

WORKING PAPER

The politics of studentification and '(un)balanced' urban populations in the United Kingdom: an update

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Abstract: This paper explores the unfolding politics of studentification in the UK. It is argued that there is a paradox between New Labour's utopian vision of sustainable communities and the geographic effects of the promotion of higher education. This contention hinges on the absence of a national policy on the production and supply of student housing, which dictates *when*, *where* and *how* enlarged student populations should be integrated into established residential communities, or dispersed to other parts of university towns and cities. It is asserted that the lack of government policy, and the relative incapacity of institutional actors to effectively intervene or regulate the residential geographies of students, is yielding 'unbalanced' populations in a range of urban contexts. This is a key factor in the rise of studentification, and the fragmentation of well-established residential communities. Ironically, some community activists argue many of these 'lost' communities signified lucid exemplars that the sustainable communities policy seeks to engender. These new student geographies also obscure the positive social, economic and cultural benefits which students can bring to university towns and cities, and may foster resentment and conflict between students and established residents. More specifically, the paper illustrates how ongoing debates of planning and housing legislation (licensing of Housing in Multiple Occupation, Use Classes Order, Areas of Housing Mix) may be integral for addressing the challenges of studentification.

1. Introduction

Processes of studentification have spawned a rising critical politics in the UK (D.Smith and Holt, 2007). Key here are well-organised local community movements (e.g. National HMO Lobby) which dispute how the production and management of student housing, and the residential geographies of students should be regulated, with a key focus on challenging the merits of leading instruments of current planning and housing legislation. Underpinning this collective action are well-publicised campaigns to alleviate the negative impacts of studentification, and to ensure that the benefits of the expansion of universities and student populations are harnessed for the good of wider society.

The remainder of the paper is divided into 4 main parts. Section 2 explores the contradictions between the effects of studentification and the promotion of sustainable communities. Sections 3 and 4 present findings from content analyses of communication exchanges (emails, letters and minutes) between leading policy makers, key institutional actors and local community activists to investigate the politics of studentification in the UK. Section 3 shows that the issue of studentification is increasingly being debated in local and national political arenas. Section 4 focuses on recent discussions of the definition and licensing of housing in multiple occupation, the reviews of Use Classes Orders (UCO), and the introduction of Areas of Housing Mix

(AoHm), to illustrate the paradox between the sustainable communities agenda and the effects of studentification. The final section draws some conclusions.

2. Studentification and 'sustainable communities'

A key ideological motif of New Labour is the promotion of sustainable communities (Raco, 2007). Indeed, the utopian vision of a set of urban geographies comprised of 'sustainable communities' was imbued within the motto of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), when established in 2002. This ideology is embedded in a series of leading policy documents¹.

Despite the political momentum for sustainable communities (DCLG, 2007), equally, there is a rising criticism that some other leading policy imperatives of New Labour undermine the conditions that enable 'healthy' and 'balanced' communities to be nurtured and nourished in sustainable ways. A key issue here is the claim that the geographic effects of the expansion of student populations (tied to the promotion of higher education and increased levels of participation), and, in particular, the residential geographies of students, contravene the tenets of sustainable communities.

In essence, critics, most notably the National HMO Lobby (see below), point to the lack of an urban policy for the production and supply of student housing to match the expansion of student populations. Instead, the underlying assumption is that the residential demands of students (currently approximately 1.7 million students, Blakey (2007)) will be 'mopped-up' in unregulated ways by the private rented housing sector and private sector developers and consortiums. As the National HMO Lobby argue:

'The chief cause of concentrations of HMOs is currently the expansion of Higher Education. No provision has been made for the accommodation of increased student numbers, so the lack has been made up by the private rented sector - hence, concentrations of shared student houses, now defined as HMOs' (National HMO Lobby, 10/5/05).

Of course, the (over) concentration of students, and the formation of 'student areas', is not an intentional consequence of the expansion of higher education. Yet this is a key factor in the rapid growth of the private rented housing sector from 1.8 to 2.3 million homes between 1996 and 2004 (DCLG, 2005), and, in particular, the proliferation of Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO) (see Rhodes, 2006; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006 for fuller discussion).

The ways in which students have filtered into this segment of the housing stock, and have undermined the sustainability of pre-existing balanced communities, is pivotal to the well-publicised campaigns of the National HMO Lobby. As the following quotes exemplify, the paradox between (over)concentrations of HMO and the political impulsion for sustainable communities is a major arsenal of the National HMO Lobby:

'We fail even more to understand why a Government which is commendably committed to the promotion of **sustainable communities** is unable to provide local authorities with the powers they need to sustain their communities' (National HMO Lobby, 28/3/07).

