The geographies of studentification: ‘here, there and everywhere’?

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ABSTRACT: ‘Studentification’ has become an increasingly used concept within academic, public policy and media lexicons of contemporary urban change. The term has recently been embedded within some schools’ curricula. Yet, robust knowledge of the geographic scale of studentification is lacking and the magnitude of the processes is contested. Using descriptive analyses of 1991, 2001 and 2011 UK Census data to investigate a range of geographic resolutions of studentification, this article addresses two main questions: ‘How widespread are processes of studentification within the UK?’ and ‘How have the geographies of studentification changed over the last two decades?’. Evidence is presented for the first time to demonstrate that studentification is a marker of population restructuring across the urban hierarchy, penetrating into more and more locations since the early 1990s. It is also suggested that studentification may have historical origins that predate the establishment of the concept and which, to date, have been under-researched.

Introduction

The term ‘studentification’ is employed by geographers, policy makers and the media to conceptualise a set of urban changes tied to residential concentrations of students within university towns and cities (Hubbard, 2009; Chatterton, 2010a; Holton and Riley, 2014). Across the UK, established local residents often view the transformations of studentification in negative ways (Tallon, 2013) and often one that is akin to the displacement and exclusionary effects of gentrification (Smith and Holt, 2007). In 2002, a national lobbying group (National HMO Lobby) was set up, with membership from 33 towns and cities, to oppose these changes to local neighbourhoods (Smith, 2008). This profusion of opposition from across many towns and cities suggests that processes of studentification span the UK, which raises important questions about the geographic scale and magnitude of studentification: the main aim of this article.

Another useful indicator of the geographies of studentification is the uptake of ‘Article 4 Directions’ by local planning departments. The deployment of this planning legislation allows local authorities to remove general permitted development rights for the conversion of single dwelling houses to ‘Housing in Multiple Occupation’ (HMO) (predominantly occupied by students). To date, Article 4 Directions have been established in over 40 towns and cities (Smith, 2013), to some degree, paralleling the memberships of the National HMO Lobby. Disputing the rationale and creation of this new legislation, the National Union of Students, British Property Federation, and National and Residential Landlords Associations counter that Article 4 Directions are ‘discriminatory’ against students. Yet, these debates have taken place in the absence of fit-for-purpose analyses of the geographic scale of studentification. Thus, it is essential that the following questions are addressed using national datasets: ‘How widespread are processes and outcomes of studentification across the UK?’ and ‘How have the geographies of studentification changed over the last two decades?’.
This article has seven sections. Sections two and three outline some of the ways that ‘studentified’ neighbourhoods can be most effectively identified and analysed using national datasets. Section four provides descriptive analyses of 1991 and 2001 UK Census ward-level data in England and Wales to consider changes over this decade using a proxy measure of studentification. Sections five and six focus on the 2001 and 2011 UK Census data in order to examine the concentration of student populations at ward and lower super output areas in England and Wales respectively. The final section makes some concluding remarks.

Studentified neighbourhoods: the signifiers of change

Recent research on studentification shows the diversification of the process and growing prominence within new socio-spatial contexts (Munro and Livingstone, 2012). Most significantly, studies reveal how the increasing commodification of student-hood and student living (Chatterton, 2010b; Holloway in the rapid development of exclusive, purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA), often on brownfield sites, as well as on-campus student villages (see Smith and Hubbard, 2014, for fuller discussion). Other studies identify the growth of ‘new student areas’ within former social-rented housing estates (Sage et al., 2013a). Although these diverse geographies beg important questions about how studentification is defined and conceptualised, in policy arenas the term continues to be treated as a process that is synonymous with HMO-dominated neighbourhoods, usually in close proximity to university campuses or centres of learning. Here, we focus on this dimension of studentification.

