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Housing in multiple occupation and studentification in Johannesburg

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Abstract. Research concerning studentification is growing in importance. The supply of private student accommodation forms part of the wider urban process of studentification which documents changes in the social, economic and cultural fabric of cities. Although scholarly interest concerning the supply of private student accommodation has enjoyed sustained interest in the global North, only limited work is available surrounding the supply and demand for private student accommodation in global South urban centres. In South Africa there has been growing recognition of the impact of the studentification that has accompanied the massification of tertiary education in the post-apartheid period. Using interviews with key stakeholders, suppliers of student accommodation, as well as focus groups with students, this paper explores the supply of houses in multiple occupation and students' perspectives on such properties in Johannesburg, South Africa. One distinctive influence upon the studentification process in South Africa is the impact of the national government funding system which was restructured in order to support the tertiary education of students from previously disadvantaged communities.

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1. Introduction

The term "studentification" entered academic discourse in 2002 when Darren Smith examined the growth and impact of private student housing on the social and physical fabric of the university city of Leeds in the United Kingdom (UK). For Smith (2002, 2005) studentification contributes to changes in local housing markets, a shift in retail and service offerings and impacts on the demographic and socio-cultural composition of neighbourhoods. It has been argued that the process of studentification has been stimulated by a shift to a knowledge-based economy, neoliberalism and the massification of higher education across the UK since the 1980s (Smith, 2002; Hubbard, 2009; Smith and Hubbard, 2014; Brennan and Cochrane, 2019). The growth in student numbers across many British cities has triggered growing demand for privately rented accommodation in areas with proximity to higher education institutions. Studentification has become a key process of demographic and spatial change in British towns and cities (Smith, 2002; 2005; 2009; Smith et al., 2014 Kinton et al., 2018; Mulhearn and Franco, 2018).

Conceptually, studentification forms part of the wider urban process of gentrification (Smith, 2005; Moos et al., 2019). Similar impacts to those in gentrifying areas are recorded. Studentification has the potential to stimulate, increase or inflate the property and rental market (Smith, 2005; Smith and Holt, 2007; Smith and Hubbard, 2014). In addition, it can contribute to the displacement and replacement of permanent and long-term residents. As well as economic activities that do not suit the student market (Sage et al., 2012a, 2012b; Nakazawa, 2017). Further, studentification often contributes to a change in the socio-cultural dynamics of a neighbourhood, with new spaces for leisure and entertainment increasingly catering to a growing student population (Chatterton, 1999, 2000, 2010; Sage et al., 2013). Lastly, and in contrast to general debates on gentrification, the process of studentification can lead to the physical downgrading and aesthetic decline of urban spaces (Smith, 2002, 2005; Hubbard, 2008, 2009).

Studentification is attracting a growing scholarly literature. Currently, the majority of research attention relates to the United Kingdom's experience (see Smith, 2005, 2008, 2009; Smith and Holt, 2007; Hubbard, 2008, 2009; Munro et al., 2009; Sage et al., 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Smith and Hubbard, 2014; Smith et al., 2014; Holton, 2016; Kinton et al., 2016; Brookfield, 2018; Brennan and Cochrane, 2019; Kallin and Shaw, 2019). There is evidence of growing research interest across much of Europe, with published works on Hungary (Fubula et al., 2017), Ireland (Kenna, 2011), Poland (Grabkowska and Frankowski, 2016; Sokołowicz, 2019), Portugal (Malet Calvo, 2018), Spain (Garmendia et al., 2012), and The Netherlands (Boersma et al., 2013; Lager and van Hoven, 2019). In North America studentification research is also on the rise, with case studies undertaken both in the United States (Pickren, 2012; Laidley, 2014; Foote, 2017; Woldoff and Weiss, 2018) and Canada (Revington et al., 2018; Moos et al., 2019). For the global North there is also research available for Australia (Davison, 2009; Fincher and Shaw, 2009), New Zealand (Collins, 2010), Turkey (Tuncer and İslam, 2017) and Israel (Avni and Alfasi, 2018). In the context of the global South much less scholarship exists about studentification and its impacts. This said, case studies are available for Chile (Prada, 2019), China (He, 2015), Kenya (Fedha et al., 2017) and South Africa, where there is recorded a marked upturn of research around studentification (Benn, 2010; Donaldson et al., 2014; Ackermann and Visser, 2016; Gregory and Rogerson, 2019; Visser and Kisting, 2019; Gregory, 2020).

Since the end of apartheid, South Africa's higher education system has been transformed, with a focus on increased student access particularly amongst those racial groups disadvantaged under apartheid. Since the democratic transition in 1994, the number of students enrolled at higher education institu-

tions has more than doubled and this growth set the stage for studentification within several urban areas of South Africa (Akoojee and Nkomo, 2007; Gregory, 2020). The first analysis of studentification in South Africa was Benn's (2010) interrogation of the impact of student housing in residential areas close to Stellenbosch University in Western Cape province. Most subsequent research has focused on examining the various social, economic and physical impacts of studentification in Stellenbosch (Benn, 2010; Donaldson et al., 2014; Ackermann and Visser, 2016; Visser and Kisting, 2019) and Bloemfontein (Donaldson et al., 2014; Ackermann and Visser, 2016). For South Africa's major cities limited research so far has been pursued, with the exception of one study of studentification impacts and the commodification of student lifestyle in the Braamfontein area of Johannesburg (Gregory and Rogerson, 2019). The aim in this paper is to extend the scholarship surrounding studentification in urban centres of the global South and in particular to focus on issues surrounding "houses in multiple occupation" or "student communes" as they are more popularly known in South Africa. This particular form of housing has long been an accommodation option for students living off-campus in South African urban centres that host large universities (Donaldson et al., 2014; Ackermann and Visser, 2016). Specifically, this paper explores, from both a supply and a demand perspective, the growth and development of student commune housing in Johannesburg, which is South Africa's leading economic hub as well as a key centre for tertiary education (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2015). Our case study is of housing in multiple occupation for students attending the University of Johannesburg, which currently has close to 50,000 students spread across four different campuses located in different parts of the city. The racial student profile of the University of Johannesburg has changed significantly over the past 20 years. With the massification of education it has been transformed from a formerly predominantly white Afrikaans-speaking student population to a student body which is now dominated by previously disadvantaged groups. Many of these students originate from areas outside Johannesburg or from the periphery of the city. Overall, a great proportion of the student body seeking accommodation