'Concentrations of HMOs present a unique threat to these communities. They tend not only to have a detrimental impact on the character and amenity of a neighbourhood - they also undermine the very pre-requisite for a **sustainable community**, which is a balanced and stable population. By

their very nature, concentrations of HMOs distort the population balance and introduce a transient population (National HMO Lobby, 10/10/07).

'This request is not peculiar to Leeds. Far from 'creating **sustainable communities**', concentrations of HMOs are in fact destroying the **sustainability of communities** around the country.... If ODPM really wishes to **sustain communities**, then effective national planning legislation, as we have requested, is essential' (National HMO Lobby, 18/11/05).

Conveying the brisk diffusion of the effects of studentification over the last decade in the UK, the membership of the National HMO Lobby has grown rapidly since its inception in April 2000 (Leeds and Birmingham), and its formal constitution in November 2004 (22 towns and cities) (National HMO Lobby, 14/11/05). Currently, 58 community groups in 34 British university towns and cities (see Table 1) are signed up to the National HMO Lobby; to co-ordinate and mobilise local community groups that contest and resist rising concentrations of HMO and the destabilisation of established residential communities.

Table 1. The politics of studentification: participation by location

	National HMO Lobby	Councillors Campaign for Balanced Communities	APPG for Balanced and Sustainable Communities (max. of 20 MPs)
Bangor	√		
Bath	√	√	√
Belfast	√		
Berwick-upon-tweed		√	√
Birmingham	√	√	√
Blackpool	√		
Bournemouth			√
Bristol	√	√	√
Cambridge			√
Canterbury	√	√	
Cardiff	√		
Coleraine	√		
Coventry	√	√	
Durham	√		√
Edinburgh	√		
Egham	√		
Exeter		√	
Falmouth	√		
Glasgow	√		
Hatfield	√		
Hull			√
Leeds	√	√	√
Leicester	√	√	

Lincoln	√	√	
Liverpool	√		
London	√	√ (Hillingdon)	√ (Uxbridge)
Loughborough	√	√	√
Manchester	√		√
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	√	√	√
Norwich		√	
Nottingham	√	√	√
Peterborough		√	
Plymouth	√	√	
Pontypridd	√		
Poole	√		
Reading			√
Rochford and Southend			√
St Andrews	√		
St Anne's, Lancashire	√		
Sheffield	√	√	
Southampton	√	√	√
Swansea	√	√	
York	√		

Despite the broad concern with rising concentrations of HMO, the National HMO Lobby's main focus of activity is student HMO. As the National HMO Lobby notes:

'The National HMO Lobby is concerned with all kinds of HMO when these gather in concentrations. There are three main markets for HMOs, benefit claimants, young professionals, and students. The student market is by far the most important of these, greater than the other two together. The Lobby therefore takes a special interest in student HMOs and their impact on communities. Like most markets, the HMO market tends towards concentrations, and this is especially the case with student HMOs. Such concentrations have developed in many university towns. This and its impact have given rise to what has been termed 'studentification' (National HMO Lobby, 27/1/06).

The interpretation of a link between student populations and the disintegration of existing 'healthy' communities is not tied to the increase of student populations *per se*. Indeed, the National HMO Lobby is explicit in recognising some of the potential benefits of students and universities (National HMO Lobby, 1/2/06), for example: 'The National HMO Lobby recognizes that HEIs and their students can be an asset to university towns' (National HMO Lobby, 26/4/07). Rather, the key concern, as outlined above, are the increasing densities and concentrations of student populations in distinct enclaves of university towns and cities (National HMO Lobby, 2007), where the relatively swift in-migration of students result in a 'demographic imbalance' or 'the substitution of the established community by a student community', as outlined in the following quote:

'It is the enormous recent expansion of Higher Education which is the source of our problems. We fully support access to Higher Education for all those

who can benefit. But an enormous price is being paid, not only in Leeds, but in most university towns in the UK. The huge influx of students is weakening the sustainability of communities. For understandable reasons, students like to congregate together. But this means that communities are overwhelmed by a population which is young and which is continually changing. In Headingley [Leeds] for instance, 61% of the population (students) changes every year' (National HMO Lobby, 30/6/05).

