it is not just the quality of the accommodation and facilities that is important, but also the service that is provided: this clearly has implications for private landlords in the town. When Lord Mandelson (Secretary of State Business, Innovation and Skills, June 2009 - May 2010), speaking at an education summit (20/10/2009 BBC), observed “as students who go into higher education pay more, they will expect more”, he was talking primarily about the quality of the teaching they receive; however, this research shows it will also be applicable to their accommodation experience. This research has established that students, increasingly, perceive themselves to be ‘customers’ who feel they pay a high cost, and therefore demand, and deserve, instant satisfaction. Vince Cable (the current Secretary of State Business, Innovation and Skills) made the statement at a HEFCE conference (April 2011) that: “the biggest mistake a university could make is to underestimate its consumers”.

The most frequently cited negative aspect of living in halls of residence identified by students was the expensive nature of the accommodation, with 33% of respondents stating that the high cost of halls of residence was a negative. However, several students suggested that their parents would be paying their hall fees – supporting Hubbard’s (2009: 1916) finding that “money was ‘no object’”, and reflecting the relative affluence of many Loughborough students. The high cost of accommodation is less of an issue for non-EU international students (20%) compared to UK-based students (34%) possibly because international students pay higher tuition fees than UK students. In other words, if these students are to study abroad – a costly undertaking - they perhaps accept paying a high amount for accommodation too. However, this statistic does indicate that some international students find accommodation charges expensive. It is important to remember that many students see themselves as ‘consumers’ now.
The general consensus in this study was that halls of residence were an expensive way of living, but students are less likely to see hall accommodation as expensive if they reside on-campus, especially if catering is included:

“T’ve found hall accommodation to be very basic … considering how much it costs you would expect a bit more for your money” [ID 100].

“Being in a hall with food included makes it good value for money, I think” [ID 130].

This underlines that many students are seeking a ‘hassle-free’ lifestyle where everything is provided (including catering), believing that halls represent better value for money and are not more expensive than accommodation in the town where they would have to pay for food separately (plus the extra work involved in the purchasing of food and the preparation of meals). When taken together, it is the combination of quality accommodation in a catered, on-campus location that is perceived to offer the best value for money. This suggests that crucial to students’ experiences is a satisfactory ‘whole package’:

“I think that living in halls works out as the best deal…having meals included in the week and living in such nice accommodation has been really important” [ID 63].

In summary, this section has identified the breadth and diversity of factors that shape students’ experience of living in university halls of residence in Loughborough. Students have typically identified positives in residing in this accommodation - namely the social benefits – but the location of halls and the quality of accommodation are also crucial factors: 44% of students who said there were no negatives to living in halls will be residing there again next year. The negative aspects, primarily the perceived high cost of halls, lack of facilities and amenities and intense sociality were seen to impact on hall experience: only 2% of students who gave three negative aspects to living in halls will be doing so next year. Significantly, this survey shows that students are seeing themselves increasingly as consumers or clients with demands that they expect to be met – and met quickly. Generally, there is a high level of satisfaction. It is clear that halls of residence play a major role in shaping students’ experiences of accommodation and these experiences (both positive and negative) will inform their future accommodation decisions.
6.3 Accommodation for next academic year

This section explores the accommodation students will be residing in next academic year. In the survey, this had two parts: firstly, accommodation preferences and whether students were successful in getting their first choice; secondly, the reasons for choosing, and the attractions of, this accommodation, particularly the importance of price (Section 6.3.3) and facilities and amenities (Section 6.3.4). Halfacree and Boyle (1993) note the importance of recognising both the primary and the latent secondary reasons for moving to a new destination, in the interest of developing a holistic understanding of this decision-making process. In light of this, open-ended qualitative responses to this question have been classified fully to incorporate both primary and secondary responses, the results of which will be discussed in the following Section 6.3.1.

6.3.1 Accommodation: preferences and realities

Figure 33 shows a breakdown of accommodation preferences for students as well as the type of accommodation students will be residing in next academic year. The results of this survey indicate that living in a shared house with other students is the most popular choice for students who will be entering their second year of University (73%), whilst 17% of respondents showed a predilection to remain in University halls of residence. Only 7% would prefer to reside in PBSA (only 5% of respondents will be residing in this type of accommodation next year). Previous research in Liverpool suggested that destudentification and low demand for student housing in the Kensington neighbourhood was caused by the development of new PBSA in the city centre (Nathan and Unwin 2005: 48). However, in Loughborough that does not appear to be the case. In fact, destudentification in the Storer and Burleigh areas of Loughborough appears to be caused, in part, by the rise in popularity of ‘newer’ student areas (Kingfisher and Forest/Herrick) and the development of, and successful retention of students in, halls of residence. Ironically, the PBSA blocks appear not to be popular with the students for whom they were constructed in Loughborough.
94% of students surveyed managed to obtain their first choice of accommodation. Half of students who wished to reside in/buy their own home will be doing so next academic year. When asked “why did you NOT get your first choice of accommodation for next academic year?”, these students pointed to financial reasons – that buying a house would not represent a good investment:
“My Mum and Dad looked into buying a house for me to live in, but decided it wouldn’t be a good idea because of the housing market right now. I think they were worried they wouldn’t be able to sell it in a few years” [ID 35].

Ten students who stated that living in PBSA (private halls) was their accommodation preference will be living in that form of accommodation next year; with only around two-thirds of students who intimated this was their first choice actually going to be living there, this is perhaps further evidence of the destudentification of PBSA in the town, supporting findings in Chapter 5, where even the providers themselves stated they were struggling to fill their rooms. In a similar vein to students who would like to have bought their own home, financial reasons were cited as the major factor in why students would not be living in a student block:

“I wanted to live in a block at first, but when I looked at the prices they were just too expensive for me … when you start to compare them [PBSA prices] to how much it would cost to live in a house. So that’s why I’m going to be living in a house next year, because it’s cheaper” [ID 50].

87% of students who wanted to remain in University halls of residence got their preference. Of the 13% who did not, the reasons cited focused on relationships with friends, financial reasons, and a belief that they would not be successful in winning a place in the hall of their choice:

“I was keen to stay, but my friends said they didn’t want another year in halls, that they wanted to live in a house. I didn’t want to be the only one not living in a house” [ID 207].

“Halls for another year was my first choice but it’s really expensive … I couldn’t really afford another year” [ID 129].

“I wasn’t confident I’d get a place in the hall I wanted for my second year. So I’m going off campus next year and I’m going to apply to come back to halls for my final year I think” [ID 246].

Sharing a house with other students will also be the reality for all students who did not get their first choice (those whose preference was to reside in University halls of residence, PBSA, or residing/buying a home). This confirms that the Loughborough student housing market is oversupplied (concurring with the notion that Loughborough is estimated to have an oversupply of 2,000 bed spaces, as highlighted by several interviewees in Chapter 5). This is reflected in students being
able to find a house to rent successfully, even though it was not their first choice. The survey also reveals that the sole reason why some students are renting these properties is because it is seen as the ‘done thing’ for students (particularly those in their second year) and the relative cheapness of this accommodation in comparison to more expensive forms such as PBSA and University halls of residence.

6.3.2 Accommodation: motivations and perceptions

Given the multiple accommodation choices facing students beyond their first year, understanding the appeal of student accommodation is an important priority; as Hubbard (2009: 1912) states, “very little has been written about how students weigh up the merits of different forms of accommodation”. Many reasons were given by students when they were asked why this was their first choice of accommodation for next academic year and what they saw as the three main attractions of this accommodation: living with friends, quality of accommodation, freedom/independence, more space, nightlife/socialising, good location, kitchen facilities, bathroom facilities, a good price/deal, close proximity to campus, lectures, shops, sporting facilities, town, being near to other friends and parking space were some of the answers given by students.

The majority of student respondents (73%) indicated a desire to move out of university-maintained accommodation and into private rented accommodation. It appears that “residence within a shared ‘student house’ is seen as a pivotal predisposition of the student habitus” (Smith and Holt 2007: 152), a point emphasised by some respondents:

“I definitely wanted to live in a house. I think most people do … it’s, like, the done thing, isn’t it? … part of the student experience” [ID 235].

The survey findings are that 69% of students residing in on-campus catered accommodation, 74% of students residing in on-campus self-catered accommodation, and 78% of students residing in off-campus self-catered accommodation would prefer to live in a shared house with other students. These statistics contradict Hubbard’s (2009: 1915) earlier findings in Loughborough where he claims “the pull of the private sector appeared somewhat weaker for those students placed in self-catering accommodation in the first year given that this
accommodation allowed them to be more flexible in their daily routines”. In fact, this research shows the pull of the private sector is weaker for those living in the cosseted, catered halls – these students have the most positive view on their current hall accommodation.

The social aspect (living with friends and/or meeting new people) was a primary motivation for 87% for students living in all types of accommodation, and nightlife/socialising was also important for 11% of all respondents, particularly crucial for those who will reside in a shared house with other students. Kenyon and Heath (2001: 621) suggest that positive television representations of shared households, such as Friends and Big Brother, “deliver the message that sharing is fashionable” which might give impetus to the popularity of HMO. Clearly, the social experience of residing in a shared student house constitutes a fundamental reason for their decision:

“I think that the social side of it, meeting people, going out with friends, that is the University experience. So you look for accommodation where you are going to get the best of that. That’s why a year in halls and then living in a house [with other student friends] is where I want to live” [ID 261].

Having freedom/independence away from the rules of halls was selected by 14% of respondents as one of the three major attractions of living in a shared house with a group of students. While some went as far as to suggest that their decision to move into the private sector was a deliberate attempt to escape the ‘student bubble’ of campus, for most it was about gaining a pathway to adulthood by moving out of halls (Smith and Holt 2007), and to do so because of a desire to exercise autonomy in less-regulated spaces (Hubbard 2009):

“We just want a change … It’s going to be a bit more grown up, having to do the cooking, the bins and the bills. I’m looking forward to that responsibility and independence” [ID 9].

44% of students who will be living in a student house next year highlighted the quality of accommodation as one of the three major attractions of living there: similarly, better kitchen facilities (12%), better bathroom facilities (5%) and more space (24%) were some of the perceived attractions of a choosing a student house:
“The kitchen was what sealed it for us. After a year trying to cook with pretty crap hall facilities, a kitchen with a proper cooker, dishwasher, and space to prepare it all is going to be a dream!” [ID 232].

“It’s all about the ensuite shower room” [ID 252].

“The house is really spacious when you get inside. The lounge and kitchen are really good. We are already looking forward to hosting a few parties and a ‘Come Dine With Me’ meal with our friends” [ID 22].

These responses point to changes in student lifestyle and culture. References to spacious living, ensuites, and dinner parties show that student accommodation has “come a long way since the days of the TV series The Young Ones” (Kollewe, 2010: 21), with students’ desire for a better standard of living whilst they are at University shaping the market. Landlords and accommodation providers have to respond to these new, stringent student demands and the competition from halls of residence. It is clear that the student lifestyle has evolved, and student comments in the questionnaire survey emphasise that these discerning young people are becoming a driving force in the accommodation market.

Accommodation in a good location (39%) was important for students living in a shared house with other students: specifically, being near to town (13%), near to campus (8%), within close proximity to other groups of friends (7%), handy for lectures (6%), close to sporting facilities (3%) and close to shops (2%). were voted as the main attractions of living in a shared house with other students. It is evident that place-specific appeals of the house had influenced their decision to move there:

“I think living in a house is going to be the best of both worlds … close enough to campus, lectures, Union, but also close enough to the shops and clubs” [ID 203].

Economic factors were significant in forming the student respondents groups’ rationale for moving into a shared house with other students, with 13% stating a good rental price or deal was a primary motivation for locating in this type of accommodation. Affordability was an issue for 21% of respondents who will live in a shared house, since they perceive this way of living to be a cheaper alternative to other forms of student accommodation:
“Getting a house is a lot cheaper than halls or those student blocks” [ID 98].

Furthermore, the quotation below offers some insights into the motivations behind students’ decisions to settle in a shared house with other students, with the combination of affordability, sociality, independence and location constituting the major appeals of this type of accommodation:

“I think you get the best of everything in a house … living with friends, bit more space … generally nicer than halls because you aren’t sharing a bathroom with loads of people, you’re off-campus so you don’t feel like the University are watching you all the time, you’re a bit closer to the shops and things, and it works out as cheaper than halls” [ID 112].

Remaining in University halls of residence for another year was the second most popular accommodation choice for students, with 17% of all students showing a desire to remain in halls. UK students were more likely to prefer halls of residence (18%) than non-EU international students (7%). This trend to choose to remain in halls beyond their first year by some students may indirectly cause de-studentification: housing that, traditionally, would be filled by these students who would be forced to move off campus (when campus accommodation was limited), may now remain unlet as students opt to stay in halls of residence.

The social aspect, such as living with friends and/or meeting new people, was particularly significant for students residing in halls of residence (95% of students who will live in halls next year gave this as one of their three reasons), as was nightlife/socialising (21%) for those who will reside in halls of residence. The social life of halls was a primary motivation for many students remaining:

“I just like the atmosphere in halls. It’s so much fun … there’s always parties or events. That’s the main reason for staying” [ID 151].

Also, key to respondents’ desire to live in halls of residence was the quality of student accommodation. Despite the criticisms some students make about hall accommodation, 28% of students who will live in halls next year stated the high-quality accommodation on offer was crucial in their decision to remain in halls for another year. Students with no experience of the private-renting sector (indicated by the word “probably” in the respondent’s comment below) point to the high-quality
facilities and amenities halls provide as one of the three major attractions of this form of accommodation:

“The accommodation is really good … probably better than a lot of houses in town. You’ve got everything you need: modern kitchen, bathroom, well-kitted out bedrooms, good internet” [ID 200].