In a similar vein to the difficulties of establishing a universal measure for gentrified neighbourhoods (Atkinson, 2000), constructing a pre-defined checklist to pinpoint when a neighbourhood is (not) studentified is not straightforward. Crucially, studies illustrate that studentification unfolds in different ways depending on the local contingencies of particular neighbourhoods. Nonetheless, some common hallmarks of local neighbourhood change can be identified (ECOTEC, 2008). These generic traits of studentification are summarised as criteria to identify studentified neighbourhoods.

<table>
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<th>Changes in...</th>
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| Local population | • High proportion of student residents  
| | • High levels of annual in- and out-migration of students  
| | • Replacement and/or displacement of established residential populations  
| | • High levels of population density  
| | • High levels of population transience  
| | • Depopulation between July and September  |
| Local housing markets | • Reduction in owner-occupied family housing  
| | • Increase in shared private-rented housing  
| | • Increase in short-term rented tenancies  
| | • Changed fabric and internal structure of housing  
| | • Escalation of property prices  |
| Residential environments | • Increase in domestic refuse and litter  
| | • Fly-tipping of unwanted household items  
| | • Lack of parking spaces for private vehicles  
| | • Changing visual appearance of streetscapes and residential environs  
| | • Proliferation of ‘to-let’ boards  
| | • Unkempt gardens and yards  |
| Local services and culture | • Closure of nurseries and schools  
| | • Relocation of retail, leisure and recreational services for student market  
| | • Closure of public and private services between July and September  
| | • Relatively high levels of burglary and crime  
| | • Perception of ‘student’ sense of place  

It can be argued that the underlying commonality between studentified neighbourhoods is the interconnected restructuring of local populations and housing markets, which are intrinsically tied to the migrationary flows of students (Duke-Williams, 2009). The former is typified by the replacement and/or displacement of a more established residential population by a transient student population (Holdsworth, 2009a). Tenure changes in the local housing market are predominantly linked to the conversion of owner-occupied family housing into high multiple occupancy (HMO) by private landlords and investors (Leyshon and French, 2009), a transition that is sparked by untapped demands of ever-increasing numbers of students looking for short-term rental accommodation (Smith, 2005; 2009). Building activities associated with the production of student HMO result in the changed fabric and internal structure of housing, including the conversion of living rooms, attics and loft spaces to bedrooms, the addition of conservatories and extensions, and, in some instances, the ‘scooping-out’ of cellars to create additional bedrooms.

This reconstitution of local housing stock often leads to an escalation of property prices (Masey, 2003); stimulated by unprecedented demands from private landlords and investors for the perpetual acquisition of existing family housing for conversion into HMO (Rugg et al., 2000a). Many local families and low-income individuals and households are thus excluded from the local housing market (Heath, 2008). Brennan et al. state, for example: ‘A university may impact on the local housing market, taking it out of reach of many households are thus excluded from the local housing market (Heath, 2008). Brennan et al. state, for example: ‘A university may impact on the local housing market, taking it out of reach of many
The geographies of studentification: ‘here, there and everywhere’?

One key outcome of these exclusionary processes of change is that social groups become more segregated within studentified neighbourhoods. As Munro et al. identify in their study of studentification in five university towns and cities: ‘Statistically, students show markedly high degrees of segregation from the rest of the population’ (2009, p. 1812).

Another common theme of studentified neighbourhoods is increasing population densities (Russo and Tatjer, 2007); exemplified by Allinson’s (2006) investigation of student housing in Selly Oak, Birmingham. Higher population densities often trigger secondary effects such as the increase of domestic refuse, litter (e.g. fast-food and pizza boxes), fly-tipping of unwanted household items (e.g. discarded beds/mattresses, sofas, fridges) and lack of spaces for the parking of private vehicles (which can lead to the removal of hedges, fences, gates and gardens for driveways). All of these secondary impacts exacerbate the ways in which processes of studentification transform the visual appearance of streetscapes and residential environs.

At the same time, higher levels of population transience – tied to the annual high mobility of students (Kenyon and Heath, 2002; Lister, 2004) – are apparent in the proliferation of ‘to-let’ boards, unkempt gardens and yards, and sometimes (depending on the type of landlord) dilapidated external residential facades and the disrepair of housing. As Christie et al. note in their study: ‘the quality and condition of some student housing was an issue of concern’ (2002, p. 209).