In this sense, studentification bears many similarities to other contemporary societal processes that are reconfiguring the sociospatial patterns of knowledge-based, post-industrial societies and economies. Processes of studentification reduce the opportunities for positive, and mutually beneficial, social interactions between different social groups, and fuels the growing segregation and polarisation of social groups based on lifestyle and lifecycle cleavages, as well as differing levels of economic capital (e.g. Dorling and Rees, 2003). It is therefore not surprising that contemporary societies are increasingly fraught with contestations and conflicts over ownership of spaces, services and territory. Studentification is a leading-edge process of urban change that epitomises this societal trend.

3. The emerging politics of studentification

The issue of studentification has gained notoriety within the national media (e.g. Levene, 2007), and increasingly circulates within the discourses of local community groups that resist (over)concentrations of (student and other) HMO (e.g. Nottingham Action Group, 2007). Since the early 2000s, there has also been a progressive recognition of studentification by local government institutional actors (i.e. planning, housing, environmental health, economic development, urban regeneration officers), local authority councillors (e.g. Durham, 2006) and university officials, in part connected to the pervasive campaigns of the National HMO Lobby.

By contrast, and until very recently, there would appear to have been a general malaise from central government departments and, to a lesser extent, from national parliament to acknowledge the issue of studentification. This reluctance of central government departments is well illustrated by the following comments of the National HMO Lobby:

'... the [Housing] Ministry has persistently turned a deaf ear to campaigners' arguments, and a blind eye to the inadequacy of its own legislation' (National HMO Lobby, National HMO Lobby, 1/8/07).

'The Lobby and its members have pressed your Department [Housing and Planning] and its predecessors over many years now for effective changes in planning legislation. Always we are fobbed off with answers which misunderstand or misrepresent what we want' (National HMO Lobby, 28/3/07).

On reflection, the disinclination of central government departments to intervene in processes of studentification may represent a missed opportunity to cast student populations (and universities) in a more positive light. The planned expansion of student populations could have been more explicitly written into urban policy, such as a lever for mediating broader processes of economic regeneration, and offering new and novel ways of accommodating enlarged populations of students. This would have more fully

emphasised the many benefits of student populations, thereby possibly counteracting some negative stereotyping of both universities and students (e.g. Tickle, 2007).

Instead, the seemingly passive role of central government departments in debates of studentification, and the pursual of a laissez-faire approach to the supply and production of student housing, might explain why the spotlight was placed on universities as the immediate 'perpetrators' of studentification during the late 1990s (e.g. Best, 2002). Although it is fair to say that some universities often denied and dismissed claims that their expansionary practices may have impacted in negative ways on local communities, some hard-line critiques of universities may have been mis-guided given that universities do not possess the necessary capital resources or expertise to directly produce and supply accommodation, to match enhanced levels of student recruitment.

Positively, the discourses of studentification have gradually become more balanced in many urban contexts, as universities launch strategies to boost cohesive relations with neighbouring residential communities, and improve 'town and gown' relationships (e.g. Loughborough Campus and Community Liaison Group). The implementation of Community Strategies, Community Liaison Officers, Off-campus Wardens, Neighbourhood Helplines, and Student Volunteering Schemes have been important here for redefining the general perceptions of universities which are held by many established residential communities (UniversitiesUK, 2005). Of course, there is still much potential and scope to improve town-gown relations, and this is an on-going endeavour in the UK.

3.1 Studentification in national politics

The acknowledgement of studentification in 2003 by the Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill MP) represented a landmark shift within central governmentⁱⁱ. This led to a formal meeting on 12 February 2004 between the Minister and Alan Simpson MP (Nottingham South) and officials from Nottingham City Council, plus other MPs whose constituencies were affected by studentification, and the National HMO Lobby (National HMO Lobby, 27/1/07). One of the main outputs from the meeting was a general agreement to more fully understand the complex processes of urban change tied to studentification, and, in particular, the over-concentration of student HMO in university towns and cities.

Following further consultation between the Ministers for Housing and Planning, and Higher Education (Alan Johnson MP) during December 2004, evidence-based research was commissioned by Universities UK (Vice-chancellors group), in collaboration with the Local Government Association, and funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the ODPM, to investigate the scale of studentification, and identify examples of good-practice to manage student housing and student populations in established residential communities.