Interestingly, a large number of respondents emphasised the place-specific appeals of halls of residence, suggesting that living on (or very close to) campus constitutes a fundamental part of their rationale: living on campus was chosen by 38% of students living in halls for another year as a reason for staying, with being close to the library (9%), lectures (8%), sporting facilities (6%), town (1%) and the Union (1%) also seen as very important:

“Halls is, all-round, the best place to live. You get that atmosphere and banter that you won’t get anywhere else, you get pretty good accommodation … all you need really. And you are in the perfect location being on campus. It’s all you could want” [ID 186].

Among the factors deemed least crucial for residing in halls was the cost of accommodation – no respondents who will live in halls in 2012/13 said that the reasonable price of the accommodation was one of the rationales. Halls are perceived to be an expensive form of accommodation but when combined with a prime location, quality accommodation, and a strong social experience, residing in halls of residence is a popular choice for many students and seems to offer (in the widest sense) good value.

Residing in PBSA was the first choice for 7% of students surveyed. However, 28% of international students surveyed would like to live in PBSA – over five times more likely than UK students (5%). Shah (2010) highlights the demand for PBSA as much higher from international students, who are often influenced by their parents who want assurance that their offspring will be taken care of whilst studying in a foreign country. Living with friends was the primary reason for students choosing to reside in PBSA with all students who will reside in this type of accommodation, again showing the importance of sociality to the accommodation decision. The entire ambience of PBSA is perceived to be different from University halls of residence, particularly the more mature atmosphere where the emphasis is more on studying than partying:
“It’s similar to halls in that it has that same atmosphere but we wanted to live nearer to town with other like-minded students … where it would be easier to work” [ID 176].

As the above quotation attests, the central town-centre location of much of the PBSA in Loughborough is important to students: three students stated location was crucial for them. Other locational benefits were highlighted; four respondents focused on close proximity to town/shops. Surprisingly, no respondents who will reside in PBSA suggested being near to campus was important:

“Being close to the town centre and the shops, I think that will be better. Halls can be intense, it will be nice to be able to get away from that and be a bit more independent” [ID 237].

The quality of the accommodation is a significant rationale behind students’ desire to reside in PBSA: nine respondents choosing PBSA suggested that the high-quality facilities and amenities student blocks provide was superior in the student accommodation market and was one of the main reasons for their accommodation decision. Many of the PBSA blocks in Loughborough offer similar facilities to those offered in Nido Spitalfields in London, such as “en-suite rooms with double beds, flat screen TV’s and free wireless broadband, as well as CCTV coverage around the building” (Kollewe 2010: 21) and this attraction was clearly evident in these responses:

“The main attraction of a student block has to be the facilities. The internet speed is quicker, the bathrooms and kitchens are nicer, they are modern … better than halls I think” [ID 51].

“The rooms are really modern and well-laid out. Plus, the security is really good, that was a big thing. So even though it’s a bit more expensive than a house, I think you get value for your money” [ID 101].

Respondents’ recognition of the value for money of PBSA was deemed less crucial than other factors with only three respondents who will be living in PBSA next year suggesting it was good value for money. This acknowledgement confirms that very few students are prepared to pay a slightly higher rent to get a perceived higher-quality of PBSA accommodation. PBSA may also be seen as good value by the international student contingent who want a higher level of quality. As Shah (2010)
states, international students are already spending a lot of money out on fees so spending a considerable amount on accommodation is not so significant.

One of the two students whose accommodation preference was to ‘reside in/buy your own home’ will be doing so next academic year. Financial factors were deemed crucial to residing in this form of accommodation, with the belief that buying a house would provide not only the ‘student house’ experience, but would save money in the long-run:

“Yeah, my parents have bought a house for me, and I’m going to be living there with a couple of friends. They thought it would be a good investment for a few years. We’ll get the experience of living in a house, but won’t have to worry about being ripped off by a landlord” [ID 58].

Only two students surveyed wished to buy their own home to live in, with 1% of the population surveyed doing so - a very small percentage. This suggests that a parent buying a house for their son/daughter to live in during their study is not seen as an opportunity for profitable investment, especially in 2012. This finding is in direct opposition to the notion that “buying a student property can prove a smarter option than renting” (The Financial Times 14/08/2010).

Just three of those surveyed will be living in the family home next academic year. The social aspect - living with parents and close to friends from home/school - was important to these students residing in the family home next year. Whilst this suggests a wish to retain family ties, as Christie (2007: 2447) states, “living at home continues to be constructed as a barrier to full participation in higher education precisely because it creates an immediate social and spatial distance between the students and life at university” and may present more limited opportunities to participate in student life, and involve exclusion from important networks of information. This is also borne out in studies by Holdsworth (2006) and Patiniotis and Holdsworth (2005: 88) who predict that the trend is that increasing numbers of students will stay in their parental home for the duration of their studies since two of the three students living at home next year were doing so “for financial reasons”. This underlines that it is a strategy employed by young people primarily to save money; with the three-fold increase in university tuition fees from September/October 2012 it could be predicted that the numbers of university students choosing to live at home
may increase substantially - clearly impacting on accommodation provision in university towns and cities.

This research reveals that the quality of accommodation at home and having more space was important to those students choosing to live there; a major attraction of living at home was the cost of accommodation, mentioned by all students who will be living at home. This supports Christie’s (2007: 2445) assertion that “more students are choosing to stay at home for financial reasons”, where they would pay nothing or very little compared to what they would pay to rent a room in Loughborough. Interestingly, they felt that commuting in for lectures would be a viable cheaper alternative:

“The positive for living at home is definitely going to be the amount of money I’m going to save. Accommodation is expensive … living at home is going to mean less debt” [ID 39].

“I know I can save loads of money by living at home and just coming in for lectures” [ID 145].

In summary, this section has highlighted the breadth and diversity of the motivational factors influencing students’ decisions to live in particular types of accommodation in Loughborough. Hubbard’s (2009: 1915) previous research in Loughborough found that “students' narratives of residential choice hence chime with existing ideas that students are consciously participating in the ‘game’ of higher education, regarding university as a time to gain new experiences and friendships and not just acquiring a degree”. The findings of this research are that students certainly regard their university years as an opportunity to “gain new experiences and friendships” and their selection of accommodation is, in part, informed by this; however, the use of the word “game” appears inappropriate: the respondents of this 2012 survey take the matter of choosing accommodation (its location, quality and cost) seriously. It is clear that students have well-thought-out expectations, needs and preferences and are becoming a driving force in the student accommodation market.

6.3.3 Rental prices

Economic factors are clearly significant in shaping the student respondent group’s rationale for moving to Storer, Burleigh and Ashby Estate, with 20%, 15% and 19% of
student respondents who will move to those areas respectively stating that an affordable property was a primary motivation for locating in these neighbourhoods. As these are the most affordable of the research sites, it would be reasonable to expect survey respondents to identify the affordability of their property as central to their decision to live there. Not surprisingly, affordability was less of an issue for students moving into Kingfisher, Forest/Herrick, or those staying in halls of residence for another year. Crucially, inflated rental prices typify these areas, underlining the attraction of these student ‘hotspots’.

In the Loughborough student accommodation market, landlords appear to be driving the flows of capital as certain enclaves (such as Kingfisher or Forest/Herrick) are studentifying, whilst, at the same time, destudentification of traditional areas (such as Storer and Burleigh) is underway: simply put, the money flows to where the landlords can maximise profits, as with gentrification where there is “systematic disinvestment, and the opportunities for profitable reinvestment created by these capital flows” (Slater 2011: 574).

Student respondents in this survey believe that all-inclusive rent (where bills such as gas, electricity and water are included in the deal) saves them time and trouble as well as minimising risk associated with fluctuating utility prices. This supports the findings reported in Chapter 5 which show that landlords have had to respond to the trend - often associated with PBSA - of making broadband part of the rental. Whilst a small percentage of students want to increase their independence by paying the bills, the majority of students want “hassle-free living” (Hubbard 2009: 1917):

“We don’t want the hassle of having to sort the electricity and the internet. All the bills are sorted for you in halls and it has just been so easy, so we wanted the same sort of deal next year in our house. You know exactly what you’re getting that way” [ID 127].

It is becoming evident that students now perceive themselves as consumers, for whom providers have to cater “in order to survive in a competitive market where service to students is paramount” (Stevenson and Askham 2011: 6). It is to be expected that, as the cost of a university education rises with each increase of fees (£9000 per year at many universities from Autumn 2012), so students will increase their demands for high-quality teaching. They also expect a high-quality overall
university ‘experience’, and accommodation is a crucial factor both in terms of its quality and whether it represents value for money.

![Weekly rent (inclusive) students will be paying for accommodation next year (%) in key student areas](image)

**Figure 34: Weekly rent (inclusive) students will be paying for accommodation next year (%) in key student areas**

Figure 34 shows the weekly inclusive rent students will be paying for accommodation in 2012/13. It is clear there is a distinct difference in rent between the different accommodation types and the different areas of Loughborough. Terraced and semi-detached housing (in Storer, Burleigh and the Ashby Estate) is at the cheaper end of the scale, with an average all-inclusive rental of £70-£75 per week. Students are willing to pay a higher rent for newly-built, high-quality accommodation, particularly PBSA and houses on the Kingfisher Estate. Figure 32 illustrates that lower rental prices in Storer, Burleigh and the Ashby Estate may be a response by landlords to a falling demand from students for these houses. This agrees with Thomsen and Eikemo's (2010: 275) statement that students “are willing to pay more rent for a better location” as well as for space and modernity:

“A terraced house is much cheaper than one of those new blocks. I think that you pay more for more modern accommodation, for the size and space” [ID 170].

192
“I’d rather pay a little bit more to get something better … you can get a really big house, more space, all the stuff you need if you are prepared to pay that little bit more” [ID 138].

In Loughborough, however, PBSA is perceived by students to be an expensive form of living – only 5% of students surveyed will be living in a student block – with an average weekly rental price of £80-£89 per week meaning it is likely to be left un-let. This is evidenced by a PBSA provider in Chapter 5, who stated that his/her block was only “half-full”. This is in sharp contrast to the experience in other student cities, such as Leeds, where “ensuite accommodation at £118 per week, with features including wifi, on-site DVD rentals, flatscreen TVs, and luxury furnishings and minibars in the upper floor pent-houses” was pre-let before completion (Chatterton 2010: 509).

Nearly a quarter (22%) of all students surveyed said they did not have a maximum weekly rent they were prepared to pay, but used letting agent, landlord, and University housing lists to gain an idea as to the student accommodation rental market prices:

“I never really thought about a maximum amount I was willing to spend … I guess once you start searching you sort of just get an idea of how much accommodation is, you know, the average prices and what would be a slightly cheaper or more expensive option” [ID 38].

In the case of Loughborough, 41% of all respondents stated that their parents/family would be paying (or making a contribution to) their rent. This supports Hubbard’s (2009) previous Loughborough study where some students reported that their parents would pay the rent as money was ‘no object’.

As Table 4 shows, 60% of all students surveyed will be paying less than the maximum weekly rent they had been prepared to pay in order to secure their first choice of accommodation. This supports the contention that the Loughborough student accommodation market is an oversupplied market, with landlords and agents prepared to offer lower rental rates in order to secure student tenants who could, potentially, find accommodation quite easily elsewhere. Most argued they got what they paid for, and that housing represented value for money, even if they paid more than the average, confirming that “students compare their housing situation to those of their peers” (Thomsen and Eikemo 2010: 283). The emerging processes of
destudentification (identified in Chapter 5) are linked to the principal areas of HMOs, with landlords whose properties are regarded as least attractive to students forced to refurbish, drop rents, or target different rental groups:

“I think you get what you pay for … if you want something really really nice then you'll have to pay a bit more to get it” [ID 266].

Table 2: The maximum weekly rent (inclusive) students were prepared to pay, and the actual rental price they will paying next year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maximum weekly rent</th>
<th>£0-£69</th>
<th>£70-£79</th>
<th>£80-£89</th>
<th>£90-£99</th>
<th>£100+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£0-£69</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£70-£79</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£80-£89</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£90-£99</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£100+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: The maximum weekly rent (inclusive) students were prepared to pay, and the actual rental price they will paying next year

An essential component when students are deciding on their accommodation is that they have value for money. It is clear that, in a time of oversupply of student accommodation coupled with the economic downturn post-2008, students are realising they have bargaining power and are able to negotiate on rent. As Rugg et al. (2000: 32) state “provision of a good standard of accommodation in a style favoured by students and at a reasonable price constituted an advantage over competitors” – price is a key factor in students’ accommodation decisions. Loughborough accommodation providers accept they must let accommodation to students at a reduced rate or at a lower deal, as setting rents too high could inevitably lead to an empty property; they are therefore willing to offer reductions as “high vacancies depress rent prices” (Glock and Häussermann 2004: 923).

One trend that is apparent through the student survey responses is that financial deals, price reductions, offers and incentives are occurring in the market. Many students now look for (and can successfully command) money off the rent (or other deals) from providers and 18% of all respondents to the survey said they successfully
made some form of negotiation, often in the form of a reduction in the price advertised:

“I feel quite proud of myself that we got a bit of a deal because I know some people who just signed up straight away and didn’t think to at least ask if the landlord might be willing to move a bit on price. I’ve definitely realised that you should try and haggle because it worked for us, and over the course of the year that money you negotiated will add up, so you’re going to end up saving yourself quite a lot” [ID 78].

“We negotiated some money off … I think it works out at about £5 a week cheaper than what it was advertised at. I just got a feeling, when we went to look at it, that he hadn’t really had much interest in it, that we were probably the first group that seemed quite interested … he was really keen for us to sign up. So when we said, “we are going to go away and have a think about it” he basically said straight away that he’d be willing to do it a little bit cheaper. So that sealed it for us, because the house is all right, it’s got everything we need really. Looking back at it now, he came across as a little bit desperate maybe, you know? … maybe if we had pushed it a bit more then we might have got him to drop the price even more” [ID 57].