In some local neighbourhoods, the volume of the replacement/displacement of local families by transient student populations (Christie, 2007; Holdsworth, 2009b) is, in part, connected to the gradual closure of local crèches, nurseries, schools and other community facilities (e.g. halls) (Rugg et al., 2000a), as the total number of children on local school rolls plummet. Conversely, high student populations may bring about an enhanced provision of other public services (e.g. dentists, doctors) and public transport (Watson, 2008).

At a cultural level, studentification leads to the reorientation of retail (i.e. off-licenses, fast-food takeaways, travel and letting agents, student-focused supermarkets), leisure (i.e. student pubs, cafés and clubs) and recreational services – to exploit and cater for the student lifestyles and consumption practices that dominate (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Atkinson and Easthope, 2008; Rugg et al., 2004). Given the seasonality of student occupation in most towns and cities (Heath, 2008), the provision of many public and private services are sometimes reduced or closed between July and September – as illustrated by Chatterton’s (2000) study of student geographies in Bristol. This seasonal depopulation of studentified neighbourhoods can also result in relatively high levels of burglary and crime (Hodges, 2008).

In tandem, these multiple social, population, economic, cultural and physical changes give rise to the formation of a new sense of place, and a distinctive type of ambience in the studentified neighbourhood (Chatterton, 1999; Doyle et al., 2006). This may explain why residual established residential communities often express that they feel a sense of dispossession and a loss of attachment and belonging to their local community and studentified neighbourhood (Bromley, 2006). It is important to acknowledge this is emblematic of broader societal trends of polarisation and segregation, as well as perceptions of isolation and loss of belonging (Dorling and Rees, 2003; 2004).

The geographic scale of studentification

To date, empirical studies of studentification prominently map onto local lenses of enquiry. Individual case study investigations of studentification within Birmingham (Allinson, 2006), Brighton (Sage et al., 2013b), Leeds (Smith, 2002), Loughborough (Hubbard, 2008; Kinton, 2013) and Portsmouth (Holton and Riley, 2013) typify this research direction. The examination of student housing by Munro et al. (2009) in Nottingham, Glasgow, Cardiff, Sunderland and Belfast currently represents the only cross-location analysis of studentification. Despite this work providing rich insights into important local socio-economic and cultural transformations, it is unclear how different socio-spatial contexts may give rise to commonalities and differences between studentified neighbourhoods across the UK.

At the same time, national level analyses of studentification are absent, and the (un)even geographic patterns of studentification are not well understood. One notable exception here is Rugg and Rhodes’ (2008) examination of ‘intensive student habitation’ in the UK, conducted as part of a wider review of the private-rented housing sector. Using 2001 UK Census data, Rugg and Rhodes reveal that of the 8000 wards in England only 58 (0.7%) have 10% or more student household
reference persons, and they conclude ‘that intensive student habitation is not common’ (2008, p. xxi). Although Rugg and Rhodes’ findings provide a valuable starting point to consider the spatial magnitude of studentification, the results of their research should be viewed with caution given the measure of the intensity of student housing is based on households with a student household reference person (HRP). Although this measure usefully provides a crude indicator of the scale of the phenomenon, such analyses will under-state the magnitude of studentification by excluding students that are co-residing with a student HRP of different sizes of student housing (e.g. three-person versus seven-person student households). In addition, this measure will confute the effects of different sizes of student housing (e.g. three-person versus seven-person student households) on local neighbourhoods.

Nonetheless, the contribution of Rugg and Rhodes (2008) is valuable for highlighting some of the difficulties for identifying the scale of studentification and for raising some important questions, such as, ‘What is the most effective way to identify studentified neighbourhoods?’ and ‘What is the most appropriate geographic resolution to spatially analyse patterns of studentification?’. However, addressing these issues in a meaningful way is problematic given the recording and reporting of students in official national datasets, such as the UK Census, has been fraught with problems (Smith and Sage, 2014). Although the most recent UK censuses (i.e. those undertaken in 2001 and 2011) address some of the problems of earlier ones (the 1981 and 1991 censuses), such as the confusion between students’ and parents’ reporting term-time address and parental address on census forms, identifying the presence of students in households is blurred.