Crucially, the brief of the research project included a focus on non-regulatory and non-legislative solutions to studentification, and did not seek a critique of the current legislative framework. Despite the majority of research participants citing the pressing need for legislative changes to give local authorities more planning controls, the main output of the project (*Studentification: A Guide to Opportunities, Challenges, and Good Practice*) outlined a useful 47 point-checklist for local authorities, universities and other stakeholders to address the challenges of studentification within the current legislative framework (UniversitiesUK, 2005). In many ways, the UUK Guide therefore consolidated the standpoint of central government for the more effective management of student housing and student populations, as opposed to changes to planning and housing legislation.

Not surprisingly, the National HMO Lobby was highly critical of the *Studentification Guide*, asserting: ‘... the Guide has fundamental flaws. It entirely omits the crucial role of national government, and especially national legislation’ (National HMO Lobby, 24/01/06). Nevertheless, the National HMO Lobby welcomed the publication of the *Studentification Guide*, since:

‘The Guide, in its very title indeed, accords formal recognition to the problem of *studentification* (the impact of high concentrations of students on communities adjacent to universities). Its Checklist provides helpful guidance to universities and councils grappling with the problem. And it gives invaluable leverage to communities still attempting dialogue with reluctant institutions’ (National HMO Lobby, 24/01/06).

‘Universities UK’s publication of *Studentification* certainly offers encouragement to those of us living in the shadow of the ivory tower – and emanating from the ivory tower itself, it is particularly welcome’ (ibid).

More recently, evidence presented at two national conferences on studentification, held in Nottinghamⁱⁱⁱ and Norwich^{iv}, illuminates numerous initiatives to address the challenges of studentification, which draw upon the UUK *Studentification Guide* (D.Smith and Sage, 2007). It is also clear that the challenges of studentification persist and are unfolding in new urban contexts (Grant, 2007). Different institutional actors from a range of locations, including the eight core cities^v and smaller university towns and cities (e.g. Loughborough, Canterbury, Bath, Norwich), consistently reiterated the urgent need for changes to planning and housing legislation.

The *Studentification Guide* has also been pivotal to sustaining and extending the on-going debates of studentification, which have accelerated over the last few years. By contrast to the late 1990s, the issue of studentification is firmly placed on the radar of many universities across the UK, as evidenced by recent UniversitiesUK national conferences^{vi}. This is further illustrated by a meeting of the Parliamentary University Group in 2006 to specifically discuss the issue of ‘student accommodation’^{vii}. As the Chair of the meeting Professor Shirley Pearce, Vice-Chancellor of Loughborough University, noted:

‘The rapid growth of participation in Higher Education and in total student numbers, and the high concentration of student residents in some areas, has meant the issue of student accommodation has become a controversial one. The issue has moved beyond education and is now being considered in respect of community cohesion, regeneration and planning law. All the main types of accommodation (University owned/on campus, private housing stock and privately owned purpose built accommodation) raise many questions about affordability (to students and institutions), management, environmental issues and neighbour relationships’ (quoted by Nottingham Action Group, 2007)

This meeting provided an opportunity for university officials to network with MPs from different university towns and cities^{viii} (National HMO Lobby, 31/10/06). The political currency of studentification, and the penetration of the issue into national parliament and local government arenas are also illustrated by the creation of two new groups, respectively.

First, an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Balanced and Sustainable Communities (with 20 qualifying members) has been established in national parliament, and held its initial meeting on 27 June 2007. This APPG is principally 'concerned about the impact of an imbalance between student and local residents' housing' (The UK Parliament, 2007). According to its constitution, the main purpose of this group is to support:

'changes in planning law to possibly control the amount of student housing in particular streets and thus ensure that our communities are balanced; a requirement to license all private rented accommodation, including student housing; adequate provision for family housing in all communities' (The UK Parliament, 2007).

Moreover, it would appear that the APPG demonstrates the mounting influence of the National HMO Lobby, which, for instance, had previously advocated the need for such an APPG:

'These issues demonstrate a clear need for an effective cross-party Parliamentary lobby on HMOs, to address the impacts of concentrations of HMOs - which affect so many constituencies. May we urge you [Greg Mulholland MP] and Roberta [Blackman-Woods MP] and other concerned MPs to urgently form such a lobby group?' (National HMO Lobby, 23 April 2006)

Second, and following a national conference on studentification for local councillors (see above), the UK Councillors' Campaign for Balanced Communities (CCBC) was formally established to: 'devise a coherent and co-ordinated message to central government that legislative changes are required to mitigate the underlying causes and challenges of studentification' (D.Smith and Sage, 2007). Currently, the membership of the CCBC includes 27 local authority councillors from 12 locations, and, as Table 1 shows, this tends to parallel the geographic distribution of MPs on the APPG, and members of the National HMO Lobby.