This indicates that some landlords are becoming increasingly “desperate” to get student tenants, appearing to confirm that there is an oversupply of accommodation. It is interesting to note that both of the respondents who are quoted above will be residing in the Storer area, where 28% of all successful negotiations were made by students. The fewest negotiations occurred in Kingfisher (0%) and Forest/Herrick (4%), suggesting that these are the most popular areas of Loughborough, where students are willing (and must) pay the full price since here landlords need not resort to deals, reductions or offers in order to let their accommodation successfully.

Figure 35 shows the inclusive weekly rent students will be paying for accommodation and the date students signed up for this. It is clear that December and January are the high times for student sign-ups, and landlords are able to command higher-levels of rent. However, 36% of students who signed up for accommodation in February successfully negotiated a reduction, with 38% of students who signed up in March also negotiating. This contrasts with 13% of students who signed up in December, and 13% in January getting money off. It appears that students who wait beyond the December-January high-times have more chance of paying less than the asking rental price. It would be interesting to see how much students who sign up much later
(April and May) pay, because based on this survey’s findings it can be assumed that there would be a drastic drop in price where deals and reductions would be common:

“We waited a bit later than most people I think, [February] until we were really ready to sign up for next year, and I think that is why the landlord was willing to knock some money off. I doubt that if we’d gone to him in, like, October or November or something, that he would have said you can have some off” [ID 7].

Across all areas (apart from Kingfisher) students have typically identified the affordability of the destination accommodation as one of the pivotal reasons for their decision to locate in their neighbourhood. It is clear that accommodation providers perceive price and cost of accommodation as an important factor in students taking up a tenancy, and therefore discounts and negotiations are becoming a key feature of the student residential geographies in Loughborough. Accommodation providers are finding they have to produce what prospective student tenants demand – or reduce the rent considerably – if they are not to lose out. It is students who appear to be the driving force in the market.
6.3.4 Facilities and amenities

This section seeks to explore the range of motives behind students’ choice of accommodation, as reported by respondents in response to being asked which facilities/amenities they expect to be included in the accommodation cost, what is to be included, and to consider respondents’ perceptions of the appeals and disadvantages of accommodation facilities. A major trend noticed in the accommodation preferences survey to students is the increased expectations students have in terms of higher-quality and high specification facilities in the accommodation they desire.

Table 5 shows high levels of desire for high-quality facilities and amenities, contrasting with Smith and Holt’s (2007: 152) assumption that students’ sociocultural identity is established via the lived experiences and ‘shared hardship’ of residing within relatively low-quality HMOs. Over 80% of all students surveyed stated that broadband internet, TV facilities, washing facilities, double glazing and security were essential facilities they wanted in their accommodation:

“Yeah, all those things are either essential or desirable really. I mean, my Dad always goes on about what it was like when he was a student, and I always say “things are different now Dad” (laughs) … you have to have internet, you have to have a TV” [ID 264].

“I mean, quite a lot of the people I know are really rich … from really rich families who don’t really care that much about how much stuff is going to cost, and they are used to having a big bedroom and a wide-screen TV and all that because that is what they have got at home. So they wouldn’t go near a place that doesn’t have pretty much all of those things” [ID 4].
Table 3: “Which of the following facilities/amenities would you expect to be included in the accommodation cost?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
<th>Not important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadband internet</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double glazing</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV / Freeview facilities</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing Machine</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security (eg. locks, alarm)</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden / outside space</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large / spacious rooms / layout</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newly-refurbished / modern style</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-road parking / designated space</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishwasher</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double bed</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuite bathroom</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumble dryer</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-road parking / private drive</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaner service</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky TV package</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games package (eg. X-box)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American-style fridge freezer</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These student demands appear to contradict Smith and Holt’s (2007: 152) argument that “residing in low-quality private rented housing is an integral component of the student habitus”. Five years after this statement, “low-quality” is no longer acceptable to today’s student body and does not constitute an “integral component” of student lifestyles if the example of Loughborough is typical.

These better facilities and amenities usually mean that students will pay a higher rent. This contrasts with Christie et al.’s (2002: 219) finding that “price was not always a clear reflection of the standard of housing, so that paying a higher rent did not necessarily improve conditions”. In Loughborough, as Figure 36 shows, students who pay at the higher end of the rental scale are more likely to get an ensuite, on-road parking and the services of a cleaner or a cleaning team.
Figure 36: Rental prices paid for accommodation with 1. Ensuite, 2. On-road parking, 3. Cleaner
It is clear that accommodation providers have to make increased efforts to attract students, particularly during a period of oversupply. According to Rugg et al. (2002) the rental marker of available housing for students does not always provide satisfactory quality, and students often end up renting low standard accommodation. This is not true in Loughborough where there is “increased expectations for a wide range of consumer choices” (Chan et al. 2010: ix). Students themselves argue that a lack of facilities, amenities and improvements to accommodation would negatively impact on the provider’s success:

“Our house has been recently refurbished. It has all the bills included, so that’s a Sky+ package, a 32” TV with TV licence, 40 meg wireless internet and the electricity, heating and stuff. If it hadn’t got all that then we would have looked for something better” [ID 114].

“I think most houses have most of those things don’t they? I mean, I would have thought that’s pretty standard now in houses … if a house didn’t have those things, there is no way we would have gone there” [ID 74].

The number of facilities and amenities students can expect in accommodation varies depending on the area. What becomes clear through the student survey is that the experience of residing on campus shapes students’ needs, preferences and expectations:

“Living in halls for a year probably influenced my accommodation decision. You sort of look for a house or whatever that is the same really, that has nice rooms and stuff. You wouldn’t go and live anywhere that is worse than campus” [ID 28].

As Figure 37 shows, students residing in Storer will have fewer facilities and amenities than students who will be residing in Kingfisher. One of the reasons destudentification in Storer is occurring is because the traditional terraced house does not provide all the facilities students now require. In the same way that gentrifiers’ lifestyles motivate their rejection of one area, as they move to another (Ley 1986; Hamnett 1991), so the flow of students within Loughborough (and possibly other university towns and cities) away from the traditional terrace is similarly motivated.
When students find housing unattractive they will not want to stay there, according to the Chan *et al.* (2010: 18) study, and will find housing which offers more amenities. This is something that Loughborough landlords, agents and providers note, that ‘slum landlordism’ (absentee landlords who attempt to maximise profit by minimising
spending on property maintenance) is in decline as landlords upgrade and improve their accommodation in order to compete with the high-standards of halls of residence and to let it successfully to student tenants. Similarly, the Bline housing report (2008: Appendix 6.2a) of Loughborough highlights that “poorer quality traditional terraced rented houses increasingly remain empty … affecting mainly less desirable older terraced houses, for example the Golden Triangle”. Clearly these “less desirable older terraces” in Storer do lack many of the facilities and qualities students are currently seeking:

“The terraces are quite small and I don’t think many of them have big rooms, ensuites and things like that. If you compare a terrace to a house in Kingfisher, there is a big difference [in the amenities/facilities]” [ID 162].

It is perceived by students that they can find accommodation in the Kingfisher or Forest/Herrick area with more facilities than accommodation in the Storer area can provide. Munro and Livingston’s (2011: 1684) interview with a Nottingham residents’ group member produces the comment: “increasingly students want to have properties which have off-road parking, so that’s changed the type of property that they look for … students like detached as they think they’re not going to be bothered by next-door neighbours”. This is the same in Loughborough, where students point to car-parking facilities as an important aspect of their satisfaction with their accommodation:

“That’s [the lack of parking facilities] probably the worst thing about where I’m going to be living next year [Storer]. The house is really nice, but there is nowhere to park, and, from what I’ve heard, it’s really difficult to get a parking permit” [ID 67].

The local council, partly in response to resident groups’ pressure (see Chapter 5), restricts the allocation of parking permits. Since on-road parking is seen as ‘essential’ by 34% of all students, and 13% of all students see off-road parking as ‘essential’, the availability of car parking is a factor driving studentification in some areas and destudentification in others (Storer, for example, is becoming less popular since the narrow roads of terraced houses offer only restricted parking).

The areas of Loughborough where students are most likely to get accommodation with ‘large/spacious rooms/layout’ is shown in Figure 38. This indicates that halls of
residence, Kingfisher and Forest/Herrick are where students are most likely to get this facility – underlining the popularity of these student enclaves. 35% of those students who will be residing in Storer say their accommodation will have ‘large/spacious rooms/layout’; this percentage is considerably lower than those who will live in halls of residence, Kingfisher and Forest/Herrick which indicates that the poorer quality of the accommodation in Storer is a significant reason for the de-studentification of this area.

Figure 38: Students who will have accommodation with ‘large/spacious rooms/layout’

However, some students who have a smaller accommodation budget are still seeking several main facilities, but will ‘pass’ on some of the others. Accommodation providers suggest, in Chapter 5, that there is an increasing movement towards value for money in Loughborough and student respondents believe that the more you pay, the more you get:

“I mean, some of those things [facilities and amenities listed] are a bit more special, you know, like your ensuite and stuff, not everyone is going to be able to afford that” [ID 71].

“I couldn’t afford the biggest room with the ensuite bathroom… if you have the money then you can definitely get better things” [ID 187].
This trend towards more luxurious student living has been noted in national media (Bawden 2009; Paton 2009; Kollewwe 2010; Shah 2010). These state that high-profile luxury student studios, with wi-fi, a flat-screen TV and a dishwasher is part of a new trend in university living. A major theme noticed in interviews with key student accommodation providers in Loughborough is the increased expectations students have for their accommodation. Some amenities and services are no longer considered ‘optional’, rather they are becoming standard within the student accommodation market. This drive to satisfy students’ high demands can be best observed in the incorporation of facilities such as plasma screen TVs and gym membership packages into the student accommodation residential experience in Loughborough. As Chan et al. (2010: ix) state, “the demand for increased expectations for accommodation is present. Students are expecting more amenities and services through their accommodation providers which all contribute to their overall experience at a residential facility”. All student expectations need to be met or accommodation will be rejected:

“I don’t think anyone would choose a place that hasn’t got internet, TV, a washing machine, would they?” [ID 211].

Christie et al. (2002: 219) state that “conditions tolerated in the private rented sector were sometimes far from ideal, and this was linked both to low expectations about student housing and to students’ relative inexperience in the housing market”. However, the Loughborough experience in 2012 is perceived – by both students themselves and accommodation providers – to contradict Christie et al.’s (2002) statement: accommodation conditions, quality and facilities have improved, and continue to do so. Students are coming to expect high quality accommodation, a good service-led approach from operators, and ideally an all-inclusive rent to minimise any additional risk associated with fluctuating utility prices.

In Chapter 5 it was established by interviewees that the Loughborough student accommodation market is now oversupplied, and this research establishes a link with Rugg et al.'s (2000: vii) assertion that “standards tended to reflect the supply of properties for rental: where oversupply was evident, students enjoyed better standards”. An increase in student expectations and the current situation of oversupply means that accommodation providers accept that upgrading and
improving their accommodation is essential in order to achieve success in a time of increased competition for student tenants.

6.4 Residential location for next academic year

This section explores the range of motives for the student influx to specific areas of Loughborough, as reported by respondents when asked for their residential location next academic year and what they see as the three main attractions of this residential location. The aim was also to consider respondents' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of residential locations for student accommodation in Loughborough, by being asked to nominate three places or locations in which they did not/would not consider living.

6.4.1 Motivations for moving to, and perceptions of, residential location

The residential location students will be living in next academic year is shown in Figure 39: halls of residence will accommodate 15% of students, whilst 50% of respondents will be residing in the traditional Storer and Burleigh areas of the town. The Kingfisher and Forest/Herrick areas of Loughborough are becoming increasingly popular, whilst PBSA will house just 5% of students surveyed.

Figure 39: Students’ residential location for 2012/13
Location is important as it is crucial in the formation of new student enclaves – students’ desire for the perfect location drives both studentification in some areas and destudentification in others. Areas that are seen as ‘the place to be’ by students will be the first to fill (or studentify) whilst those ‘not in the right area’ will show signs of destudentification (although some students are still prepared to live in these areas in order to save money due to the cheaper rent levels):

“We wanted to be in the best area, an area with a reputation as a student place … everyone wants to live in the best and most popular houses” [ID 188].

“There was no way I was going to even consider somewhere too far from University. Location is really really important … I didn’t want to be stuck really far away in a house not in the right area” [ID 130].

Accommodation providers clearly perceive that location is crucial in being able to let accommodation successfully to students. Proximity to university, entertainments, and freedom from regulation are important factors (Bline housing report 2008) as are convenience and location. Students, noted by Chan et al. (2010: 19) said “that being only 15 minutes from the furthest end of campus was very handy”. Findings from this Loughborough survey support Thomsen and Eikemo’s (2010) similar conclusion that living close to campus had a positive impact on the degree of satisfaction:

“I want to be close to campus, the Union, the library, and at the same time be close enough to town, shops and friends” [ID 198].

6.4.2 Remaining in halls of residence

Remaining in University halls of residence is now a realistic option for students beyond their first year of study, in part due to Loughborough University’s decision to enter into partnership with UPP to develop 1300 new self-catered bed spaces on campus adjacent to the existing ‘student village’ of managed, catered halls. As Hubbard (2009: 1911) noted, it has “helped to relieve pressure on the housing market”, by providing students with further options. However, although this new campus development has, in one respect “helped to relieve pressure” (from the student perspective), in other ways it has had a profound and on-going impact on Loughborough – oversupply of accommodation, competition between providers,
standards of properties, rental rates and, above all, colonisation of new areas and
destudentification of the old are all direct consequences of this “pressure”.

The hassle-free way of life for students who choose to live in this new campus
development, with its prime location and quality accommodation, makes staying in
halls a popular choice for students:

“By staying in halls you save all the hassle of finding a house, sorting out your
internet and stuff … you know exactly what you’re getting with halls” [ID 222].