A comprehensive investigation of the scale of studentification at a national level would ideally embrace all of the specific criteria identified in Table 1. To operationalise this broad analytical framework, a range of datasets and variables would be required to fully capture the diversity of indicators of studentification. In the context of this article, such a manoeuvre is not possible. Instead, one of our main aims is to establish a starting point to shed light on the geographic distribution of studentification in England and Wales by focusing on spatial concentrations of both students and student housing. These two facets of the process will provide good indicators of the spatial magnitude of studentified neighbourhoods, given studentification is inherently a signifier of concentrations of students and student housing. At the same time, it is advantageous to incorporate a temporal dimension since studentification is innately a process of population change; the main focus of the following sections.

Studentification in the 1990s: historical representations

The term studentification was coined in the late 1990s (Smith, 1999) to describe local transformations within Leeds, West Yorkshire; sparked by increasing concentrations of students/student houses within the neighbourhoods of Headingley, Hyde Park and, to a lesser extent, Burley and Woodhouse. Like many other university towns and cities in the UK, the formation of notable concentrations of students in Leeds unfolded before the late 1990s, mostly in close proximity to the centres of study. Neighbourhoods such as Headingley gained a notoriety and sense of place as being a ‘student area’ before the early 1990s. Yet, these relatively ‘early’ geographic concentrations of students were not conceptualised as being formed by a distinct process of urban change, and received limited attention from researchers in this way (e.g. Rugg et al., 2000b). The relatively less intense increase of student populations may be a key factor here, and established local communities not yet perceiving a tipping-point and the loss of their local neighbourhood to a student population, when compared with the late 1990s. To date, there is a general lack of historical analyses of student geographies during the 1990s, when the student population increased from approximately 1,150,000 (1990–91) to 1,850,000 (2001–02) during this decade (Watson, 2013).

As a starting point, cross-sectional UK Census data (1991 and 2001) can be used to examine changing patterns of student geographies over this decade. Unfortunately, the inaccurate reporting of students’ place of residence in the 1981 and 1991 UK Censuses means that it is not possible to use a measure of changing student populations between 1991 and 2001 (Smith and Sage, 2014). Instead, we utilise the indicative variable of the total number of persons in shared private-rented housing, which is defined in a consistent way between the 1991 and 2001 UK Censuses at ward level. We acknowledge that other social groups (e.g. housing benefit recipients, young professionals) reside in shared private-rented housing (Smith, 2012); although it is important to note that the financial returns for landlords and investors is often likely to be higher for student...
housing in university towns and cities than for benefit recipients.

Given our analysis specifically focuses on wards with relatively high student populations (i.e. a student population of 10% or more as a percentage of the total population in 2001), it is likely that the majority of persons in private-rented housing in these wards will be students. This allows a consideration of wards that may have been studentified before 1991 (i.e. longstanding ‘student areas’), as well as wards that may have been studentified between 1991 and 2001. Our findings are presented in Figure 1, and we use natural breaks in the data to group wards organised by the rank order of the total persons in shared private-rented housing in 1991: 2000 or more persons (Figure 1a); 1000–1999 persons (Figure 1b); 400–999 persons (Figure 1c); and less than 400 (Figure 1d) in 1991, respectively.

Notes: The city or town name is shown in brackets. Source: UK Census data, 1991 and 2001. Data for wards with 10% or more student population. Some wards appear more than once due to boundary changes.
One striking finding is the relatively high number of university towns and cities: with 50 towns and cities represented within the 129 census wards included in Figure 1. This points to processes of studentification being prevalent in the majority of university towns and cities by 2001 (there are 64 university towns and cities in total according to the Halifax Building Society’s (2005) university towns and cities housing survey. It is also interesting to identify the relatively high number of wards with
1000 or more persons in shared private-rented housing in Figures 1a and 1b. This consolidates the interpretation of early concentrations of students in neighbourhoods that had well-established social and cultural meanings as a student area before the late 1990s, such as Cotham in Bristol and Bevois in Southampton.