This geographic overlap of activity has been influential for the recent impetus of joint-action within local politics to lobby central government to revise the UCO (see below). Motions have recently been submitted by the local authorities of Leeds, Newcastle, Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, and Southampton. In Nottingham, a motion of the city council has been passed and endorsed by both the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University (National HMO Lobby, 16/10/07). The recent passing of a motion by Canterbury City Council (4/10/07) to lobby central government on the UCO is particularly notable, since this reversed a previous decision. In line with other local authorities, the motion asserts: 'new powers [revision to UCO] are necessary to limit further loss of affordable family homes and prevent those communities that have not yet become HMO laden' (Councillor Calvert-Mindell, 5/10/07). Similarly, the Chief Planning Officers of the eight core cites are to lobby central government for a change to the UCO (National HMO Lobby, 1/10/07).

The CCBC and the National HMO Lobby have also ensured that members of the APPG have been informed in strategic and coordinated ways, and there has been an exchange and dissemination of research and intelligence, and the sharing of good practice. This partnership and joined-up working has been pivotal for impregnating the issues of studentification and HMOs within recent debates in parliament. Three recent key events should be noted here: the Early Day Motion 1488 (16/5/07), the Ten Minute

Rule Motion (22/5/07), and two Adjournment Debates (5/6/07) on 'balanced and sustainable communities' and 'houses in multiple occupation', and these are discussed below.

3.2 Policy documents and the 'absence' of studentification

Contrary to the infiltration of the term studentification in parliamentary debates, recent policy documents of central government departments have not embraced the term. This is despite an explicit recognition of the effects of studentification in some policy documents. Perhaps the negative connotations of studentification, which have been perpetuated by the national media, have, in part, influenced the reticence of central government departments to adopt the term within policy documents. As an official from the DCLG commented:

"Studentification' is a rather clumsy term to describe the fact that, in some areas, market forces have led to a predominance of student housing in which services like schools have declined' (DCLG, 2006).

This tone is unfortunate since the term studentification has, without doubt, significant social and cultural meaning for many MPs, local councillors, local government officials, university officers, local community activists, private sector and institutional actors, and other key stakeholders. The term has clearly enabled a wide range of individuals and social groups to make sense of the complexities of a leading-edge process of contemporary urban change in university towns and cities. As noted by Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con) MP notes:

'The term 'studentification' has been used - it is probably one of the ugliest terms in the English language and it is unfortunate that we have to use it, but it captures a phenomenon that we recognise' (quoted in Hansard, 5/6/07).

Indeed, some local community activists interpret the omission of the term from policy documents, as signifying a lack of understanding of the prominence of the processes of change, and the profound impacts on society.

Examples of this orthodoxy include *Housing Research Summary 228, Dealing with 'Problem' Private Rented Housing* (DCLG, 2006), which focuses on pilot projects to counteract problematic issues in the private rented housing sector. Arguably, this is the first government publication to publicly acknowledge some of the effects of studentification (National HMO Lobby, 6/9/07; 10/8/06), yet surprisingly makes no reference to studentification. The report comments, for instance, that areas within Canterbury are 'beginning to experience a problem with its student population ... the 'swamping' of areas with student households has begun to concern residents and members [councillors]' (p.6). Likewise, it is noted that 'there is evidence to suggest that in some neighbourhoods housing markets have become unbalanced; that owner occupiers can no longer compete for properties; and that an increased proportion of privately rented properties exacerbates problems of poor management and anti-social behaviour' (p.5). Other notable coverage of the impacts of studentification include: 'anti social behaviour [in Swindon] falls into two categories: noise nuisance and rubbish problems, mostly associated with students; and more serious anti-social behaviour' (p.12), and 'most of the reported ASB [in Canterbury] consists of student linked noise nuisance and litter problems' (ibid).

More recently, *Evaluating the impact of HMO and Selective Licencing: the baseline before licencing in April 2006* (DCLG (2007) makes explicit reference to the effects of studentification, without employing the term. Indeed, the report vividly illuminates a series of economic, physical, cultural and social transformations, which are akin to the hallmarks of studentification (see D.Smith, 2005; Hubbard, 2008), respectively (**emphases added**):

Economic

'There are a number of reasons why **house prices have risen**, but in some case study authorities, the officers and local residents felt that much of the price inflation had been fuelled by **speculative purchase for private renting**. They felt that this had effectively priced a number of first time buyers out of owner occupation in some areas. Within the case study authorities some smaller areas have seen a particularly large increase in the proportion of private rented homes and, as a consequence, an increase in the proportion of **transient people** within neighbourhoods' (p.116).