“The best thing about halls is the fact you are smack bang in the middle of
campus, you know. I think that is the main reason for choosing to live here for
another year … for convenience” [ID 224].

An examination of the survey findings to identify the characteristics of students who
reside in halls beyond their first year produces the following data: students who have
been residing in on-campus catered halls are more likely to live in halls beyond their
first year (49%): students from Hazelrigg-Rutland (22%), David Collett (20%), Cayley
(19%), Royce (18%), Elyvn Richards (18%) and Towers (18%) will remain living in
halls next academic year. Crucially, all these halls are on-campus, all are in the
’sstudent village (apart from Towers), all are catered (apart from Hazelrigg-Rutland)
and many of them have been recently built or renovated. Therefore, the type of
student likely to remain living in halls is one who enjoys the catered lifestyle, a
modern hall and the prime central location offered by campus accommodation.

Since only 5% of all international students will remain living in halls of residence
beyond their first year, halls are dominated by UK-students. Halls are most popular
with students from East Anglia (22%), the South West (22%), and the North West
(19%); however, halls are popular with students from all over the country, and show
no dominance of any one geographical area. In reference to how they selected
accommodation for the following year, approximately one third (31%) of students
remaining in halls said they sought advice from students in the year(s) above: it
seems likely that ‘word of mouth’ can influence students to remain in halls. It may be
that older students have said, after themselves experiencing the private sector, that
the halls experience is the best, and this has encouraged the current year group to
remain in halls.
6.4.3 Storer and Burleigh

The main reasons students would consider living in the Storer area of the town is shown in Figure 40: being ‘close to campus’ and ‘close to town’ are the main factors for residing here for over half of students, suggesting that the area’s prime location is the biggest attraction. The advantages of the area were claimed to be its location “half way between town and the Union” and “fifteen minutes from lectures” and being home to a range of local facilities “a corner shop and a pub” [ID 244]. But above all else, it was seen as a ‘studenty’ area:

“The Golden Triangle was my first choice because it is the main student area if you know what I mean, most people live there” [ID 244].

“We are going to be living in Golden Triangle. That’s the place we wanted just because it’s pretty close to campus and town, and the house is pretty reasonable” [ID 133].

![Main reason for considering living in Storer (% n = 71)](image)

Figure 40: The main reasons students would consider residing in Storer

The poor quality of the accommodation in Storer is a reason why some students choose not to move to the area, with the terraced properties seen as a less attractive proposition in comparison to the higher-quality halls, blocks and other housing enclaves in the town:
“I didn’t want to live in the Golden Triangle. We had a look at a couple of houses on … Paget Street was one of them. I didn’t like the terrace thing, and the fact that one of the rooms was basically downstairs on the front of the house. It didn’t seem much like a home … the kitchen was really small and so were a couple of the bedrooms” [ID 234].

The low rental price of the accommodation in the Storer area was a factor in the decision of some students, suggesting that Storer terraces (and to a lesser extent, Burleigh) provide some of the cheapest student accommodation on the market and this attracts some:

“I thought accommodation would be expensive but we saw one for £45 a week. It [Storer] is probably one of the cheapest places, because you can get a house for, like, £65 a week, with all the bills … that’s why I went for it in the end” [ID 159].

Rugg et al. (2000: 29) state that where property was in limited supply there was greater evidence of students being willing to live in poorer standard accommodation in order to save money. They highlight in their study how, for example, some properties at the centre of St Andrews were not in the best condition but there were always student households willing to accept low quality in order to be close to the University. This may be the reason why students still continue to reside in the Storer and Burleigh areas of Loughborough. In short, for these students the location, half-way between campus and town, outweighs the poorer quality of the accommodation. However, this favourable location may well be at a cheaper price, but the lack of the quality which is provided in other housing areas (Kingfisher, Forest/Herrick), PBSA and campus may be a major contribution to the destudentification of the area. As Glock and Häussermann (2004: 923) state, “it is quite likely that individual preferences are becoming more central … Only the most attractive locations and neighbourhoods will have a chance to succeed in this competition”. In Loughborough only the most attractive locations will win student approval, but there is also competition between landlords and providers to come up with the most ‘attractive’ offers.

Analysis of the types of students who will reside in the Storer and Burleigh area of Loughborough shows: 40% of students from Cayley, 33% from Falkner Eggington and 29% from Butler Court and Harry French will be living in Storer and Burleigh next
academic year. Students will therefore be coming from both on and off campus halls, however, Cayley is the only one located in the ‘student village’. It is significant, perhaps, that these are some of the cheapest halls – for example, a standard room in Falkner Eggington costs £3264.30 for a 39-week let, one of the cheapest hall options available (2012/13 academic year prices). Students who will live in Storer have generally been living in the cheaper halls and have lower accommodation expectations: for example, only 20% who will live in Storer considered an ensuite ‘essential’, in contrast to the 81% in Kingfisher who consider this facility ‘essential’. There are indications that students who will move to this area have more limited budgets (36% of students who said their budget was £70-£79 will be living in Storer next year):

“The house I’ve got [in Storer] is cheap … I didn’t want to pay loads and loads on accommodation, that’s why I went for it” [ID 72].

Storer is the chosen area for students across the UK, since Scotland (67%), London (35%), the West Midlands (33%), the North West (31%) and the East Midlands (30%) will all be represented in Storer next year. 25% of students said the main reason for choosing Storer is the reputation of it as a ‘student’ area. However, only 14% of international students will be living in Storer next year, suggesting it is very much a UK-student enclave, while many international students do not consider it suitable:

“I did not want to live in those houses [Storer] because that is where the noisy English students all go to live” [ID 52].

Nearly half (45%) of all students who waited until February to search for their accommodation will be living in Storer next academic year. There is clear evidence of oversupply of accommodation in this area (see Chapter 5) so that students who find they are unable to secure suitable accommodation elsewhere (Kingfisher for example), know they will always manage to find a house/room in Storer – as a second or last choice. 37% of students who will live in Storer did not start searching until January or later, which contrasts with students in Kingfisher, who had all started searching in December or earlier. If a high-quality of accommodation is required then students need to move quickly; if they are happy to accept a more basic standard then they can afford to be more relaxed about the entire accommodation-seeking process.
6.4.4 Kingfisher and Forest/Herrick

In comparison to Storer and Burleigh, the high-level of quality accommodation the houses in Kingfisher provide was the main reason for 18% of students who will be moving to this area:

“When we went to view a house I was really surprised by how nice it is. Like, it had a big lounge with a massive TV, the bathroom was really modern, the kitchen had a huge fridge ... I wasn't really expecting you'd be able to find houses like that in Loughborough. So that sort of made the decision really, I would say that houses are better, you know, in terms of quality, than halls” [ID 189].

Since 57% of students who will be residing in Kingfisher next year have been living in on-campus catered halls, it appears that these students are ones who want everything provided for them. If students want “hassle-free living” (Hubbard 2009: 1917) with everything provided as they have experienced in halls of residence, then they will hope to continue the cosseted, ‘everything done for them’ lifestyle and believe Kingfisher houses can provide this. It is interesting that a significant proportion of students who will be living in Kingfisher next year are locating from some of the most expensive halls of residence: 18% of students who have been living in Elvyn Richards (new catered), 17% from Royce (traditional catered) and 13% from Robert Bakewell (new self-catered) will live in Kingfisher next year. Many of these are catered, or new-self-catered halls, all located in the ‘student village’ area of campus – a room in Elvyn Richards, for example, will cost £5986.00 per annum in 2012/13. It appears that this group of students has been paying highly for good hall accommodation and are prepared to continue to pay for the best quality accommodation when they move off-campus. All students in Kingfisher started searching for accommodation in December or earlier, which underlines its premium status and popularity. Every student who will live in Kingfisher sought advice from fellow students (either in the same year group, or the year(s) above). The notion that Kingfisher is the ‘place to be’ has spread through word of mouth and student recommendations have only served to enhance the area’s reputation.

The survey shows that students from the South East (22%) and London (14%) will be living in Kingfisher next academic year; no students from Yorkshire/Humber or the
North East will be living there from this cohort. 67% of all students living in Kingfisher will have parental/family support in paying for all (or a proportion of) their rent. This research has confirmed that the desirability of Kingfisher means that no rental negotiations occur in this area which suggests the students who go to live there (or their families) have a high disposable income. Kingfisher appears to be a London/South East enclave. What is also interesting to note, however, is that none of the international students who participated in this survey will be living in Kingfisher next year, this is despite the assumption that because they pay high fees, high-cost accommodation is less of an issue.

The location of the Kingfisher Estate and the reputation of the area as a student enclave was an attraction for 29% of students, suggesting it is building a reputation as offering a similar ‘bubble’ experience to campus:

“I really wanted to live in Kingfisher. Everyone says the houses there are the best in Loughborough. I mean, they are new-builds, they’ve got huge bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchens, and it is right across the road from campus. And, well, it’s just really cool to be able to say “I’m going to be living there next year”, like everyone thinks it’s a really cool place, you know” [ID 96].

“Kingfisher is the place everyone wants to live. I mean, it is on the more expensive end of it, but the houses are probably the best you’ll find because they are new and have stuff like big fridges and more space to park than the Golden Triangle” [ID 230].

Kingfisher’s reputation as ‘the place to live’ for students in Loughborough means students are prepared to pay a premium to secure housing in this location, especially as this is a premier housing area. Similarly, in Forest/Herrick, students are seeking a prime location, but also high-quality accommodation:

“I wanted somewhere to park my car, and a lot of the student places don’t have that, you know. We’ve got a house on Forest Road which is perfect because it’s only about 5 minutes from campus, 5 minutes from town and we’ve got a driveway” [ID 124].

The movement of students to Kingfisher and Forest/Herrick housing from the old Storer terraces identified by this research is a key finding, documenting how the patterns of student geographies see a shift from the old terrace to newer, much larger, ‘family’ homes for students. Munro and Livingston (2011: 1683) note a similar
movement in Nottingham where “large semi-detached and detached houses were being used, in what had been high-quality, middle-class neighbourhoods”. Student concerns about safety and parking (for their cars) in the Golden Triangle appears to be encouraging some students to pay ‘a little more’ to live in areas rapidly gathering a ‘studenty’ ambience but offering better standards of fixtures, fittings, services and overall quality of living. It may be that agents and landlords prefigure these choices by steering students towards the most profitable and lucrative locations for them.

21% of international students will be living in Forest/Herrick next year, suggesting the high-level of quality is important also for these students. Furthermore, the area is not a UK student enclave in the same way as Storer and Burleigh. Students who will reside in Forest/Herrick have specific requirements: 80% of students in Forest/Herrick will have off-road parking, showing that parking is a high-priority for this student group, recognised by landlords who are investing in this area. A high number (72% of all students living in Forest/Herrick compared to 67% in Kingfisher) said they will have parental/family support in paying for all (or a proportion of) their rent. In the same way that students who will live in Kingfisher did not negotiate on rent, the same applies here, emphasising that this is a highly desirable location and that students proposing to move there have a high disposable income, something of which landlords are aware.

25% of students who have been living in David Collett will live in Forest/Herrick next year: David Collett is one of the closest halls to the engineering buildings, and this indicates that many of these students move to the Forest/Herrick area to retain close proximity to the buildings where their courses take place. Forest/Herrick has a reputation for being something of an engineering-student enclave, and shows evidence of studentifying.

6.4.5 Purpose-built student accommodation

Privately managed new-build developments aimed at students are now common in most UK university towns, and Loughborough is no different, but the effect they have had on student housing and their success as a possible solution to the overconcentration of student accommodation in HMOs has not been measured previously. In this context, the study of student accommodation choices in
Loughborough provides insight into the limited success of PBSA. These have little appeal for students who want to be within close proximity to campus; a point confirmed by 0% of students stating they thought the location was ideal. However, it is clear that for others these blocks now constitute a credible alternative to living in HMOs, since they are seen to combine the best of independent living with a communal ‘student’ vibe:

“I’m really looking forward to living there [a PBSA block] next year. It will be like living in halls again, but much closer to town and it will be a bit more of a grown up way of living” [ID 33].

Stevenson and Askham (2011) state that PBSA in Sheffield has increased the standards of accommodation in the housing sector to such an extent that sub-standard properties are becoming unlettable and the landlords of these properties are consequently being forced out of the student housing market. Similarly, the role that PBSA in Loughborough has played in increasing the quality of facilities in meeting students’ expectations, should not be underestimated. In Loughborough, there is also evidence that properties that do not meet these expectations are certainly becoming more difficult to let.

Overseas students tend to be particularly drawn to centrally located, high-end accommodation with good security. Shah (2010) highlights the demands from international students to be much higher than that of home students, adding that the choice of PBSA is influenced by their parents who want assurance that their offspring will be taken care of whilst studying in a foreign country:

“There everything will be provided [in a block]. You get much more than you would in halls or in a house. They look after everything for you” [ID 29].

42% of all students who will reside in PBSA are international students. This may be due to non-UK students generally demanding higher, premium quality accommodation (King Sturge 2008), which means PBSA blocks in the town are increasingly building a reputation as an international student enclave where UK students do not want to be based:

“For me, there were only ever two options: I was either going to live in a house, which was my first choice, or I’d have another year in halls, that was my backup
I guess … I don’t know anyone that is going to be living in a student block, from what I hear, they are full of Chinese students” [ID 268].

The Loughborough experience appears to support the view that international students tend to ‘self-segregate’ and to create exclusive geographies (Chatterton 1999), as this comment by a Chinese student emphasises:

“I will live in a block next year because I have a lot of friends who will be living there too” [ID 100].