Although there is a wholesale increase of persons in shared private-rented housing between 1991 and 2001 in the census wards, there are some noteworthy differentials between the graphs shown in Figure 1. First, total increases between 1991 and 2001 were generally most pronounced, in absolute terms, in the ‘established studentified wards’ (see Figures 1a and 1b), perhaps pointing to the reproduction of geographic patterns of studentification during the 1990s. Key census wards with the highest increases in Figure 1a are Selly Oak in Birmingham (+6222 persons), Cathays in Cardiff (+4947), Withington in Manchester (+3358), Portswood in Southampton (+3305) and St Peter’s & North Laine in Brighton (+3242). In Figure 1b, key wards are: Dunkirk & Lenton in Nottingham (+4145), Radford & Park in Nottingham (+4049), Netherthorpe in Sheffield (+3685), Newlands in Hull (+2896) and Kirkstall in Leeds (+2774). In total, Figures 1a and 1b reveal a total of 45 census wards that witnessed an increase of 1000 or more persons in shared private-rented housing between 1991 and 2001. The entrenchment of students into many of these more ‘established studentified’ wards will have been compounded by supply-side factors – particularly the proliferation of student HMO, tied to the high uptake of buy-to-let mortgages during the 1990s (Gibb and Nygaard, 2005), as well as demand-side factors tied to increasing student populations in towns and cities.

Interestingly, and within this context, Figures 1c and 1d also show relatively high increases in smaller university towns and cities; many of which experienced the first (re)development and/or expansion of higher education between 1991 and 2001. Notable here are Central (+1997 persons) and Winton East (+1878) in Bournemouth, College in Chester (+1430), Gresham (+1697) and Middlehaven (+652) in Middlesbrough, Treforest in Pontypridd (+1353), Oldfield (+849), Westmoreland (+767) and Widcombe (+767) in Bath, St Stephens (+1547) and Westgate (+832) in Canterbury, Carholme (+974) and Southfield (+849) in Lincoln, and, to a lesser extent, Hatfield West (+608) and Hatfield South (+529) in Welwyn Hatfield.

In addition, Figures 1c and 1d indicate the formation of more entrenched student frontiers within the more established university towns and cities, for example Brunswick in Warwick (+1549 persons), Crossgate & Framwelgate (+1488) and Nevile’s Cross (+885) in Durham, Hull Road (+1092) and Fishergate (+1312) in York, St James in Exeter (+2164), John O’ Gaunt (+1284) and Scotforth West (+750) in Lancaster, and Storer (+1203) and Southfields (+975) in Loughborough.

In total, Figures 1a–d express a diverse set of geographies of studentification, which are clearly complicated by the various mixes of different types of higher educational establishment within particular towns and cities, and the different ages and prestiges of particular institutions. What this
Studentification during the 2000s: a focus on change

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) datasets reveal that the total student population of the UK increased from 1,948,135 (2000–01) to 2,340,275 (2012–13) and peaked at 2,501,295 in 2010–11 – marking a period of major expansion of higher education (Holloway and Jöns, 2012). Students live near and with each other in order to acquire a sense of group membership and belonging, feelings of safety and security and to take advantage of the provision of student-oriented services (Smith and Holt, 2007). Given most studies of student housing reveal that university students tend to gravitate towards pre-existing, well-defined student areas (Chatterton, 2010b; Rugg et al., 2002), it is plausible that the concentrations of student residence identified in our analysis of 1991 and 2001 UK Census data will have been further amplified by increasing student populations during the 2000s, which is tied to the incessant expansion of higher education. However, this relationship may have become more complicated by the profound ways in which increasing numbers of students have moved into off-campus, commercially-provided, PBSA and on-campus student villages (Smith and Hubbard, 2014), in conjunction with the de-studentification of some local neighbourhoods (Kinton, 2013) and the movement of students into former socially-rented estates (Sage et al., 2012).