Physical

'Residents in a number of areas were concerned about **property conditions** generally and in particular where they lived next door to a private rented property and could not contact the landlord to carry out repairs to items like shared guttering which were causing problems in their property ... Landlords who lived outside the area were seen as the main culprits for failing to maintain properties by some residents. Residents also pointed out that poor condition properties help to create the impression that it is acceptable to **dump rubbish** because nobody cares' (p.115).

Cultural

'The key problem is that tenants generally only stay for short periods ... This clearly has important consequences for the tenants concerned and also on the overall appearance of the area. But, possibly more important are the subtle effects on the **fabric of the community** when people do not know other people and tenants don't see it as worthwhile to become involved in their community' (p.14).

Social

'There are some important issues to think about in terms of how these high levels of private renting, in some areas it is up to 50 per cent or more, are contributing to **fragmenting communities** in some of the most deprived areas in the country when the government is committed to building sustainable communities' (p.14).

Although there are no direct references to students in the above quotes, in a further discussion of transient groups in HMO, the report notes: 'students are another group whose 'work hard - play hard' lifestyle sometimes leads to complaints from other residents' (p.109).

The general reluctance to explicitly acknowledge the link between the effects (of studentification) and the residential patterns of a particular social group (i.e. students) within policy documents may have been influenced by a concern not to 'demonise' students as the 'perpetrators' of studentification. This is an important point since most students also experience the challenges of studentification in their everyday lives (e.g.

noise-nuisance, car parking, refuse and litter, crime, sub-standard accommodation and urban environments).

In this sense, it is possible to interpret the underlying remit of the politics of studentification as representing the broader interests of both students and established residents. Clearly, many students would also benefit from improvements in the management and fabric of urban housing and physical environments in studentified areas. It is surprising therefore that some commentators have accused the National HMO Lobby, and other groups, as being 'anti-student'; an accusation which the National HMO Lobby and other groups have vehemently refuted. Instead, and as noted earlier, the National HMO Lobby assert that their campaigns seek to reduce or halt (over)concentrations of HMO (irrespective of the dominant social group in residence), and not the exclusion of students or other populations.

This subtle, and yet significant difference, is most prominently expressed via some 'fall-out' from the National Union of Students (NUS) report *Students In The Community* (2007); assembled to address the challenges of studentification. Although the introduction of the report explicitly cites recent work on studentification, the report omits the term since: 'it has developed a negative connotation in the media' (p.11). As a result, the National HMO Lobby counter: 'We are resigned to NUS being in denial over the reality of studentification' (National HMO Lobby, 14/6/07).

Perhaps more importantly, the report notes: 'NUS strongly rejects the idea of using national legislation to restrict the number of students living in some parts of cities and towns' (p.9). Instead, and in a similar vein to the stance of central government, the NUS advocates: 'It's about making good use of what's [current legislation] already there' (ibid), and that 'management, not legislation, is the way forward'. One of the underlying premises for this point of view is that:

'Some councils and lobbies, such as the HMO lobby, have called for Use Classes Orders to be used to restrict the numbers of HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupation) being built offering accommodation to students' (p.16).

In response, the National HMO Lobby were clearly enraged and strongly rejected this interpretation of their campaign for a change to the UCO, insisting:

'This would mean using planning permission to restrict a certain category of the population (students) to live somewhere.' That *would* be the meaning - if the National HMO Lobby had ever said such a thing. That however is completely false. The Lobby has never called for the use of the UCO to restrict any category of the population. Do you have any evidence at all for this (false) accusation? What the Lobby has called for, is amendment of the UCO - first, to provide adequate definition of HMO (which would benefit all concerned), and second, to change their classification. The Lobby has never made reference anywhere to the occupants of HMOs. In fact, that is precisely why the Lobby is concerned with **HMOs**, and not with any class of occupant (if you were better informed, you would know that we campaign on HMOs in a wide range of contexts, not only student HMOs) (National HMO Lobby, 14/06/07).