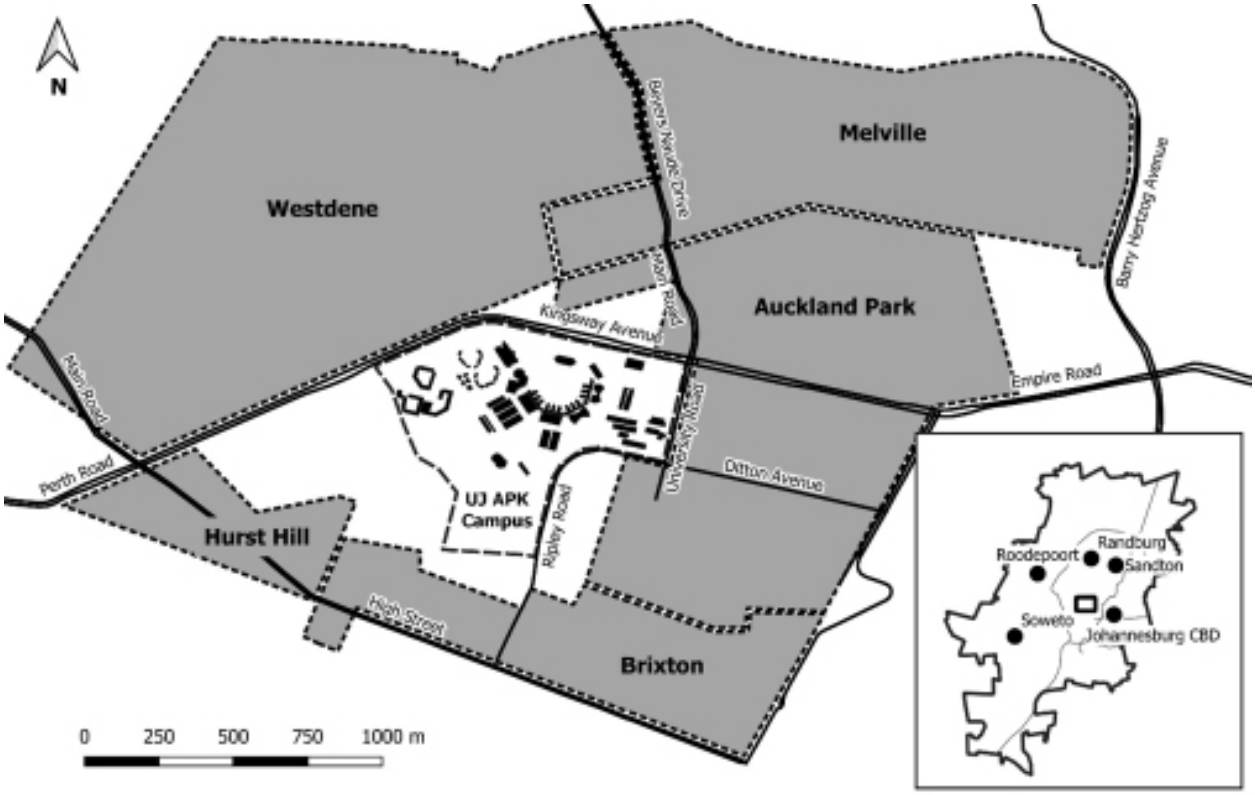

Fig 1. *The Study Location (Source: Authors)*

near the university comprises black South African students – most of whom are first-generation university students and benefit from a government finance support introduced to assist their tertiary studies (Gregory and Rogerson, 2019).

The study examines studentification impacts around residential areas close to the University of Johannesburg's Auckland Park Kingsway (APK) Campus, the largest of the university's four campus sites in Johannesburg. The impacts are examined for the surrounding five residential areas of Auckland Park, Brixton, Hurst Hill, Melville and Westdene (Fig. 1). Several research methods were employed to collect data in order to understand the dynamics of student commune housing in Johannesburg. To inform the supply-side perspective, a total of seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with student housing suppliers as well as in-depth interviews undertaken both with the head of private student housing at the University of Johannesburg and the chairperson of the Department of Development Planning at Johannesburg City Council. In terms of the demand-side of student housing, five focus groups were conducted with between six to eight student participants each living in Auckland Park, Brixton, Hurst Hill, Melville and Westdene. The results from these focus groups provide insight into issues surrounding locational motivation and the challenges that students faced living in communes surrounding the university.

2. Student Housing Debates: The International Context

Smith and Hubbard (2014) contend that the growing demand for private student housing is met by private accommodation suppliers and other institutional actors that are actively involved in shaping the geography of students. Further, Smith and Holt (2007) underscore that the concentration of student populations has intensified with student areas having been "manufactured" by both public and private sector institutions. Smith (2005) argues that students are often consumers of "readymade spaces" that have been produced by suppliers. Therefore, he states that it is more appropriate to consider the institutional actors and suppliers of these studentified spaces as "studentifiers". A range of stakeholders are involved in the production of studentified space, including property owners, property developers, investors, universities, local government and service providers. In addition, gate keepers include letting agents and real-estate agents. Hubbard (2008) reinforces the notion that multiple stakeholders are involved in the production of studentified space. Smith and Hubbard (2014) state that the production of student housing has become part of neoliberal urban policies focused on capital (and investors) constantly seeking new markets for profit realisation. This parallels Chatterton and Holland's (2002) argument that student lifestyle is being commodified, packaged and sold. Chatterton (2010:512) explains as follows: "the student has come to represent a monetarised and commodified, as much as an educational, persona, presenting opportunities for profit for both local businesses and universities". Arguably, the socio-spatial segregation of cities into various sub-markets creates opportunities for capital investment and profit realisation (MacLeod, 2002; Smith and Hubbard, 2014; Betancur and Smith, 2016; Nakazawa, 2017).