There also appears to be a perception amongst students that going into PBSA in their second year is not the ‘done thing’, and that this type of living is more popular with international or postgraduate students:

“I just think that in your second year you need to live in a house … I know they [PBSA] are popular with a lot of the foreign students and postgrads” [ID 102].

21% of UK students said PBSA would be one of the places they would not consider living in. It is perceived by these students that PBSA offers a similar experience to halls – particularly in terms of layout – but cannot compete in terms of location or the unique hall atmosphere:

“It [PBSA] is a lot like halls, they have the same kind of rooms all coming off a corridor … they are similar, but campus has the hall spirit” [ID 75].

“They are very quiet and don’t have the same atmosphere as halls. I don’t think they are very social places … If you like halls, then you’d stay in halls. If you didn’t like halls, then you wouldn’t live in a block” [ID 204].

“They [halls of residence and PBSA] are pretty much the same, but halls have the benefit of being on campus” [ID 57].

Of the students that will reside in this type of accommodation next year, the highest number have been living in David Collett (13%) – a catered hall - and Hazelrigg-Rutland (11%) – a newly-built hall – suggesting the type of student attracted to PBSA is seeking a high-level of accommodation where everything is provided. An interesting statistic is that 92% of students who will be living in PBSA used the internet to search for accommodation – these websites are the main ways the providers attract and secure student tenants.
The all-inclusive feature of PBSA has forced certain landlords either into adopting all inclusive rents themselves or at least considering the proposition in order to keep up with competition within the market (Stevenson and Askham 2011). One of the perceived negatives of PBSA is the high cost in comparison to other forms of accommodation in the town:

“It is more expensive than most of the housing ... I didn’t consider it for that reason” [ID 255].

This research shows that cost is a major factor that students consider when making a decision about their accommodation, coupled with the desire for high-quality living spaces. Students with higher disposable income (particularly students with financial backing from their family/parents) are more likely to live in Kingfisher, Forest/Herrick or PBSA. Those students with a tighter budget, or limited funds, tend to go and live in a house in Storer and Burleigh. The location of the accommodation is clearly crucial, as student responses emphasise. In their search for accommodation, cost, quality and location are the key considerations for students, and these three factors are evident in driving the studentification and destudentification taking place in certain enclaves of the town.

6.5 Accommodation search process

This section explores how and when students go about finding accommodation. As Figure 41 shows, the majority of students begin searching for accommodation in November/December and sign up between November and January. What is apparent is that students sign up for accommodation in popular areas (particularly Kingfisher and Forest/Herrick) early as there is a premium in this type of accommodation. On the other hand, traditional and plentiful Storer and Burleigh housing still has a considerable percentage of students signing up in February and March.
6.5.1 Reputation, ‘word of mouth’ and the role of the Students’ Union

The most common method used by students to search for accommodation was to seek advice from students in the same year group (87%), but also from students in the year(s) above (33%) who have experience of the private-rented sector. This was a particularly significant factor in the decision of students to reside in Storer next year:

“Yeah, some of the guys I play basketball with who are second years said that most of the agents are really desperate to get students to sign up because there’s too much student housing now, and that I should make sure I don’t rush into getting a house, but have a good look around and maybe ask for some money off or for them to provide something extra in the price, you know. They said that they didn’t realise that when they were first years, and they wished they had because they know you can get a really good deal if you know how to play it” [ID 252].

This shows the importance of ‘word of mouth’ in shaping and influencing student decisions, and thereby impacting on the residential patterns in Loughborough. Generally, students in Loughborough appear to be ‘getting what they want’, and this may be due to increased levels of communication between students who are
becoming more knowledgeable about the Loughborough accommodation market. 19% of all students talked about the reputation of an area as being the main reason for choosing to live there, often because they had been given recommendations on 'student areas' by other students:

“Just by talking to other students you can find out where are the best places to live, where are the big student areas, where are the places to steer clear of, which landlords are good or bad” [ID 131].

Students also spoke of the role of online searching (65%) to seek accommodation. Many agents and providers now use Facebook and Twitter pages to reach the student population. An increase in online advertising has streamlined the process of letting accommodation to students and accommodation providers increasingly attempt to shape the residential patterns of student living through various marketing devices to attract students (free gifts, financial incentives) advertised on their websites to try to secure potential tenants:

“They [providers] try and tempt you with things on their websites like “£100 Amazon voucher when you book” and “get a free cleaner when you book as a group”” [ID 109].

However, Loughborough University (particularly the Students’ Union) encourages students to “Stop. Wait. Look: don’t rush into renting” (Figure 42). Loughborough University has power and influence to shape the student accommodation market and student living patterns through the University advertisement service (Loughborough Student Pad www.lborostudentpad.co.uk), a University-approved landlord accreditation scheme for the private rented sector, and the University run ‘Housing Bazaar’. The following quotation suggests that the role of the Students’ Union is important in pushing students to gain knowledge of the accommodation market – giving students agency and power and exerting this on the market:

“The Housing Bazaar was a really good place to start looking for accommodation. Obviously, the uni are only going to let good landlords come to advertise … the Students’ Union really seem to care about students” [ID 126].

The landlord accreditation scheme gives the University the opportunity to exert control over the standards of accommodation and landlords. A landlord who fails to meet the requirements of the accreditation scheme will be disadvantaged, since his
property (or properties) will not appear on any University-approved housing lists, and will not be backed by any University-based advertising. This is a method by which the University tries to keep some control over the ‘student experience’ or the ‘Loughborough experience’ even when the students leave halls of residence for the private-sector: the University’s influence extends beyond the campus boundaries.

The findings of this student survey support the contention that students are prepared to pay ‘above the odds’ if they find the right house (Hubbard 2009: 1917), but in contrast to Hubbard’s reference to students’ “ignorance of the options available and making somewhat snap decisions about housing”, the Loughborough students interviewed were knowledgeable about local accommodation and careful when making their selection, paying close attention to the quality and location and trying to ensure they received value for their money. Students in 2012 are operating within a different market from that of 2009, because with the development of PBSA in the town and the construction and refurbishment of halls of residence, there has been a shift from restricted choices to a situation of oversupply of student accommodation.

6.6 Summary

This concluding section synthesises the key findings outlined in this chapter regarding the role of students in the unfolding processes of studentification and
Destudentification; these findings have been gleaned from the survey responses of students living in halls of residence at Loughborough University. It is important to note at this juncture that the respondent sample as a whole allows only the needs, motivations and preferences of a distinct cohort of students to be explored.

These findings show conclusively that students have clear expectations about how and where they wish to live, filling the void identified by Hubbard (2009) who points out that there has been very little investigation into the considerations behind student accommodation decisions. The experiences recounted by students show that the description by Chatterton (2010) of how students used to live in the past is certainly not valid today; respondents of this survey, even those who have a restricted budget, will not be “tolerating” the poor-quality living conditions to which Chatterton (2010) referred:

“I am reminded by a friend that student accommodation is referred to as digs as it reflected the fact that students used to literally dig down and spend a few years at university tolerating substandard accommodation in a subterranean world, looking forward to a brighter future” (Chatterton 2010: 509).

The shifting residential geographies of students in Loughborough indicate that changing student expectations (in terms of the quality of accommodation, amenities, location and price) are influential factors in shaping the market. Students have become ‘educated’ and empowered in the accommodation market: they have high expectations and a clear view of how to achieve them. As a result of this ‘student power’, accommodation providers must respond to student demands, as some of them are aware:

“When I first came into the market, the landlords were in demand, good landlords were in demand, there weren’t many student properties, now it’s the other way round, the students are in demand, they’re demanding, we’re giving” [Interview with Landlord 2].

Students surveyed in this research are conscious they are in a position where they can often negotiate the rent they will pay, or broker other deals with providers who need to respond to this student-led demand for service. This research has established that in Loughborough the accommodation market is oversupplied and competitive.
The development of PBSA is highly significant in raising the quality of accommodation so that what once was ‘luxury’ has become ‘standard’ (Hubbard 2009), although University halls of residence (particularly the new developments) are preferred by students; this is further confirmation of student agency, since the university authorities’ recent extensive building programme targets the high standards of accommodation students now require. Accommodation providers perceive students as customers, whose demands they have to meet if they are to maximise profits: the commodification of studenthood, as discussed by Chatterton (2010: 509) suggests that students now represent “opportunities for profit for both local businesses and universities”. This explains the drive by providers to upgrade the quality of the accommodation they offer: the university authorities by refurbishing old, or building new, halls of residence; private developers by the construction of PBSA; and private landlords and agents by attempting either to modernise existing stock, or investing in larger and luxurious properties. One example of this investment is the landlords who are taking the initiative to push the studentification frontier to new areas (such as Kingfisher and Forest/Herrick).

In summary, the proliferation of high-quality accommodation for the student market which gives students a wide choice has led to an oversupply, which supports Bramley’s (1998: 12) assertion that “a powerful underlying influence on potential abandonment must be the underlying supply and demand situation in the local housing system”. The signs that students are beginning to desert the traditional terraces of Storer and Burleigh are explained by the ease with which housing of the superior quality they demand can be found in a more desirable location elsewhere. Students’ preferences and requirements are shaping the accommodation market and these are themselves, in part at least, shaped by the University’s construction of a lifestyle which provides the total ‘student experience’. The result is to cause destudentification in once densely-populated student enclaves, where the majority of properties cannot provide (or be adapted to provide) the high-quality or luxury that students have come to expect.

This research shows the power of the student is a key factor in destudentification. Students have “learnt to be more discerning consumers” (Christie et al. 2002: 223) and this discernment equips them to wield the ‘power’ they now hold in the
accommodation market. The survey reveals that students are seeking the total ‘student experience’ (not just an academic qualification) and that accommodation plays an important role in forming this overall experience, an essential part of which is the sense of being in a discrete student world or being within a ‘bubble’, which supports Chatterton’s (2010: 513) view that students are “chasing the same social withdrawal and cultural exclusivities that define the urban middle classes”. These “exclusivities” are sought (and found) in halls of residence and on the Kingfisher Estate, which has been likened to a mini-campus. Areas which do not so easily lend themselves to the creation of social and cultural enclaves, such as Storer and Burleigh, are, as a result, showing signs of destudentification. The underlying inference from Smith and Holt’s (2007) analysis of student populations is that student enclaves appear to be shaped and controlled by the providers in the student accommodation market:

“The concentrations of student populations have been intensified through the manufacture of ‘student areas’ by private and public sector institutions (including, property developers, investors and financiers, universities, local government, retail and leisure consortia, and the media), and the intentional gatekeeping strategies of letting and estate agents” (Smith and Holt 2007: 148).

However, the findings of this survey suggest the importance of student agency. Students are not passive recipients of an environment manufactured for them by providers. They are informed consumers whose preferences and expectations dictate and control the way the student accommodation market evolves and, by implication, the shifting boundaries of the studentification frontier.

Destudentification is therefore an issue of student housing and accommodation, and while landlords, agents and providers play key roles, student agency is paramount. This research establishes that in Loughborough as some areas are studentifying others are destudentifying, and these complex processes are the result of an unspoken understanding between students and landlords. In short, students want the best accommodation to suit their needs while landlords want to make the highest possible returns. It is in the satisfying of the needs of students by accommodation providers that the intricate, inter-related factors that contribute to the ever-changing residential patterns of living by students can be found, meaning that the phenomena of destudentification and studentification co-exist in the context of Loughborough,
exemplifying the dynamism and fluidity of student markets and the importance of student accommodation preferences and choices.
7. Discussion and conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The concept of studentification was coined by Smith (1999) to conceptualise the process by which university towns and cities undergoing major changes as areas become dominated by a large number of private-rented properties occupied by students. When studentification occurs, students have typically clustered in particular areas of a city (Munro et al. 2009), and their high demand for privately rented housing leads to intense spatial concentration (Munro and Livingston 2011) which carries socio-cultural, environmental, and political implications. There has been a proliferation of academic debate about studentification (Smith 2005; Allinson 2006; Hubbard 2008; Sage et al. 2012a), which has generated ongoing discussion about issues of urban change, higher education expansion and student populations; this points to the “definable label of ‘student geographies’” (Smith 2009: 1802). Recently, however, geographers have begun to consider the impacts of universities and students in the “context of wider debates concerning the social, economic, and cultural geographies of urban transformation” (Hubbard 2008: 1903).

Academic research and media interest has focused on the ways in which concentrations of students in parts of university towns and cities have led to changes in the nature of those areas. One of the most significant examinations of the patterns of student residence and its impacts on UK cities, showing that students have become a significant and distinctive element in the residential mix of city populations, was carried out by Munro et al. (2009). This considerable contribution to understandings of contemporary urban change reveals that studentification can have disruptive and damaging effects on the integrity of local neighbourhoods, and draws parallels between student geographies and broader geographies of social conflict. This emphasises the many complexities of the urban transformations brought about by concentrations of students, and supports the contention that “studentification is a leading-edge process of urban change” (Smith 2008: 2546).

More recently, a phenomenon has emerged in university towns and cities which is a distinct interconnected process of urban change that warrants exploration: destudentification. This process was first noted by Smith (2008), but to date there
have been no academic studies of this important aspect of contemporary urban change. This represents an important dimension of the “ongoing story of students and their relationship to urban space” (Chatterton 2010: 510). The high rate of student population transience, density, and segregation as identified by Munro et al. (2009) suggests that the ‘death of studentification’ may occur in some local neighbourhoods. In the context of these developments, this thesis has identified, explored and analysed processes of studentification and destudentification through an examination of the complex geographic patterns within the university town of Loughborough.

In offering some final thoughts, this concluding chapter is divided into five sections. Section 7.2 provides a definition of destudentification and considers the context in which these processes develop. Sections 7.3 and 7.4 unravel the key theoretical and conceptual contributions of the thesis, namely the spatialities and temporalities of studentification, and the roles played by accommodation providers, higher education institutions and the student population in urban change. Section 7.5 suggests possible avenues for further research and exploration. Finally, Section 7.6 provides concluding thoughts arising out of the main findings of the thesis.