It is unfortunate that some important institutional actors and stakeholders have shied away from embracing the term studentification, due to the negative connotations that have been constructed by the national media. In doing so, such a stance perpetuates the value-laden negativity of the term. A fuller appreciation of the term (i.e. it does not

equate with an anti-student viewpoint) is required if policy makers and other actors are to get to grips with the complexities of the urban changes tied to (over)concentrations of (student) HMO. Rather, more fully embracing the term may provide a platform to deepen understandings of the many benefits of enlarged student populations and expanded universities, when integrated into established residential communities in sensitive ways.

4. Addressing the underlying causes of studentification

Despite the growing recognition of studentification, there would appear to be no signs of the impending (re)formulation of a government policy for the supply and production of student housing. Until very recently, the enduring stance of central government is for the relatively unregulated supply of purpose-built or HMO student housing and accommodation by the private sector. To address the challenges of studentification, central government continues to espouse an approach for the more effective management of student housing and student populations within the current legislative framework. This standpoint conflicts with the growing consensus of the need for legislative change, as outlined above; a perspective which is clearly motivated by an underlying belief of the need for more significant interventions by local government in the processes of studentification.

In the following sections, I will illustrate the marked divergence of opinion between central government, and groups such as the APPG, CCBC and the National HMO Lobby, by exploring recent communication exchanges between key actors and stakeholders about three contested instruments of planning and housing legislation. These were gathered from a range of sources including policy documents, parliamentary minutes and the email list of the National HMO Lobby. These issues circulate widely in current political, media and community group discourses, and are integral factors which will shape the current and future production and supply of student housing, the quality of the management and regulation of student housing, and the increasing scripted spatialisation of student areas, and, ultimately, underpin the future residential geographies of students in the UK.

4.1 The definition and licensing of HMO and the management of student housing

Historically, the relative incapacity of institutional actors (e.g. planners, housing and environmental health officers) to intervene in processes of studentification was tied to a superficial knowledge of the scale and magnitude of (student) HMO in university towns and cities. In part, this lack of understanding was due to the absence of a legislative requirement for recording, monitoring and regulating the geographic distribution of HMO, since there was no legal obligation on private landlords or local authorities to licence HMO. Instead, many local authorities implemented voluntary licensing schemes (e.g. Leeds), with membership usually taken-up by the more 'conscientious' private landlords. As a result, the (re)production of HMO and the conversion of family homes was allowed to proliferate in unchecked and unregulated ways. As recently noted by the DCLG:

'Information on the number of HMOs in England is problematic as different sources relate to different definitions of HMOs and households and to different years. Our best estimate is that there are around 700,000 HMOs according to the old Chartered Institute of Environmental Health definition which includes bedsit accommodation, shared houses and self-contained

converted flats. It is estimated that between 200,000- 300,000 fall within the definition for mandatory licensing' (DCLG, 2007: 117).

The requisite for the mandatory licensing of HMO, as envisaged within New Labour's manifesto commitments in 1997 and 2001, was motivated by tenancy deposit and health and safety related-concerns tied to the ineffectual management of HMO and sub-standard housing conditions. Accordingly, the DETR published the Consultation Paper *Licensing of HMOs – England* in 1999. In the wider UK context, this coincided with the introduction of HMO licensing in Scotland in 2000^{ix} and, more recently, in Northern Ireland in 2004^x; expressing that there is no consistency of legislation across the UK.

In England and Wales, the potential of local authorities to more fully record, monitor and regulate the intensity and patterns of HMO was extended by Part 2 of the 2004 Housing Act. The licensing of HMO was laid before Parliament on 22 February 2006, and statutory instruments provided a definition of HMO^{xi}, made the distinction between mandatory and selective licensing of HMO^{xii}, and, set minimum standards for management of HMO^{xiii}. Not surprisingly, the National HMO Lobby championed the introduction of this legislation, yet noted a word of caution:

'We welcome the provisions within the Housing Act 2004 enabling local authorities to license Houses in Multiple Occupation. We recommend that the Government encourages local authorities to make full and effective use of the licensing and statutory planning powers available (including compulsory purchase) to manage HMOs' (National HMO Lobby, 1/7/05).

Moreover, the National HMO Lobby were vociferous in stressing the need for the utilisation of a broader definition of HMO, and the use of additional licensing of HMO to capture HMO that was excluded by mandatory licensing:

'We are pleased too that HMO licensing will help to curtail the worst abuses inflicted on communities by the landlords of student HMOs. We hope ODPM will be sympathetic to university towns who seek additional HMO licensing to help manage their student colonies' (National HMO Lobby, 30/6/05).