Student housing has become a growing and stable sub-market for property investors. Accordingly, it is essential to understand the economic motivation of these investors in producing studentified space. Smith (2005:74) avers that houses in multiple occupation are viewed as "first-wave studentification" and defines it as "the recommodification of 'single family' 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 for higher education students". From classic gentrification theory, Neil Smith's (1979) rent gap is of importance for understanding the process of studentification. It is explained that "the existence of a rent gap between the actual value of single-family housing and the potential value of [student housing] becomes evident. The production of [student housing] and the realisation of long-term rental income from multiple students per annum can be viewed, therefore, as a closure of the rent gap" (Smith 2005:79). This links to the revalorisation or recommodification of housing stock in order to ensure a greater investment return. Suppliers of stu-

dent housing achieve a higher return on investment from renting a property to multiple students than to a single family. Smith (2005) maintains that this is not tied only to areas of devalued housing stock, but also to middle- and higher-income areas close to universities. The role of estate agents and letting agents as gatekeepers is also noted as significant, as these actors might market properties for their potential to be converted to student housing and appeal to investors. Studentified space stretches beyond the supply of student housing *per se*. Arguably, it encompasses also "the manufacturing of student areas, [which] enables students to buy into specific types of lifestyles, linked to the consumption of particular forms of accommodation, retail and leisure services" (Smith and Holt, 2007:157). The rise in purpose-built student accommodation development from the mid-2000s across the United Kingdom and other countries can be seen as exemplifying "manufactured student lifestyle spaces" whereby student housing is produced in (often) gated student enclaves along with a range of other retail and leisure services.

The role that students play in the process of studentification is not, however, a passive one. Students seek neighbourhoods that fit with the student lifestyle and their collective consumption habits. Indeed, their collective taste and lifestyle choices contribute to and shape studentified space (Smith, 2005). Students are seen as early or marginal gentrifiers with limited economic capital, albeit possessing cultural capital to form a group identity that sets them apart from broader society (Smith and Holt, 2007). Studentified space has become the "learning space" for acquiring aspiring middle class cultural (and eventually) economic capital; thus studentified spaces have become important for new middle-class formation. Studentified spaces are the gateway to achieving professional status – a crucial component for gentrification to occur (Smith and Holt, 2007; Hubbard, 2009). Early accounts of the impact of students in gentrification include the work of Ley (1996), who outlined historical events such as the baby boomers reaching college age in the United States during the 1960s and the movement of broader society into higher education as a crucial component to gentrification in the decades to follow. Mills (1988) identifies housing being converted in the 1960s by artists, hippies, students and transients celebrating communal and counter-cultural lifestyles. Rose (1984) highlights the pioneering role of students as part of a "marginal" group of gentrifiers. Ley (1996) maintains that the impact of youth has been scarcely discussed in gentrification. Ley (2003:2542) explains that "spaces of higher education and studenthood are the nursery for acquiring cultural capital". In Australia, Davison (2009) explains that the phenomenon of gentrification is closely linked to the post-war expansion of higher education, with inner city neighbourhoods close to universities being first to gentrify.

For Smith and Holt (2007), students and other marginal or apprentice gentrifiers assume a dual role of (re)producing and consuming the re-definition of urban space. In their decision-making, students are motivated to reside in different areas with varying forms of housing options and dependent on affordability, personality and taste (Sage et al., 2012a, 2012b). It is argued that some students prefer to live in private accommodation, especially houses in multiple occupation, as it affords them the opportunity to reside with people of their choice and with friends ("people like us"). Other motivations for wanting to live in such accommodation include the desire for an independent student lifestyle. Students often cluster in areas that are already perceived as "student areas" where they would enjoy access to various retail, services and spaces for entertainment that cater specifically to a student lifestyle. Rental costs and safety considerations are also isolated as important issues for students when choosing a specific location. In some cases, students opt for cheaper locations, despite a bad reputation for crime and safety; in such cases cost and affordability become the main motivation (Smith, 2002; Hubbard, 2009; Sage et al., 2012a; 2012b).

Smith (2002) observes that students at different levels of study can be motivated to seek different types of accommodation. According to Smith and Holt (2007), first-year students prefer university-managed residences, which are seen as safe and supportive spaces, a coping strategy as students transition into becoming more independent. These university-managed spaces of accommodation further provide access to peers at the same life stage. It is during this time that students are consolidating group associations. They learn studenthood and student habitus, which is reproduced through

patterns of behaviour and consumption and expression of cultural capital. From the second and third year, however, students often opt for different types of student housing. The move to the private rented housing sector becomes more popular with students sharing housing with co-residents of their own choice. Motivations include a more independent lifestyle, the freedom to undertake particular forms of behaviour in less regulated spaces, and proximity to cultural and entertainment facilities. Overall, the work of Smith (2002) shows that student geographies are influenced by the complex of factors relating variously to collective taste and student lifestyle or culture, as well as proximity, cost and safety considerations.

3. Student communes in Johannesburg

The research area around the Auckland Park Kingsway campus of the University of Johannesburg has been a focus for student communes since as far back as the 1980s. At that time the campus was the heart of the former – almost exclusively white – Rand Afrikaans University (RAU). As part of a broader restructuring of South African universities in 2005, RAU was merged with Technikon Witwatersrand (TWR) and Vista University's Soweto Campus to form the newly established University of Johannesburg.