Positively, advancements in the collection and reporting of census data allow the utilisation of a consistent measure of total students as a percentage of total usual residents at ward level for both 2001 and 2011 UK Census data. Drawing on this data, Figure 2 provides a national map of census wards with student populations of 15% or more (in 2001 and/or 2011) to illustrate changes in England between 2001 and 2011. An arbitrary cut-off point of a student population of 15% or more is adopted for our analysis, as a mid-point between Berube’s contention that 20% or more is the best measure to define ‘student-heavy wards due to studentification’ (2005, p. 11), and the National HMO Lobby’s (2008) (adopted by other local authorities) assertion of a threshold of students comprising 10% or more of the total population (many planning departments have also used 10% thresholds for the operationalisation of Article 4 Directions).

Overall, our analyses reveal that in 2011 there were 242 census wards with a student population of 15% or more, compared to 172 wards in 2001. The total number of towns and cities with one or more wards with a student population of 15% or more increased from 70 (2001) to 87 (2011). Interestingly, the emerging 17 towns and cities in 2011 are associated with relatively recent developments of higher education institutions (e.g. Falmouth), and some distinct boroughs of London. Nevertheless, it would appear that the predominant geographies of studentified wards was reproduced and maintained over the 2000s, with students continuing to in-migrate and reside within well-established studentified neighbourhoods.

To consider changes between 2001 and 2011 within individual wards, Figure 2 makes the distinction between established studentified wards (15% or more student populations in both 2001 and 2011) and studentifying wards (less than 15% in 2001 and 15% or more student populations in 2011). It can be seen that 127 wards continued to have a student population of 15% or more, emphasising the reproduction of geographies of studentification between 2001 and 2011. At the same time, a remarkable 70 census wards increased from below to above 15% or more student population between 2001 and 2011. This demonstrates how geographies of studentification have become more widespread across the UK during the 2000s and are permeating into more towns and cities.

Studentification: identifying the micro-geographies

According to Rugg and Rhodes, studentification ‘can evidently be felt very acutely at street-by-street or neighbourhood level’ (2008, p. 99). Likewise, local empirical studies consistently show that studentification can have a profound effect at a micro-scale, often due to the relatively high visibility of student populations in particular localities (e.g. pedestrian movements, lifestyle-related behaviours of some youthful population(s)
The geographies of studentification: ‘here, there and everywhere’?

To and from home/university and home/leisure venues), and the environmental changes tied to the production of student HMOs. In a sense, indicative analyses of studentification at ward level, as presented in the previous sections, may mask the broader ways that studentification penetrates into neighbourhoods. The geographic resolution of lower super output areas (LSOAs) enables more precise clusterings of studentification to be identified since these provide information on average 5500 individuals, and range from 100 to 30,000 individuals (Office for National Statistics, 2008b).

To investigate the spatial patterns of full-time students as a percentage of the total usual resident population at LSOA level, 2001 and 2011 UK Census data were extracted for all LSOAs in England and Wales. In line with interpretations in the previous section, the findings reveal the formation of more wide-scale geographies of studentification across England and Wales during the 2000s. In 2001 there were 929 LSOAs with 15% or more student population, which increased to 1331 LSOAs by 2011.

Figure 3: Changes in the numbers of lower super output areas (LSOAs) with a student population of 15% or more (of the total usual residential population) for those towns and cities that had five or more LSOAs at the 2001 UK Census – 2001 to 2011, England and Wales.
51 towns and cities with five or more LSOAs (with a student population of 15% or more) in 2001. By 2011 there were 69 towns and cities with five or more LSOAs (with a student population of 15% or more).

Further analyses of the data reveal that the total number of LSOAs with a student population of 50% or more increased from 131 (2001) to 229 (2011), pointing to a growth of more intense geographies of studentification within some towns and cities. In a similar vein, LSOAs with student populations of 15–49% rose from a total of 798 in 2001 to 1102 in 2011.