7.2 Defining and conceptualising destudentification

This thesis is the first empirical grounding of destudentification, examining the process ‘in situ’. A major contribution of this research is to demonstrate that the concept of destudentification is distinct from studentification and gives rise to different forms of urban change. In its identification and exploration of student depopulation and empty student accommodation in specific areas of Loughborough, this thesis deepens our understandings of destudentification and the interrelated geographies of studentification, abandonment and segregation.

Smith (2008: 2552) identifies destudentification as “the reduction of a student population in a neighbourhood which leads to social (for example, population loss), cultural (for example, closure of retail and other services), economic (for example, devalorisation of property prices) and physical (for example, abandonment of housing) decline”. However, it can be argued that such a description is vague, and does not encompass the complexity of destudentification as identified in this thesis.
In light of this point, a definition of destudentification is presented below, that teases out four major characteristics:

- Student population loss from a previously student-dominated area; resulting in partially-occupied and/or empty accommodation.
- Reduced rental rates, devalued property prices, and landlords withdrawing from/selling/abandoning accommodation.
- Downgrading, deterioration and decline of the urban environment due to student and landlord abandonment.
- Loss of viability/closure of student-oriented services.

This definition, more precise than Smith's (2008) four-tier description, embraces the diversity and complexity identified at the micro-scale in Loughborough. However, as revealed in Chapter 6, the evolving student cultural lifestyle is a fundamental component of destudentification but, clearly, this process is difficult to observe. Destudentification is most obviously identified as student population loss, which is its most important characteristic, but it is difficult to measure the ‘tipping point’ when an area changes irreparably due to this loss, in the same way that Hubbard (2008) notes the problematic nature of a ‘tipping point’ in reference to population gain in studentification. The other three components of the definition above, therefore, assist in establishing the nature and extent of the destudentification of an area. This definition should enable unfolding processes of destudentification to be identified in a variety of urban contexts with differing tenure and socio-cultural profiles, and across a variety of temporal scales. The definition is proffered as a summary of the commonalities recognised across the micro-geographies studied in Loughborough. It is not intended to homogenise the case study sites, however, and should be considered within the context of the key message of the thesis: notably that there is an inherent set of geographies to destudentification, giving rise to complex spatial, economic, physical and socio-cultural expressions. Therefore, one major contribution this thesis makes to the literature is the establishment of a definition of destudentification which encapsulates the complexities and diversities of the processes at local neighbourhood scales.
The main findings of this research identify processes of destudentification occurring in the Storer and Burleigh (‘Golden Triangle’) area of Loughborough. The out-movement of students from the Storer and Burleigh housing stock is highlighted by all interviewed groups, with local established residents stating the student depopulation began gradually in 2008, becoming more rapid since 2010. The analysis of student addresses indicates that there are 1,069 bedspaces across the Storer and Burleigh area without student tenants, with 28% of student HMO bedspaces empty. However, destudentification is more pronounced in Storer than Burleigh: there are 758 empty bedspaces in Storer and 19% of student HMOs in this area are empty, compared to 311 empty bedspaces in Burleigh with 7% of student HMOs empty. This appears to be due to housing in the Storer area being formed of smaller terraced properties. By contrast, Burleigh, with its marginally larger houses and wider roads continues to appeal to a higher number of students. The findings of the student survey support the suggestion that Burleigh is a somewhat more attractive proposition for students than Storer, due to the quality and size of the accommodation in this area. Also, when measured in economic terms, the differences between the areas are apparent: in Storer 47% of students will pay £69 or less per week in rent, whilst in Burleigh 30% of students will pay £69 or less per week. There is devalorisation in both areas (in comparison with Kingfisher, where all students will be paying £70 or more per week) but it is greater in Storer. Therefore, the use of the term ‘the Golden Triangle’ as a ‘catch-all’ phrase to describe Storer and Burleigh is problematic since there are many inherent differences both between, and within, the respective areas. Put simply, in these enclaves micro-geographies exist which academic research needs to analyse if we are to understand more fully the geographies of studentification, destudentification and urban change.

The recognition of an oversupply of student accommodation in the town is a key theme within landlord and letting agent respondent narratives, intimating that it is becoming more difficult to fill housing that is marketed at the student population with student tenants. Importantly, this research identifies the phenomenon of part-empty student HMO. This partial occupancy is interpreted by interviewees as an initial sign of destudentification processes unfolding, a phase that has not been identified or explored in the pre-existing literature of destudentification. It is hypothesised that this phenomenon marks the initial stage - then the abandonment may gather momentum
in depopulating areas. In Storer and Burleigh 44% of student HMOs are suffering already from partial student occupancy. Population loss is not the single indicator of destudentification. However, these findings support Smith’s (2008) belief that student population loss is a crucial factor in determining destudentification.

This research presents evidence from respondents’ reports that the depopulation of students from the Storer and Burleigh area has led to agents and landlords beginning to consider letting to the non-student market, or selling on their property, rather than continuing (and struggling) to find student tenants: an out-movement of students from Storer and Burleigh has produced a burgeoning devalorised housing stock left struggling or empty. The identification of, and the exploration of the causes for, the proliferation of empty and deteriorating housing enriches our understanding of studentification, destudentification and wider processes of urban decline in towns and cities.

Perhaps surprisingly, destudentification processes are also apparent in PBSA in the town centre, where there has been a reduction in student residents. This contradicts previous Loughborough findings, where changing student demands were seen to be “encouraging a move away from houses in multiple occupation towards purpose-built accommodation” (Hubbard 2009: 1903), and where one student block had 98% occupancy in 2007/08. Studies in Leeds (Chatterton 2010) and other UK cities, show that student towers were pre-let before completion. It appears that in Loughborough the relatively expensive prices of PBSA (in comparison to those for traditional student houses) and the town-centre location (being further away from campus than other accommodation) are key reasons for destudentification. Similarly, Chapter 6 indicates that students who seek out and enjoy purpose-built living will choose to stay in the on-campus university halls because they have the same high-level of quality, prime location and atmosphere that PBSA sited in the town cannot replicate. This underlines the importance of the situation of oversupply, the role of the University in its provision of student-preferred accommodation, and the strength of student agency. The limited success of town-centre PBSA in Loughborough raises important questions for policy-makers, as well as broadening our perspective on the connections between student decision-making practices, gentrification and regeneration.
Recently it has been argued that understandings of the processes of destudentification remain underdeveloped (Sage et al. 2012a). This thesis, in its exploration of the conditions, causes and catalysts that lead to destudentification (summarised in Figure 43) provides an important contribution to knowledge of destudentification. The components identified in Figure 43 are general processes which could affect any university town and city, although, clearly, those factors that may lead to destudentification will have different degrees of importance according to variations between university towns and cities. The findings of this thesis point to the oversupply of student accommodation as the most important factor in destudentification: this is the crucial catalyst, while decreasing numbers of students, changing student expectations and lifestyle, and difficult economic conditions combine to form the complex interconnection of factors that lead to, and accelerate, the processes of destudentification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Cultural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Decreasing numbers of students attending university that seek short-term rental accommodation.</td>
<td>• Increasing student accommodation expectations (significantly of quality; price; location).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increasing numbers of students living at home/not residing in the town/city.</td>
<td>• Increased tuition fees, student loans and student debt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased accommodation provision: oversupply of bedspaces following expansion of buy-to-let; proliferation of PBSA; development of on-campus blocks.</td>
<td>• Student awareness, influence and agency (significantly in negotiating accommodation terms).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Physical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of attractive mortgage deals/rates for buy-to-let investment.</td>
<td>• Reduction in renovations/upgrading of accommodation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decreasing ready/accessible finance.</td>
<td>• Falling/devalued property prices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Current financial recession.</td>
<td>• Introduction of legislation restricting/enabling development in specific areas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 43: A model representation of factors that cause destudentification

It is important to realise that processes of destudentification are not a necessary element of studentification, and that destudentification does not always occur in
areas where there is (or has been) studentification; they are not mutually reinforcing patterns of change. The manifestations of these processes are characterised by their dynamic, fluid and kinetic expressions. Indeed, the findings of this thesis suggest more research is needed to explore further the complex connections between them.

The concept of destudentification and the significant impact of its processes is therefore the central finding of this research. The thesis extends our knowledge of the ways in which student population shifts are connected with contemporary processes of urban change. This research has also exposed the absence of engagement with theorisations of destudentification within the growing scholarship on studentification.

7.3 The diverse spatialities and temporalities of studentification

As outlined in the previous section, this conclusion problematises pre-existing academic conceptualisations of studentification (Smith 2005; Smith and Holt 2007; Hubbard 2008), which although mindful of varied processes and outcomes rooted in macro-level contingencies (such as the characteristics of local student populations, the ‘host town’, and the incumbent history of town-gown relations) have generally overlooked the finer-grained intricacies within towns and cities. It can be argued that such conceptualisations have culminated in too rigid a definition of studentification, which runs counter to the complex and fluid processes of studentification and destudentification identified in this thesis.

Notably, these findings support Smith’s (2009: 1795) contention that pre-existing conceptual instruments and theorisations of urban change may be insufficient in terms of advancing understandings of complex contemporary expressions of studentification:

“Arguably, it is possible that many of the pre-existing conceptual tools and theoretical constructs of geography, urban sociology, and other disciplines are inadequate for resolving … complex relationships between contemporary urban restructuring, student populations, and extended systems of higher education that are unravelling”.

Therefore, it is perhaps beneficial to relax, in part, some conceptual constraints of studentification and embrace its unpredictable and irregular expressions identified in different areas of Loughborough. Critically, this should allow the unfolding processes
of studentification to be considered in a variety of urban contexts and across a variety of temporal scales. The findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6 clearly outline a range of spatial and temporal contingencies that have influenced the different ways in which studentification (and destudentification) has unfolded (and continues to unfold) in the case study sites within Loughborough.

Evidently, the temporal dimensions of the processes of studentification have emerged as pivotal in shaping the diverse observed expressions of studentification in the town. Storer and Burleigh residents stated that studentification had become deeply embedded from 2000-2008 (before emergent signs of destudentification in this area). However, destudentification is more pronounced in Storer than Burleigh. This was juxtaposed with emerging community resistance in the Kingfisher Estate in response to rapidly unfolding processes of studentification in this area of the town since 2007, and signs of emergent processes of studentification in Forest/Herrick beginning in 2010. These examples represent a complex interweaving of spatial and temporal specificities, which have resulted in disparate manifestations of urban change with varied outcomes. This provides support for Munro and Livingston's (2011: 13) research findings which charted the ways that “increased numbers of students in cities have created differential geographies, shaped by local contexts and histories”.

The pace of change is also crucial to note. The rapidity of change observed in Kingfisher, and that reported to have unfolded in Storer and Burleigh between 2000-2008, contrasts with the slower, ongoing processes of change reported elsewhere in the town. This emphasises the varying speeds and rhythms of studentification and destudentification, which have concomitantly inspired different community responses (from intense resistance to resignation) and highlights the unpredictability of studentification. Therefore, scale (temporal and spatial) and speed (of change) are of paramount importance in conceptualising, analysing and understanding the complex processes of studentification and destudentification.

It is concluded, based on the empirical findings presented in the preceding chapters, that the diverse expressions of student residence are temporally and socio-spatially uneven across the town. This research has implications for established academic conceptualisations of studentification and destudentification, raising questions about
how successfully these terms capture the diverse and dynamic nuances of contemporary student geographies, and how these concepts link to broader theories of contemporary urban change. Thus, the thesis contributes to the literature by revealing that processes of destudentification and studentification can unfold in concurrent ways, and within and between different areas of a university town.

7.4 The *dramatis personae* in contemporary student geographies

The different roles of accommodation providers, Loughborough University, and the student population have emerged as significant in the unfolding geographies of studentification and destudentification. Interviewees perceive that this form of urban change has been driven by a substantial growth in the student accommodation sector, with an increasing number of landlords, agents, providers and developers operating in the market in Loughborough. These investors have had, and continue to have, a major influence on where investment (and disinvestment) takes place. Whilst studentification is emerging in certain areas (Forest/Herrick), and continues in others (Kingfisher Estate), destudentification processes are occurring concurrently in other parts of Loughborough. However, it is important to reinforce the point that studentification and destudentification are not mutually reinforcing patterns of change. This thesis finds that as accommodation providers invest in an area they ‘milk it for maximum profit’ which encourages further investment from other landlords. Then, when profits begin to decline they disinvest, selling up and abandoning the area. Some providers (namely those private investors and agents who operate as businesses, and have easy access to finance and a comprehensive knowledge of the market), will then seek to invest in a new area to obtain greater profits and easier letting, and the process begins again. When Smith and Holt (2007: 146) discuss the ethos of gentrification they observe that “institutional actors strive for innovative ways to stimulate urban transformations and profit maximisation”. In terms of studentification and destudentification, however, accommodation providers who strive to maximise their profits produce, almost as a side-effect, the stimulation of urban transformations. Accommodation providers have the power to shape and influence the trajectory of studentification, and are catalysts for the shifting spatial imprint, “triggering concurrent processes of studentification and destudentification in different parts of the town” (Hubbard 2009: 1904).
Similarly, the importance of Loughborough University is emphasised in the findings, particularly the impact that an increase in on-campus bed spaces has on student living patterns. Respondents stated that this University development has exacerbated the situation of oversupply. Indeed, off-campus providers clearly perceive that many students are choosing to live on campus, rather than renting a house in the town, so creating vacancies in the traditional student lets of Storer and Burleigh. Interestingly, there is also a perception that University accommodation expansion has had a more significant impact on the PBSA in the town than on the traditional housing market because of the similarity between such PBSA in the town centre and the on-campus blocks. Clearly, Loughborough University has always played an important role in the provision of student accommodation. However, as the wide variety of high-quality, ideally-located on-campus student accommodation provides the total 'student experience' which, as the student survey makes clear, is what students want, the desirability of this accommodation is having a far-reaching impact on the shaping of student residential geographies in the town. As a result, the University is perceived by other providers as a formidable competitor, exerting a dominant influence over the formation and evolution of student living patterns.