During the 1980s and 1990s early investors in properties for student housing were parents, recent graduates or existing property owners who converted garages, domestic staff quarters and backrooms into garden cottages on their properties in order to rent out to students for an additional income. It can be argued that during these decades this private student housing market for RAU had marginal investment interest, as the majority of student housing demand was met by on-campus, university-supplied accommodation. In addition, many of the student cohort were considered "dailies", commuting to campus from family homes across the greater Johannesburg metropolitan region. This limited demand for private student housing reflected the smaller student population of RAU at the time, which catered overwhelmingly to a minority white (and mostly Afrikaner) student population (Interview, Auckland Park Residents Association Member, 14 August 2017; Interview, Head of Private Student Accommodation, University of Johannesburg, 1 March 2018). Post-apartheid restructuring in higher education policies saw both increased student numbers with greater access through financial aid as well as a shift in demand that occurred as a result of the massification of student enrolment in South African tertiary establishments (Jansen, 2004). During the early 2000s, student enrolment at what would become the new University of Johannesburg increased steadily but university-supplied accommodation did not, thus triggering a greater demand for private student housing (Interview, Student Housing Supplier 1, 19 July 2017; Interview, Head of Private Student Accommodation, University of Johannesburg, 1 March 2018). This gap in the market stimulated a new wave of investment in communes that stretched beyond the initial marginal investment interest of the 1990s. The early 2000s saw investors seeking properties for the sole purpose of recommodifying and conversion into communes (Interview, Student Housing Supplier 3, 18 August, 2017). During the 2000s, communes were often associated with haphazard conversions that were unregulated and without proper by-law and city approval in place. By the mid- to late-2000s the proliferation of unregulated communes became rampant in residential areas close to the university's Auckland Park Kingsway Campus (City of Johannesburg, 2009; Interview, Head of Private Student Accommodation, University of Johannesburg, 1 March 2018).

The unregulated nature of commune development throughout much of the 2000s was linked to a lack of institutional and local policies dealing with private student housing and communes. During 2008 the City of Johannesburg conducted research on the impact of communes in Auckland Park. The research revealed that many students (and other transient population groups) had fallen victim to exploitative landlords in unregulated communes. The local community of Auckland Park also felt that the development of communes attracted crime and contributed to aesthetic decline and devaluation of property prices in the neighbourhood. The outcome of this research was the subsequent development of the city's commune policy released in 2009 in order to regulate the growth of housing in multiple occupation (City of Johannesburg, 2009). The Uni-

versity of Johannesburg formulated its own policy for the regulation of privately-owned student accommodation (University of Johannesburg, 2016). As a result of the implementation of this policy the university embarked on a rigorous process of accrediting private student-housing suppliers with a strict set of specifications that approved properties should adhere to (University of Johannesburg, 2016; Interview, Head of Private Student Accommodation, University of Johannesburg, 1 March 2018). Despite the introduction of these city and university policies on the regulation of communes, unaccredited and illegal communes have continued to proliferate in the suburbs that surround the Auckland Park Kingsway campus (Fig. 1).

Overall, three different types of communes can be identified within the environs of the university. First are a group of illegal communes that do not have consent use or a commune license from the City of Johannesburg. Without consent use from the city it is not possible for any commune to become a university-accredited supplier. Second, there are non-accredited communes that do have consent use and a commune license from the city to operate as a legal commune but do not have university accreditation; these operate as non-accredited suppliers of student accommodation. As well as housing students, such non-accredited suppliers provide accommodation to non-students and working people. The third type of commune is accredited by the University and has consent use and a commune license from the city. This third group of accredited communes, which on average house eight students, has gone through a strict application and accreditation process to become suppliers of accommodation for the University of Johannesburg (Interview, Department of Development Planning Chairperson, City of Johannesburg, 9 December 2018; Interview, Head of Private Student Accommodation, University of Johannesburg, 1 March 2018). It caters almost exclusively to (Black South African) students that benefit from South Africa's National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) as well as other bursaries. The NSFAS is a national government fund or financial scheme with a focus on providing financial aid and most recently directed at increasing access to poor and working-class students. As is discussed below, this government scheme assumes a critical role in setting the price and standard of private student-accommodation suppliers in Johannesburg.

The past two decades have seen the number of communes increase significantly in residential areas near the University of Johannesburg's Auckland Park Kingsway (APK) Campus. The majority of residential areas that have been impacted by commune conversions are located in residential areas surrounding the university. Although communes are present in many residential areas of Johannesburg, the highest concentration of multiple-occupation housing properties is in Auckland Park, Brixton, Melville, Hurst Hill and Westdene. An audit of accredited communes revealed that there are 140 university-accredited communes in residential areas surrounding the Auckland Park Kingsway Campus and which supply housing for 1,258 students. It is important to note that the number of communes listed on the university's private housing list (which is updated annually) adhere to both city and institutional criteria and are licensed to operate as a commune. It is, however, the proliferation of unregulated and illegal communes that causes the most widespread impact and community frustration. The local councillor for the Auckland Park and its surrounds estimated that there are 905 illegal communes, with a conservative estimate of 7,240 people living in such illegal communes. An interview conducted with the chairperson of the city's Department of Development Planning (2018) revealed that the city council does not have a record of the total number of illegal communes and instead relies on communities to collate and report illegal commune activity. The local resident association chairperson for Auckland Park explained that:

> *There are loads [of illegal communes]! It is vastly more than we imagine. Any establishment that has a 'cash only' advertisement on the gate is probably illegal. If it's legal, it would go through the formal processes. There are many more than we are aware of.*

This viewpoint was confirmed by a local Brixton Community Forum Member that "*if we count all the illegal communes, we are way above our 20% quota for communes, probably around 40%. There are masses and we can't keep track of them*." It is therefore difficult to determine the exact number of il-

legal communes in the study area. The residents' associations in areas surrounding the university regularly conduct checks and report properties that are suspected of being illegal communes to the local authority (Interview, Auckland Park Residents Association Chairperson, 10 August 2017; Interview, Brixton Community Forum Member, 4 October 2018; Interview, Department of Development Planning Chairperson, City of Johannesburg, 9 December 2018).