Interestingly, in 2001 there were 145 towns and cities with at least one LSOA with a student population of 15% or more. This decreased to 140 in 2011, due to a number of towns and cities showing only one LSOA in 2001 (e.g. Ashford, Rugby, Stroud).

Figures 3a and 3b show the towns and cities with 10 or more LSOAs with a student population of 15% or more. One of the most fascinating findings expressed in Figures 3a and 3b is the increasing student populations in Boroughs of London. These include Newham (+40 LSOAs between 2001 and 2011), Camden (+15), Islington (+14), Tower Hamlets (+13), Wandsworth (+10) and Southwark (+8), which suggests the emergence of studentified neighbourhoods in the capital between 2001 and 2011. This tends to contradict policy discourses and debates that have represented London as a place of non-studentification. Figure 3 also reveals notable increases in the core cities, such as Manchester (+16), Salford (+9), Liverpool (+13), Nottingham (+13) and Rushcliffe (+19). Interestingly, a decreasing number of LSOAs between 2001 and 2011 are expressed for Bristol, Oxford and Sheffield, which may be linked to the development of PBSA and de-studentification of some local neighbourhoods. These instances can be seen as anomalies, however, with increases in the numbers of LSOAs between 2001 and 2011 the overwhelming trend for university towns and cities across the urban hierarchy, and the continuing (and growing) penetration of studentification into UK towns and cities.

Conclusion

This article sought to address two key questions that, to date, have been under-researched, viz ‘How widespread are processes and outcomes of studentification across the UK?’ and ‘How have the geographies of studentification changed over the last two decades?’. Using 1991, 2001 and 2011 UK Census data together with a range of variables and geographic resolutions as starting points to address these questions, we have shown that there may be an unreported pre-1991 history of studentification in university towns and cities in England and Wales. Our findings also reveal that the geographic scale of studentification has increasingly permeated into most university towns and cities, being prominent in 2001 and rising in number and magnitude by 2011. This interpretation of the embeddedness of studentification across the urban hierarchy – evident in London, metropolitan core cities, provincial towns and cities, coastal towns and market towns – does not concur with many public policy discourses, which represent studentification as a piecemeal phenomenon (e.g. ECOTEC, 2008).

We would argue, therefore, that a fuller understanding of the spatial magnitude of studentification, particularly in more robust ways, is important. Indeed, this is imperative given studentification is a topic that is deeply emotive, divisive and politicised, and has spawned tensions, conflict and differences of opinion between a diverse range of individuals, organisations and institutions (Smith, 2008). Within these recent exchanges, perceptions and anecdotes of the scale of studentification have been influential in shaping the arguments of some advocate and oppositional groups of the need to change housing and planning legislation to regulate studentification. Further advancing our knowledge of the geographies of studentification is vital given the unintentional consequences of students and student housing on the wider housing market. This includes the supply of affordable rental accommodation for other social groups (e.g. housing benefit recipients) and owner-occupation. It is crucial at a time of a so-called affordable housing crisis and constrained access to mortgage finance for first-time buyers in the UK.

This article has provided indications of the reproduction and extension of geographies of studentification since the early 1990s. It would appear that studentification is a key marker of population change in many towns and cities of the UK, and needs to be taken seriously within broader debates about social sustainability, balanced communities, neighbourhood cohesion, social exclusion and segregation. In this way, more evidence needs to be analysed to deepen understandings of studentification as a leading process of urban change across the UK that is reshaping many neighbourhoods, communities and local economies, and cultures.
The geographies of studentification: ‘here, there and everywhere’?

Note
1. A household reference person is: ‘the member of the household in whose name the accommodation is owned or rented, or is otherwise responsible for the accommodation. In households with a sole householder that person is the household reference person. In households with joint householders the person with the highest income is taken as the household reference person. If both householders have exactly the same income, the older is taken as the household reference person’. Source: ONS.

References


ONS: www.statistics.gov.uk/lib/Section243.html


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