Another key finding of this thesis is that the agency of students is paramount in studentification and destudentification processes. Student accommodation preferences have been shown to be changing, and thus transforming the distribution of students across Loughborough. The decreasing number of students residing in Storer and Burleigh HMO is partly due to the ease with which those students who seek it, can find housing of the superior quality they demand in a more desirable location elsewhere, and partly due to their willingness to pay higher prices for their accommodation (such as remaining in newly-developed halls of residence on campus, or moving to modern/larger/luxurious housing areas such as Kingfisher and Forest/Herrick). Respondents to the student survey make it clear that the quality of accommodation, amenities, location and price play important roles in their accommodation decisions: the accommodation market is shaped by students’ preferences and requirements, thereby causing destudentification in once densely-populated student enclaves. The stereotypical picture of how students used to live, “tolerating substandard accommodation” (Chatterton 2010: 509) bears no relation to the current expectations or experiences of students. However, a gap in the
scholarship of studentification has been identified with the statement that “very little has been written about how students weigh up the merits of different forms of accommodation” (Hubbard 2009: 1912). A major contribution of this research, then, is that it fills this gap, and its findings show conclusively that students are empowered in this market, and accommodation providers need to respond to student demands. It is clear that this exploration of student preferences and expectations makes a unique contribution to our knowledge of studentification, destudentification and residential decision-making practices.

Although the development of PBSA has been perceived as highly significant in raising the quality of accommodation so that what once was ‘luxury’ has become ‘standard’ (Hubbard 2009), University halls of residence (particularly the new developments) are preferred by students. This raises the question of student agency: the University authorities’ recent provision of high-quality accommodation may be seen as a response to student requirements; however, it could be perceived that as the University constructs a lifestyle to provide the ‘student experience’, it thus both generates and feeds a demand. It is important to note Chatterton’s (2010: 509) view that students are seen to represent “opportunities for profit for both local businesses and universities”. Students have become customers or clients whom accommodation providers serve. Providers have found it necessary to upgrade the quality of the accommodation they offer, in some cases rapidly and effectively, which confirms Munro and Livingston’s (2011: 4) statement that “the efficiency with which the private rented sector responded to the demands of the growing student populations is striking”. The findings of this thesis suggest that students are not passive but have become active and informed consumers whose preferences and expectations play an important role in controlling the development of the student accommodation market, and the shifting boundaries of the ‘studentification frontier’.

This thesis has unpacked the roles played in the processes of studentification and destudentification by accommodation providers, Loughborough University and the student population. Landlords, agents and providers play key parts in destudentification, but the power of the student body is shown to be paramount. This thesis clearly exposes the intricate, inter-related factors that contribute to the ever-changing residential patterns of living by students. Destudentification and
studentification co-exist in the context of Loughborough, exemplifying the dynamism and fluidity of student markets and the importance of student accommodation preferences and choices.

7.5  Extending the empirical foci of studies of urban change

The key contributions of this thesis have emerged from the sustained observation of the case study sites over a period of three years, enabling the processes of studentification and destudentification to be scrutinised as they unfold. It is concluded that a more broad-brush methodology would have masked the small-scale complexities observed, and a ‘snapshot’ approach to observing the processes and impacts of change would have generated a more superficial analysis, arguably insufficient in terms of conceptualising the volatility and rapidity with which both studentification and destudentification can unfold. This emphasises the value of a fine-grained approach to theorising urban restructuring, as advocated by academics scrutinising processes of gentrification at the micro-scale, such as Freeman (2006), whose methodology was adopted by the researcher to observe processes of urban change ‘in-situ’, underlining its tendency to generate deeper, richer accounts of urban transformation.

A number of interesting themes that clearly merit further research have emerged from the thesis. Unfortunately, it was not possible, due to limited time and resources, to examine more case study sites in the town to a sufficient level of detail. However, undoubtedly an examination of the processes of change unfolding in other Loughborough locations as a result of increasing (or decreasing) student populations would further deepen and embellish the existing analyses. Similarly, it was only possible to survey the needs, motivations and preferences of a distinct cohort of students – an annual survey to gather longitudinal data registering student movements through the accommodation market would improve further the understanding of student decision-making practices as presented in Chapter 6.

In terms of ‘scaling up’ the key findings of the thesis, it would be valuable to explore emergent processes of destudentification outlined earlier in the Chapter within other studentified urban settings in the UK, and those further afield, such as North American, Canadian and Australian College towns and cities, where evidence of
studentification has emerged. In the UK context, the release of 2011 Census data in February 2013 offers the opportunity to examine change in student populations nationally.

7.6 Final reflections

The findings of this research raise crucial questions about how the processes of studentification and destudentification will continue to reshape and reform the urban landscape. Firstly, student depopulation needs to be monitored in order to document more fully the extent and pace of destudentification, whether certain areas will be abandoned altogether by students, or if processes of destudentification can be reversed. In Loughborough, residents interviewed suggested that the out-movement of students from Storer and Burleigh is likely to continue, since students are choosing to remain in halls of residence on campus, or moving to more modern enclaves such as Kingfisher, but the complete abandonment of traditional student-let areas was unlikely. However, residents did display, in line with Munro and Livingston's (2011: 13) analysis of the impacts of students in five UK cities, “some pessimism as to how areas would fare if there were to be a rapid…decline in the demand from students” for terraced accommodation.

Secondly, there is a pressing need to explore the long-term effects of destudentification, particularly if different social groups begin to move into former student HMOs. In the context of Loughborough, interviewees claimed in Section 5.2.5, that DHSS or low-income/benefit dependent groups have already been identified in the Storer and Burleigh area. A major concern expressed by established residents is that the outgoing students may be replaced by less desirable social groups, and Smith (2008: 2552) makes reference to “growing anecdotal evidence of European (A8) migrants moving into the voids in the private rented housing sector in some destudentified neighbourhoods”. If students are replaced by these low-income groups the situation will possibly give rise to new forms of social conflict.

When interviewed, local residents expressed the hope that destudentification will see the return of families who moved out of the area when it became studentified. However, since many landlords have altered properties to suit the student-tenant lifestyle – by converting most rooms into bedrooms for example – these houses are
unlikely to attract (or be adapted to attract) young couples or families, which supports Sage et al.’s (2012a: 600) claim “that the high levels of investment needed to deconvert student HMO to housing suitable for family occupation can discourage the in-movement of families to destudentified areas”. Clearly, in the current economic recession, “high levels of investment” in destudentifying areas is unlikely to occur.

An additional barrier to the regeneration or gentrification of destudentifying neighbourhoods is the stigma attached to them with a lingering reputation as a ‘student ghetto’, meaning other social groups may be reluctant to move into an area which is in danger of possible urban decline, as postulated by Munro and Livingston (2011: 13):

“Some of these areas have suffered severe reputational damage and now contain unattractive houses previously multiply occupied and difficult to convert back, even to low-price owner-occupation. This raises the spectre of quite rapid localised decline, with downward pressure on rent levels, increased vacancies and repossessions and forced sales”.

Therefore, destudentification is seen by some interviewed residents living in Storer and Burleigh as a negative process with negative connotations. This research has shown that with destudentification it is not only the inhabitants of the houses who move away but also the landlords who own the property, in effect a ‘double desertion’. It is not certain that an inevitable result of destudentification is urban blight and decline. However, further investigation into the complex processes of destudentification is needed in order to discover whether a more positive outcome could result.

In the light of this, questions are raised about the roles played in causing processes of destudentification by universities (through the development of campus accommodation), by local councils (through their implementation of accommodation legislation) and by national government (by the increase of tuition fees). It seems that all these groups should consider whether they bear any social and ethical responsibility for destudentification in university towns and cities, and whether explicit policies should be designed to minimise the negative implications of destudentification. Therefore, the feasibility of devising effective forms of action to halt, slow down, or reverse processes of destudentification should be considered, in
the same way that the issue of intervention “where the spectre of studentification hangs in the air” (Smith 2008: 2559) was raised. To reiterate, this thesis emphasises the need for further research to examine the economic, social, physical and political implications of destudentification and to deepen our understanding of its interconnections with wider issues of community cohesion, neighbourhood renewal and future urban developments. It is an interesting conjecture, incidentally, whether destudentification ceases to be destudentification once students have totally abandoned an area: such a phenomenon probably warrants a new term.

The findings of this thesis are timely, given the potentially dramatic changing conditions which are likely to affect the provision of student accommodation in the coming years in university towns and cities. It was noted by interviewees in Section 5.5.3 that the introduction of an Article 4 Direction in Loughborough (introduced in February 2012) and the establishment of £9,000 tuition fees at Loughborough University (from the 2012/13 academic year) would accelerate destudentification processes in some areas, whilst encouraging investment and studentification in others. Smith (2009: 1802) suggests this “would have major ramifications on the geographies of students, and the ways in which large student populations are embroiled in the restructuring of university towns and cities”.

One of the key questions arising from this Loughborough case study is how applicable the findings of the thesis are beyond this location. A significant finding of this thesis is that processes of destudentification are occurring in the town, and since factors such as a growth in PBSA, declining student numbers and increased tuition fees are impacting elsewhere across UK university towns and cities, the findings clearly have a wider relevance. In the international context it must be recognised that if processes of studentification have occurred/are occurring then there is a possibility of destudentification taking hold; it could be that in Europe, Australia and North America, for example, as here in Loughborough, increasing student expectations and a diversification of available accommodation may be catalysts for destudentification. This underlines the valuable and relevant contribution of this thesis in advancing the wider debate.

Finally, an important issue raised by this research is how the major effects of the economic recession will impact on student geographies in the UK. It has been
predicted (Liverpool Victoria Report 20/04/2011) that the current financial situation and higher tuition fees will see decreasing student numbers attending university and living in the town or city. A result may well be the deceleration of studentification processes, since this research has shown that when the supply of student accommodation outweighs the demand, this is the catalyst for destudentification. The student survey underlines that when choosing their accommodation the two most important aspects for students are price and quality. Given this scenario, a polarised market could develop, since higher university fees will inevitably mean higher levels of debt: some students may be prepared to pay a high price for good quality accommodation. They may rationalise that if they are to be in debt, they may as well ignore the size of the debt and enjoy their accommodation experience, whilst others, keen to minimise their debts, will choose to live in more basic (and cheaper) accommodation. This latter group of students may still seek to reside in cheaper traditional terraces, with the result that such areas may not totally destudentify or be abandoned completely, but retain a smaller student population. As yet, the outcome of the raising of tuition fees in the context of the present financial situation is unknown, but this is clearly an area ripe for further research to uncover which types of student accommodation will be popular in this economic scenario: the monitoring of shifting student geographies will extend our knowledge of student-related urban change, which could have major ramifications for future urban developments in university towns and cities.

Therefore, in its presentation of the first empirical findings of processes of destudentification in the university town of Loughborough, the thesis makes a valuable contribution to the literature of student geographies. First, it establishes a definition of destudentification. Second, there is a consideration of the conceptual overlaps between studentification and destudentification, and a contention that whilst studentification is a necessary prerequisite for destudentification, destudentification is not an inevitable outcome of studentification. Third, the empirical findings show that destudentification and studentification can unfold concurrently within different parts of a university town or city. Fourth, the complex relationships and leading causes of destudentification are identified: the balance of supply and demand of student accommodation, and the ways in which accommodation providers, higher education institutions and student populations influence the production of student
accommodation. Therefore, the thesis advances understanding of the complex and diverse relationships between geographies of studentification, destudentification and processes of urban change in university towns and cities.
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Appendix 1

Dear Participant,

I am a postgraduate student at Loughborough University, conducting research on student housing in Loughborough. This research explores the changes in the student-renting market in the town and the patterns of student living.

The interview will be an informal chat about your experiences in the private-rented sector with regards to student housing. The research will form the basis of a PhD thesis and articles/books for academic publication.

All discussions will be treated in strictest confidence and all participants will be anonymised. If preferred, any identifying information disclosed will be removed during transcription. Participants are free to refuse to answer any questions on whatever grounds, without explanation, or stop the interview at any time. Participants also have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, on any grounds, without explanation.

With permission, interviewees will be tape recorded, for the purpose of transcription at a later stage. All data and personal details will be stored securely, and will only be seen by the researcher and the project supervisor. Information that is put onto a computer will be coded so that it is not traceable to interviewees, and can only be accessed by a password. On completion of the project, all participant information will be destroyed (July 2013).

Name (please print): .....................................................................................................

Signed: ............................................................................... Date: ................................

Contact Details:

Researcher: Chloe Kinton, Department of Geography, Martin Hall, Loughborough University, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU, 01509 222797
Email: C.Kinton@lboro.ac.uk

Project Supervisor: Dr. Darren Smith, Department of Geography, Martin Hall Loughborough University, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU, 01509 222745
Email: D.P.Smith@lboro.ac.uk
STUDENT ACCOMMODATION SURVEY 2012

For students that have found accommodation for next academic year (2012/13)

Chloe Kinton, PhD Student
Department of Geography, Loughborough University

I am conducting a survey to assess the different accommodation needs, preferences and expectations of students. The survey will take approximately 5–10 minutes to complete; the data will be collected and treated anonymously and securely (on a password protected computer). No identifiable data will be collected (name or address, for example).

To answer please tick the relevant boxes and, where appropriate, write in any additional information in the spaces provided.
Section A: Experience of living in halls of residence

1. How would you rate the experience of living in University halls of residence (please tick all)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Very Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amenities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layout of rooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of halls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. What have been the 3 best things about living in halls of residence?