The growth in student demand for private student accommodation stimulates investor interest in communes. The student commune market in Johannesburg offers investors a situation of sustained demand, with suppliers of such accommodation benefiting from the continuous stream of new students that each year are seeking accommodation. According to the head of private student accommodation at the university, student numbers are growing steadily each year and the demand remains strong for communes as a housing option for students. This popularity of communes has remained despite the growth of alternative housing options such as purpose-built student accommodation or inner-city buildings that have been retrofitted for student accommodation (Interview, Head of Private Student Accommodation, University of Johannesburg, 1 March 2018). Student housing suppliers indicate that one of the key motivations for entering the commune market is that it offers a guaranteed and projectable income. A guaranteed rental return is calculated per student per room (sometimes sharing) and the total rent generated per property is more than it would be from a single family. Under the NSFAS system from which many students benefit, a percentage of their funding is allocated to accommodation and is paid directly to accommodation suppliers. The NSFAS rental rate per student is R3,000 per month (2019 rate). A number of student housing suppliers stated that this guaranteed rental income paid from an organisation rather than an individual is extremely attractive for investors as there is less risk involved, and suppliers can project earnings and capital gains in the foreseeable future. One supplier explains:

> *It is a great investment opportunity still, the interest you get from the bank won't give you what you get from a commune. My one house [in Brixton] has four bedrooms and a cottage and two bathrooms. If I had to rent it out to a family, I wouldn't get more than R7,500 per month. Between my two properties, I get R42,000 per month.* (Interview, Student Housing Supplier, 8 November 2017)

For the group of accommodation suppliers, students are perceived as low-risk tenants and form part of a transient population group with less risk of them staying on in properties and not paying rent. Accordingly, suppliers are not faced with the risk of obtaining eviction notices through a court application. One interviewed housing supplier reflected that:

> *I think one of the reasons why people go for students is because of the NSFAS link…. With any type of investment, you want to project your future cash flow and with the current rental act it is risky as you can get stuck with people who stop paying rent and you can't immediately kick them out. Fortunately, students are a lot easier and less of a risk because of guaranteed rental income from NSFAS and they are transient, they move on, they are not permanent residents with families.* (Interview, Student Housing Supplier, 18 August 2017)

Despite the benefits highlighted above, various challenges and risks also exist within the student commune market. Table 1 provides a summary of the risks and challenges associated with the development and supply of student communes in the South African context. Undoubtedly, the greatest external threat as highlighted by commune suppliers is the sustainability of the funding model of NSFAS and other bursaries, as the industry relies on payments from the government subsidy for funding student accommodation. In interviews, several suppliers expressed their concern regarding the longevity and sustainability of the NSFAS funding model. If students were not to have access to NSFAS (or similar bursaries) most do not have the personal funds to pay for tuition and accommodation fees. What this means is that national government, through the operations of NSFAS, is largely the "price-maker" in

the student commune sector, which in turn makes the suppliers strongly dependent on the functioning and sustainability of the NSFAS funding model (Interview, Student Housing Supplier, 10 November 2017).

Another key concern for suppliers is the stringency of the university accreditation process. Several suppliers argued that the requirements as set out by the university constantly shift and have become much stricter in recent years. There is a lengthy process involved in becoming a university-accredited supplier. This includes obtaining city consent use and a commune license, and only then does the university accreditation process begin, which can take up to two years (Interview, Student Housing Supplier, 8 November 2017). Suppliers face the risk of not being profitable or benefiting from NSFAS payment in the first two years of operation (Interview, Student Housing Supplier, 8 November 2017). Accredited suppliers are subject to annual inspections and the need to adapt to the changing requirements of the university, and if not, there is the guaranteed risk that they will lose accreditation status (Interview, Head of Private Student Accommodation, 1 March 2018). In addition, the university also conducts unannounced inspections and if something is out of order or fails to meet the university requirements, the supplier runs the risk of losing their accreditation (Interview, Student Housing Supplier, 10 November 2017). High property maintenance costs and the rising cost of services is another challenge that suppliers highlight: "*the maintenance costs associated with student housing is much higher than any other rental market. Having to repaint, repair and replace soft furnishings every year*" (Interview, Student Housing Supplier, 19 April 2017). As water and electricity are included in rent payments for NSFAS students in accredited communes there is often the uncontrolled and wasteful use of water and electricity. The increasing costs of electricity and water coupled with wasteful usage by students means water and electricity charges can escalate if certain controls are not introduced by the supplier. A number of student housing suppliers noted that in some cases, suppliers opt for gas stoves, heaters and geysers in order to cut down on electricity usage.

In non-accredited properties suppliers face the risk of self-funded or (as they are popularly known) "cash students" absconding without payment of rent. During the academic year, as some students fail courses, occupation levels can begin to drop in non-accredited properties, thus forcing commune owners to turn to other non-student tenants (Interview, Head of Private Student Accommodation, University of Johannesburg, 1 March 2018; Student Housing Supplier, 19 April 2017). As rental competition exists amongst non-accredited communes there is a risk that students can abscond and relocate to cheaper properties. Four of the student housing providers agreed that, overall, the group of cash or privately funded students are considered a higher risk than NSFAS students with a guaranteed income. Seemingly, some suppliers enter the commune market with pre-conceived ideas of what the profit margin or return on investment will be, and this is not always realised. The lease period is only 10 months and limitations are imposed on the number of people that are legally allowed to live in a commune (Interview, Student Housing Supplier, 8 November 2017). Further, there is also the risk of converting a commune but not securing consent use or accreditation and then being forced to become a non-accredited or illegal commune (Interview, Head of Private Student Accommodation, 1 March 2018). Investors underestimate the costs involved in the conversion of old traditional family homes into communes as properties need to be rewired and new plumbing installed (Interview, Student Housing Supplier, 18 August 2017). In numerous instances, suppliers who do not comply with consent from the local authorities or the university accreditation process operate as illegal communes, which negatively impacts the image of the industry as a whole.

Another challenge facing most commune owners is that of widespread community resistance and objection to commune applications and new conversions. One respondent housing supplier reflected that:

> *We've had it a few times when we try to start a student house and the minute the neighbours figure that out, it's an ugly story. There is a lot of community resistance. You really need to prove yourself to them, that is going to be well managed and that you are in the process of obtaining a commune license*. (Interview, Stu-

Table 1. Potential risks and challenges associated with student communes.

Sustainability of government/NSFAS funding	*Funding reliant on government subsidy. Concerns surrounding the sustainability of the current funding model.*
University accreditation process	*Stringent accreditation process is seen as a barrier to entry for investors.*
Limitations set by the City of Johannesburg	*Strict commune license application process. Other limitations include by-laws, densification restrictions, heritage restrictions and other infrastructural limitations.*
High maintenance costs and the rising cost of municipal services	*High annual maintenance costs associated with students. The rising cost of water and electricity.*
Risk of self-funded students absconding	*Self-funded students are often seen as a risk; they can abscond and find cheaper accommodation elsewhere.*
Uninformed investors	*Lack of knowledge on how the industry works; investors only realise the strict application process and costs involved after property purchase.*
Illegal communes	*The growth of illegal communes and their negative socio-economic impact in various neighbourhoods have given created a negative image of student communes.*
Community resistance to commune development	*Communes are met with community opposition and resistance. Community objections occur against the conversion of properties for communes.*
Negative media reporting	*A negative media narrative on the impact of communes and students persists, which has tarnished the industry.*
Impact of crime	*Safety and crime have impacted the industry both in terms of costs involved for securing properties and the risk of protecting students against threat of crime.*

Source: Student Housing Supplier Interviews

dent Housing Supplier, 18 August 2017)

The negative association with communes has caused increased community resistance and objection to the establishment of communes. In most cases, commune applications are objected to by residents' associations and neighbours, which results in projects being put on hold, with corresponding delays for consent use from the city and the university accreditation process. Rezoning or densification applications also meet with resistance from community associations and not least as a result of negative media reporting that tarnishes the industry (Interview, Student Housing Supplier, 19 April 2017).

Finally, safety and security considerations and the impact of crime is of major concern for suppliers. Ensuring security and access control is particularly difficult in communes where there are multiple tenants living and entering the property throughout the day and during evening hours, as this increases the risk of theft or robberies. All suppliers agreed that crime in many areas is high and a threat to both property owners and students. Many property owners indicated significant losses due to theft: "*Our commune has been broken into many times, with no help from police when you call them to investigate, and many of our tenants have been mugged several times*" (Interview, Student Housing Supplier,

18 August 2017). To address crime risks to property the suppliers adopt certain precautionary measures: "*During December and January when the students are gone, suppliers need to make sure communes stay occupied by caretakers or security to ensure properties do not get stripped from electrical appliances, wiring and pipes*" *(*Interview, Student Housing Supplier, 19 April, 2017).

4. Student perspectives

This section explores student perspectives on living in communes surrounding the university. The discussion details student motivation for locational choice, the benefits associated with commune housing, as well as the various issues associated with commune residence. The material draws on the findings from the five focus groups.

The reasons given for locational choice and the decision to reside in a commune show close parallels to those reported from investigations conducted in other parts of the world. Issues of affordability and desire for proximity and the convenience of being located close to campus emerged as the main motivations for most students. Affordability is a key consideration for students. A diverse price range exists within the student commune market, with rooms ranging from R1,500 per room at illegal or unaccredited communes to around R3,000 per room at accredited communes. Self-funded students who do not benefit from NSFAS or other bursaries are particularly motivated by affordability considerations, as they rely on parents, other family members or guardians for financial support to fund their university tuition fees and accommodation costs. The cohort of self-funded students are mostly channelled into those properties that are non-accredited or illegal communes, as rental rates in these properties are often significantly lower than for accredited communes. By contrast, students who benefit from NSFAS or any other type of bursaries are channelled into accredited properties where the price for accommodation is set by NSFAS at a rate of around R3,000 per person (price in 2019). Students with NSFAS and other bursaries are not responsible for the payment of accommodation themselves, as NSFAS and other bursaries allocate a specific amount towards housing. University-accredited properties are inclusive of additional services such as laundry, wi-fi, water and electricity. Accredited communes were viewed as affordable, as students do not have to spend extra money on additional services. As one student stated: "*If I had to pay the rent out of my own pocket, I would not be able to afford it. I've got NSFAS*" (Respondent – Westdene Focus Group, 11 May 2018). Those students who reside in illegal or non-accredited communes save money on cheaper rent, but often spend more money on additional services such as Internet, laundry and payments for water and electricity usage (Respondents – Brixton Focus Group, 2 March 2018; Hurst Hill Focus Group, 23 March 2018). A student in a non-accredited commune elaborated as follows:

> *In terms of rent it is affordable, I pay between R2,500 to R2,800 per month. It only includes water and electricity. No wi-fi, which is what I miss. There are also no cleaning services. At non-accredited communes there are no additional services; you are responsible for everything, in the end, I have to self-fund all those additional services, making it less affordable.* (Respondent – Westdene Focus Group, 11 May 2018)

Likewise, another student explained:

> *There is no wi-fi, no washing machines – there's just nothing. I am paying R3,200 per month and on top of that, I need to buy data. So, I feel like I have a lot more expenses than when I stayed at an accredited property.* (Respondent – Hurst Hill Focus Group, 23 March 2018)

Students are also motivated to live within walking distance of campus in order to minimise the cost of public transport and to reduce commuting time. Areas such as Auckland Park, Brixton, Hurst Hill, Melville and Westdene are within easy walking distance of campus.