1. .......................................................................................................................
2. ............................................................................................................................
3. ............................................................................................................................

3. What have been the 3 most negative things about living in halls of residence?

1. ............................................................................................................................
2. ............................................................................................................................
3. ............................................................................................................................

Section B: Accommodation in the next academic year

4. What was your preference of accommodation for next academic year?

- Remain in University halls of residence [ ]
- Purpose-built student accommodation (private halls) [ ]
- Shared house with other students [ ]
- Shared house with some other students / non-students [ ]
- Reside in / buy your own home [ ]
- Reside in family home [ ]
- Other (please specify): ................................................................. [ ]

5. Why was this your first choice of accommodation for next academic year?

........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
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........................................................................................................................................
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6. What will be your type of accommodation next academic year?

- Remain in University halls of residence (place yet to be confirmed) [ ]
- Purpose-built student accommodation (private halls) [ ]
- Shared house with other students [ ]
- Shared house with some other students / non-students [ ]
- Reside in / buy your own home [ ]
- Reside in family home [ ]
- Other (please specify): ................................................................. [ ]
7. What do you see as the 3 main attractions of this accommodation?

1. ...........................................................................................................................................
2. ...........................................................................................................................................
3. ...........................................................................................................................................

8. Was this your first choice of accommodation for next academic year?

Yes (go to Q.10) [] No []

9. Why did you NOT get your first choice of accommodation for next academic year?

...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................

10. What maximum weekly rent were you prepared to pay to ensure you obtained your first choice of accommodation for next academic year?

£ .................................... per week

11. Which of the following facilities / amenities would you expect to be included in the accommodation cost?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility / Amenities</th>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadband Internet access</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV / Freeview facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky TV package</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games package (eg. X-box)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double bed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuite bathroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing machine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishwasher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumble dryer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American-style fridge freezer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large / spacious rooms / layout</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newly-refurbished / modern style</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double glazing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security (eg. locks, alarm)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden / outside space</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-road parking / designated space</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-road parking / private drive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaner service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Was your first choice of accommodation influenced by previous experience(s) of living in student accommodation?

Yes [] No []

13. Please explain why?

...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................

265
14. What weekly rent will you be paying for accommodation for next academic year?
£ .................................... per week

15. Who will be funding your accommodation costs for next academic year (i.e. yourself, parents)?
...................................................................................................................................................

16. Did you negotiate the cost of your accommodation for next academic year?
Yes [] No (go to Q. 18) [] Don’t know []

17. What type of things did you negotiate?
...................................................................................................................................................
...................................................................................................................................................
...................................................................................................................................................

18. What is included in the cost of your accommodation for next academic year?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broadband Internet access</th>
<th>TV / Freeview facilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sky TV package</td>
<td>Games package (eg. X-box)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double bed</td>
<td>Ensuite bathroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing machine</td>
<td>Dishwasher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumble dryer</td>
<td>Large / spacious rooms / layout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American-style fridge freezer</td>
<td>Newly-refurbished / modern style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double glazing</td>
<td>Security (eg. locks, alarm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden / outside space</td>
<td>On-road parking / designated space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-road parking / private drive</td>
<td>Cleaner service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section C: Residential location

19. Please indicate, in order, the top three places or locations you considered living in during your recent search for accommodation. (please state the street / neighbourhood):

Place/location 1. ………………………………………………………………………
Place/location 2. ………………………………………………………………………
Place/location 3. ………………………………………………………………………

20. Please indicate your reasons for considering each of these locations:

Place/location 1. ………………………………………………………………………
Place/location 2. ………………………………………………………………………
Place/location 3. ………………………………………………………………………

21. Please indicate three places or locations where you did NOT / would NOT consider living. (please state the street / neighbourhood):

Place/location 1. ………………………………………………………………………
Place/location 2. ………………………………………………………………………
Place/location 3. ………………………………………………………………………
22. Please indicate your reasons you would not like to live in each of these locations:

Place/location 1. …………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………

Place/location 2. …………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………

Place/location 3. …………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………

23. What is your residential location for next academic year? (please state the street /
neighbourhood):
……………………………………………………………………………………………………

24. What do you see as the 3 main attractions of this residential location?

1. ………………………………………………………………………………………………………

2. ………………………………………………………………………………………………………

3. ………………………………………………………………………………………………………

25. Was this your first choice of residential location for next academic year?
Yes (go to Q.27) [] No []

26. Why did you NOT obtain your first choice of residential location for next academic year?
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………

Section D: The search process for accommodation

27. When did you start the process of obtaining accommodation for next academic year?

28. When did you sign-up for accommodation for next academic year?

29. What did you use to search for accommodation for next academic year? (Please tick more
than one if appropriate):

University accommodation office [] University housing list []
Private letting agents / estate agents [] Private landlord / provider []
Posters and flyers [] Friends in the same year group []
Friends in the year(s) above [] Internet (e.g. Netlet / social networks) []
Other (please specify): ……………………………………………………………………… []

267
30. What would be your ideal choice of accommodation for years 1 to 3?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>University halls of residence</th>
<th>Purpose-built student accommodation off-campus</th>
<th>Shared rented house with other students</th>
<th>Shared rented house with some other students / non students</th>
<th>Reside in / buy own home</th>
<th>Reside in family home</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, please provide some personal details:

31. What will be your year of study from October 2012:

- Second year [ ]
- Third year [ ]
- Other (please specify): ........................................ [ ]

32. Are you:

- Male [ ]
- Female [ ]

33. Are you:

- UK student [ ]
- International EU [ ]
- International non-EU [ ]

34. What is your non-term time address (town / county):

............................................................................................................................

35. How old are you:

.............................................

36. What is your ethnicity:

- White: British [ ]
- Irish [ ]
- White Other [ ]
- Black or Black British: Caribbean [ ]
- African [ ]
- Black Other [ ]
- Asian or Asian British: Indian [ ]
- Pakistani [ ]
- Bangladeshi [ ]
- Chinese [ ]
- Other Asian [ ]
- Mixed Parentage: White and Black Caribbean [ ]
- White and Black African [ ]
- White and Asian [ ]
- Mixed Other [ ]
- Other Ethnic Background (please specify): ................................................................. [ ]
- Not known [ ]

Thank you very much for your co-operation with this research

This is an on-going research project, and it would be extremely useful to follow-through and carry out some additional research later in the year. If you would not object to being contacted in the future about how your ‘student accommodation experience’ is going, please supply your e-mail address below. As stated at the outset, all responses and subsequent information will be treated in the strictest confidence.

E-mail contact: ..........................................................................................................................

If you have any questions, please contact: C.Kinton@lboro.ac.uk
Appendix 3

Student Survey Research Diary (Notes from Week 1: 13th-17th February):

- Hardly any students about in the mornings (particularly between 9:00am – 11:00am). Some students do not appear to be in Loughborough on Monday mornings or Friday afternoons (possibly travelling to/from a weekend at home/away from University?). Many students seem to be in bed in the mornings (possibly due to a big night out at EQ nightclub on Sunday night, Stupid Tuesday on Tuesday nights, Hey Ewe on Wednesday nights, and Echos/Universal Thursday on Thursday night?).

- Most success at lunchtimes (11:00am – 13:30pm) in catered halls: dining halls a centre of student congregation. Students seem to have more time/lunchtime is a social time.

- Most refusals occur between half-past and the hour (from :30 - :00) with many students saying “I can’t stop, I’m on my way to my lecture” (lectures start on the hour). Best time seems to be from the hour, for half an hour (from :00 - :30) when students are/have returned from that block of lectures and therefore have time to spare. Big student movements occur from :45 - :05 each hour.

- Wednesday seems to be a really busy day: there are no afternoon lectures, sports events are taking place and there seem to be more students around.

- Issues with student survey questions:
  - If students are going to be living on campus/in halls of residence again next year, then Q.7 (“What do you see as the 3 main attractions of this accommodation?”) has already been answered by Q. 2 (“What have been the 3 best things about living in halls of residence?”). Many students who will be living in halls again next year responded to Q.7 by saying “the same reasons as I said before” (namely their answers to Q.2).
  - Many students gave the same reasons for Q.5 (“Why was this your first choice of accommodation for next year?”) as Q.7 (“What do you see as the 3 main attractions of this accommodation?”), often saying “for the same reasons as I said before”.
  - Students seem to misinterpret Q.11 (“which of the following facilities/amenities would you expect to be included in the accommodation cost?”) as “which of following facilities/amenities would you expect to be included in accommodation you would want/rent?” – they seem to perceive this question as what they want in their accommodation rather than what they expect to be included in the cost.
  - A number of students never considered a budget for their accommodation (Q.10), but considered the higher and lower ends of the market average cost and based their decisions on this. Many, therefore, gave a guesstimate as to how much they would have been prepared to pay/would pay in the future.
  - Some students do not know how much they will pay a week (Q.14) because they will be paying termly/monthly, for example – responses, therefore, were approximate.
  - Many students found it hard to remember exactly when they started their search for accommodation for next year (Q.27) so made a guesstimate. Some were also unsure of the date they officially signed up for accommodation next year so made a guesstimate.
Student Survey – Research Diary (week 1)

Monday 13th February
(Day 1) Royce Hall:
  Start @ 09:10am
  3 refusals
  ID 1 @ 09:25am
  3 refusals
  ID 2 @ 10:05am
  2 refusals
  Break @ 10:25am – 10:40am
  2 refusals
  Break @ 10:30am – 11:00am
  1 refusal
  ID 5 @ 12:00 noon
  1 refusal
  ID 6 @ 12:15pm
  1 refusal
  ID 7 @ 12:25pm
  2 refusals
  ID 9 @ 13:10pm
  Break @ 13:30pm – 14:00pm
  2 refusals
  Break @ 13:45pm – 14:30pm
  2 refusals
  ID 10 @ 14:20pm
  2 refusals
  Break @ 15:00pm – 15:20pm
  ID 11 @ 15:30pm
  END @ 16:45pm
  12 responses
  33% response rate

Tuesday 14th February
(Day 2) Faraday Hall:
  Start @ 9:30am
  3 refusals
  ID 13 @ 10:00am
  2 refusals
  Break @ 10:30am – 11:00am
  2 refusal
  ID 14 @ 11:15am
  2 refusals
  ID 15 @ 11:45am
  ID 16 @ 12:05pm
  2 refusals
  ID 17 @ 12:25pm
  ID 18 @ 12:40pm
  1 refusal
  ID 19 @ 13:05pm
  2 refusals
  ID 20 @ 13:20pm
  2 refusals
  Break @ 13:45pm – 14:30pm
  2 refusals
  ID 21 @ 15:00pm
  2 refusals
  ID 22 @ 15:40pm
  3 refusals
  End @ 16:30pm
  10 responses
  32% response rate

Wednesday 15th February
(Day 3) Rutherford Hall:
  Start @ 9:20am
  3 refusals
  ID 23 @ 10:05am
  3 refusals
  Break @ 10:45am – 11:00am
  ID 24 @ 11:05am
  2 refusals
  ID 25 @ 11:30am
  ID 26 @ 11:45am
  ID 27 @ 11:55am
  1 refusal
  ID 28 @ 12:15pm
  ID 29 @ 12:30pm
  ID 30 @ 12:40pm
  2 refusals
  ID 31 @ 13:10pm
  1 refusal
  Break @ 13:45pm – 14:30pm
  1 refusal
  ID 32 @ 14:30pm
  1 refusal
  ID 33 @ 15:00pm
  ID 34 @ 15:20pm
  4 refusals
  ID 35 @ 16:20pm
  3 refusals
  End @ 17:00pm
  13 responses
  37% response rate

Thursday 16th February
(Day 4) Cayley Hall:
  Start @ 9:30am
  2 refusals
  ID 36 @ 10:00am
  2 refusals
  ID 37 @ 10:35
  Break @ 10:50am – 11:15am
  ID 38 @ 11:45am
  2 refusals
  ID 39 @ 12:00 noon
  ID 40 @ 12:30pm
  ID 41 @ 12:45pm
  1 refusal
  Break @ 14:00pm – 14:30pm
  ID 42 @ 13:05pm
  1 refusal
  Break @ 14:30pm – 14:20pm
  1 refusal
  ID 43 @ 14:40pm
  4 refusals
  End @ 16:00pm
  8 responses
  33% response rate

Friday 17th February
(Day 5) Telford Hall:
  Start @ 10:00am
  3 refusals
  ID 44 @ 10:40am
  1 refusals
  ID 45 @ 11:25am
  1 refusal
  ID 46 @ 12:15pm
  1 refusal
  ID 47 @ 12:40pm
  1 refusal
  ID 48 @ 13:05pm
  Break @ 13:30pm – 14:00pm
  3 refusals
  End @ 14:45pm
  5 responses
  33% response rate

Weather: cold (5 degrees), cloudy with some sunshine and patches of sunshine

Week total: 48 responses
Weekly response rate: 33.6% response rate

Weather: cold (6 degrees), cloudy with some sunshine

Weather: cold (8 degrees), cloudy with some sunshine

Weather: cold (7 degrees), cloudy with some sunshine

Weather: cold (8 degrees), cloudy with patches of light drizzle
### Appendix 4

#### XY Street

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>C3 (family or &lt;3)</th>
<th>C4 incl. capacity</th>
<th>Date sold / Change of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 XY St</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 XY St</td>
<td>C3 SARG</td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 XY St</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 XY St</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 XY St</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>&lt;2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 XY St</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 XY St</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>&lt;2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 XY St</td>
<td>C3 SARG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 XY St</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 XY St</td>
<td>C3 SARG</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11 XY St</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>&lt;2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 XY St</td>
<td>C3 landlord</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>13 XY St</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>C3 landlord</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>&lt;2000</td>
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<table>
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<th>23</th>
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<tr>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>69.7%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

C3 to C4  C3 to C3  C4 to C4  C4 to C3