> *I chose Auckland Park because of its proximity to campus, the place I stayed at previously was too far away from campus. Some of my classes*

> *are at 8[am] and I don't like to wake up too early. I don't know the area so well. I am not from here, it's a bit new for me. So, I wanted to stay closer for convenience and Campus Square mall is close by. Just looking at the cost. I don't have to spend money on transportation, I can walk almost everywhere for shopping and university.* (Respondent - Auckland Park Focus Group, 9 March 2018)

> *When we started to view properties in Brixton we realised how close to university it is and very convenient and better than the other places we viewed. So, we really chose it because it is so close by and you can just walk to campus.* (Respondent - Brixton Focus Group, 2 March 2018)

Many students argued that areas such as Melville and Auckland Park are attractive not only because of the proximity to campus but because of other services in these areas, such as retail and entertainment facilities. A student living in Melville explains: "*Because I am doing my final year, I wanted a place that is next to civilization because I also have research I need to do. So, I wanted to be close to everything*" (Respondent – Melville Focus Group, 16 March 2018). In particular, students flagged the importance of close access to entertainment facilities and an area's night-time economy as being influences upon their locational choice. In addition, focus group respondents indicated that they were motivated in their choice of housing by desires to have access to their peers and a social life: "*Brixton has a student community, so I know there are always students around and I can interact with them and it's not like being alone in a remote area where I am like the only person from university*" (Respondent – Brixton Focus Group, 2 March 2018). Another student indicated that attachment to a sense of place is important: "*Westdene is already known as a student neighbourhood*" (Respondent – Westdene Focus Group, 11 May 2018). Students are attracted to settle in neighbourhoods that are already perceived as a student area. All focus groups revealed that the social aspect of living with other students or peers with a shared life experience is important. Having access to peers forms a large part of the social life for many students, with regular socialising and parties a feature of many communes. The majority of students indicated that during the week (especially Mondays to Wednesdays) it is generally quieter and students tend to focus on university work. From Thursday, on Friday and at the weekends, there is increased socialising at communes and often parties at some properties. One student stated: "*During the week I try hard to focus on school, then the weekend comes, and Friday comes, we just live, life, I guess. Sometimes the party starts at the commune and then we go somewhere else*" (Respondent – Melville Focus Group, 16 March 2018). Another respondent observed: "*I also try to do much of my academics during the week, because on Friday is just a different vibe, everyone is just happy and bubbly*" (Respondent – Auckland Park Focus Group, 9 March 2018).

Some students chose a commune for the quieter living conditions as compared to the densely populated student residences. In particular, communes were preferred by senior students (2nd year of study and above) who prefer a quieter space in which to study. Some senior students have pointed out that they prefer communes in quieter residential areas: "*The house I chose is nice and quiet and I can study better. Communes offer quieter space for studying*" (Respondent – Brixton Focus Group, 2 March 2018). Another observation was that "*I wanted to stay in a quiet place. I stayed in Braamfontein before for six years. It got a little bit tiring, it was too much chaos, too much everything at once, so I wanted to move to a more subtle place*" (Respondent – Westdene Focus Group, 11 May 2018). Life in communes offers students more privacy as compared to university and private residences, as the density is much lower and there are fewer shared facilities: "*Well for me it's privacy. In res. there is always sharing; there I get to be in my own space at my own time*" (Respondent – Westdene Focus Group, 11 May 2018). Communes also offer students more freedom and independence than life in student residences, often with many house rules: "*I didn't want to live on campus because I want more freedom and fewer rules and regulations that come with residences*" (Respondent – Brixton Focus Group, 2 March 2018). Likewise, another respondent remarked: "*Yes! Free-*

dom is the number one reason! I am a rule breaker, I love breaking rules" (Respondent – Melville Focus Group, 16 March 2018). Communes offer freedom to have visitors and to socialise more than would be possible at university or private residences:

> *At our commune, we are so free that we can bring in any gender of visitors and they can sleep over too. We are that comfortable at our commune. We are all welcoming, so we are like one big happy family. We are allowed visitors, we can come in any time we want, and the landlord is like a friend. We are so lucky. He doesn't live on the property and there is no caretaker on the property.* (Respondent – Brixton Focus Group, 2 March 2018)

The proximity of many student communes and ability to walk to campus is, however, a double-edged sword. Safety is a major concern for students who rely on walking to campus. Respondents in all focus groups disclosed that living close to campus might reduce the risk of exposure to crime and muggings. One student living in Auckland Park observed as follows: "*So, I just wanted to choose the closest area to campus as possible. I thought it was better for me to stay as close as possible for safety. I don't have to worry*" (Respondent – Auckland Park Focus Group, 9 March 2018). Another Auckland Park resident stated:

> *I just wanted to choose the closest area to campus as possible. The chance of someone mugging me from class to my commune is reduced because the distance is not that long. I didn't think about affordability much but more safety. The last time I chose a place based on affordability I actually got mugged.* (Respondent – Auckland Park Focus Group, 9 March 2018)

Some students expressed the willingness to pay more on rent to be in a safer neighbourhood: "*Safety is a very big issue for me. We have to look at the cost versus benefit for safety. The cost might be a bit more but there is the benefit of safety. Auckland Park is much safer for me*" (Respondent – Auckland Park Focus Group, 9 March 2018). This view is echoed by a student living in Melville: "*Last year I used to stay in Brixton. It was cheaper but not safe at all. Places in Melville are more expensive than in Brixton but much safer. My safety is a priority*" (Respondent – Melville Focus Group, 16 March 2018).

Despite proximity, many students experience or witness muggings close to campus. One student living in Westdene pointed out that "*Now that I have to walk it's not safe – I can't even walk with a laptop. There is no transport provided because it's close enough to walk. Most students around here rely on walking and that becomes a security risk*" (Respondent – Westdene Focus Group, 11 May 2018). Indeed, students are constantly exposed to crime, mostly in the form of street muggings:

> *The biggest issue with walking around is the safety concern. Criminals target students and they know we carry devices and they know it's easy picking for them. You don't have any means of protection. Even if you walk in groups, the criminals will come in groups too and rob you.* (Respondent – Brixton Focus Group, 2 March 2018)

Another respondent elaborated that:

> *I am a victim. I have recently been robbed by my phone. They drove up in a car, I saw the car coming. I wanted to run, but the person I was with just stopped and I had nothing to do… it happened so quickly. You are not always sure if they are armed or not, they prey on our fears and we just hand over our valuables. Some students who are stubborn and refuse are beaten up.* (Respondent – Hurst Hill Focus Group, 23 March 2018)

Students adopt a number of coping strategies because of crime and prefer to walk to campus only during the day. Early mornings, late afternoons and evenings are perceived as high-risk periods for students; at these times of the day many minimise the amount of walking or choose to walk only in a large group. One student from the Auckland Park Focus Group (9 March 2018) stated:

> "*During the daytime I don't feel my safety is threatened. When I walk home late afternoon, I am always checking to make sure. During the day I would walk alone but at night I would rather go in groups.*"

The lack of security and absence of police patrols is a challenge for addressing issues of crime in the areas surrounding the university. One respondent reflected that:

> *We do report muggings to the police, but it is difficult to find the perpetrators because of lack of evidence. These cases are hardly ever solved. There is a lack of police patrol in the area. I have never seen one police car. I don't understand why. Brixton is where students stay, and they must patrol. We are complaining and complaining but they never do anything about it. The first step in trying to stop crime is to patrol, but they don't.* (Respondent – Brixton Focus Group, 2 March 2018)

The university, along with local communities, has introduced private security patrols, but these tend to be limited to main routes. Students noted that they feel safer when they see the private security patrols. Participants in all five focus groups expressed the view that the university and police must introduce further measures designed to ensure student safety both on and off campus.

Within communes interpersonal conflicts between students occur mostly in relation to issues of noise disturbances. Inevitably, some students socialise more than others in terms of loud music, talking as well as drinking, and thus disturb other students:

> *In terms of noise, some people are just way out of order and it makes it difficult sometimes. It's all linked to the type of relationship you have with fellow students. Some people bring a whole hi-fi system into their room; even if that door is closed the sound travels. It's like they are sharing their music with you. Sometimes it's distractive and some students can't study with loud music. It forces students to stay on campus and to stay late to have a wi-fi connection and quiet time to study, but issues come in with safety having to walk back late evening.* (Respondent – Auckland Park Focus Group, 9 March 2018)

Another respondent observed:

> *A lot of communes allow parties. The problem is we don't know each other's schedules, so I and my friends could be planning a party on the weekend and someone might be writing a test on Monday. That makes it hard. It makes it also easily distracting for students to join in parties. There were guys drinking in their room. And later they decided to run down the passage and kick people's doors. So, imagine trying to study when something like that is going on.* (Respondent – Westdene Focus Group, 11 May 2018)

As a whole, the group of accredited communes have stricter house rules and regulations than non-accredited communes, with some not allowing alcohol. Certain non-accredited communes have relaxed house rules and students can party and drink at these types of communes. It must be acknowledged that interpersonal relationships within communes are not always strained. In many communes, students adhere to rules and regulations with respect for each other:

> *We are chilled, and we get along and we share many things. I don't really have problems with them. We respect each other's privacy and respect each other's study times. We don't play music whenever. We play music when we all agree.* (Respondent – Auckland Park Focus Group, 9 March 2018)

Conflict occurs with non-student neighbours because of parties and excessive noise disturbance (Respondents – Auckland Park Focus Group, 9 March 2018; Melville Focus Group, 16 March 2018). A student explains:

> *Around us, it is hard to distinguish between communes and normal residences. The normal residents are always angry at us because of*

> *noise, so we don't generally get along. Apparently, the one family claims they were threatened by drunk students once because the parties do get out of control sometimes. So, they come and shout and then they just report us. They also do sometimes call the cops on us when there is a loud party.* (Respondent – Auckland Park Focus Group, 9 March 2018)

In many cases, non-student neighbours complain to commune owners or in extreme cases phone the police. In particular, the groups of non-accredited and illegal communes generate more conflict with non-student neighbours because of lax regulation and minimal house rules. Students who live in accredited properties account for less community tension and conflict than those students living in unregulated properties. In many instances, conflict between students and residents results in a complete breakdown of neighbourliness. This said, it was revealed that relationships between neighbours and students vary geographically, with the general consensus that areas such as Brixton are more welcoming of students as compared to Auckland Park or Melville (Respondents – Brixton Focus Group, 2 March 2018; Melville Focus Group, 16 March 2018).

5. Conclusion

First-wave studentification in the form of houses in multiple occupation (or communes in South Africa) contributes to neighbourhood change (Sage et al., 2012a, 2012b). The aim of this paper was to understand the growth of multi-occupation student communes in residential areas surrounding one campus of Johannesburg's largest university, which has experienced the impacts of the massification of tertiary education in South Africa. Several findings affirm those from existing studies conducted in the global North. On the supply-side, concerning motivations surrounding the development of such properties it was revealed that investors in Johannesburg favour student communes most importantly for the projectable income and greater return on investment as compared to renting to traditional families. This result aligns with Smith (2005), who identified rent gap theory as vital for understanding the re-commodification of traditional family housing for student consumption as a closure of the rent gap. On the demand-side, several motivations for students to reside in multi-occupation properties again show commonalities with other research investigations that isolate issues of affordability, proximity and safety as key location considerations (Smith, 2002; Hubbard, 2009; Sage et al., 2012a). In addition, Johannesburg students expressed wanting to live in areas with a sense of student community, to be surrounded by "people like them" and to be in locations that offer student-oriented services and entertainment. The most distinctive aspect of the making of studentified spaces in Johannesburg relates to the influential role of the national government's funding assistance programme, which was introduced to support the tertiary education of students from previously disadvantaged communities. The NSFAS scheme is critical both for investors and for students, as it guarantees direct payment to accommodation suppliers. The long-term sustainability of the NSFAS model is an important factor to be monitored in the studentification of Johannesburg, as well as other South African university centres.

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