On reflection, it would appear that the concerns noted by the National HMO Lobby and other groups have been partly realised in many urban contexts. Indeed, the system for the licensing of HMO has been subsequently critiqued by many commentators for two main reasons (Cooper, 2006). First, there is criticism of the value of the narrow definition of HMO, as defined in the Housing Act 2004, which does not require two-storey HMO, or three-storey HMO with less than 5 occupants to be licensed. Blakey (2007) notes for example, that mandatory licensing will only apply to 250,000-300,000 houses out of 2.7-2.8 million private sector houses, and 90% of the 250,000-300,000 houses will be concentrated in 15 local authorities. It is clear, therefore, that large proportions of HMO are exempt from the mandatory licensing framework (see above quote from DCLG). As the National HMO Lobby argues:

'We are pleased that larger HMOs are subject to mandatory licensing, though disappointed that licensing was not required of all HMOs (as it is in Scotland). We are urging local authorities to introduce additional HMO licensing where HMOs are concentrated (as in areas of 'studentification'). We hope ODPM will consider such applications favourably and speedily' (National HMO Lobby, 10/5/05).

Furthermore, the National HMO Lobby have consistently lobbied for a standardised definition of HMO, which cross-cuts and spans both planning and housing legislation:

'We request a revised *definition* of HMO in planning law. On the one hand, the present definition (such as it is) is not fit for purpose – for instance, it relies on the concept of 'single household' which itself is nowhere defined. On the other hand, there is a broad consensus in housing legislation throughout the UK on a far more precise definition of HMO. The latest instance was provided by the Housing Act 2004, which dealt simply and clearly with all the problems which are usually raised. It remains entirely incongruous that the notion of HMO is different in housing and planning legislation' (National HMO Lobby, 28/3/07).

Second, it is widely acknowledged that many local authorities do not have the appropriate resources (staff) to implement and monitor mandatory licensing schemes, despite the supposition that licensing is self-financing. This interpretation is based on the initial low take-up of licensing by private landlords. In Leeds, for example, it was estimated that only 300 applications from approximately 8,000 HMO had been received (National HMO Lobby, 5/7/06), although by December 2006 2,388 HMO were included on the Public Register of licenses (National HMO Lobby, 5/12/06). In the national context, Blakey (2007) reveals that only 25% of HMOs had submitted applications within the first year of the mandatory licensing scheme.

Although the mandatory licensing of HMOs in England began on 6 April 2006, there was three months' clemency for private landlords to submit applications for licences. At the end of this period of grace, it was clear that many landlords had not applied for a licence. This is despite private landlords being subject to prosecution, and a fine of up to £20,000 for not obtaining a licence. Local authorities also have the power to seek an order for the repayment of up to 12 months' housing benefit paid out while the property was let without a licence, and tenants are also able to seek an order for recovery of rent they have paid while a licensable property was let to them without being licensed (DCLG, 5/7/06). At the same time, there is also an onus on every local authority to publish a Public Register of licences that have been issued to private landlords. To counteract the reluctance of most private landlords to apply for a licence, notification forms were disseminated by the National HMO Lobby to 'shop' private landlords of HMO that had not applied for a licence.

The immediate effects of mandatory HMO licensing on the residential geographies of students are difficult to pin down, and the benefits and costs are ambiguous. In some studentified areas, HMO licensing would appear to have resulted in the withdrawal of significant numbers of small-scale 'amateur' landlords who have 'pulled out' of the student housing market, perhaps due to the perception of added costs and risks of licensing. Indeed, this trend was anticipated by the DCLG (2007: 116), which notes: 'Licensing, where applied, is likely to encourage at least some to sell or put the property in the hands of a reputable agent'. Of course, other changing economic and societal conditions may be important here, such as the increasing supply of purpose-built student accommodation by private sector developers, rising interest rates for buy-to-let mortgages (Collinson, 2007), the saturation of the student housing market, and the over-supply of student accommodation (D. Smith, 2007).

Nevertheless, the licensing of HMO may be an important factor in the reduction of (over)concentrations of students in some neighbourhoods; although this may not have necessarily yielded the (re)balanced populations which were envisaged by the

campaigns of the National HMO Lobby and CCBC. Instead, one unintentional consequence is 'destudentification' (e.g. Bournebrook, Birmingham); defined here as the dramatic reduction of a student population in a neighbourhood which leads to social (e.g. population loss), cultural (e.g. closure of retail and other services), economic (e.g. devaluation of property prices), and physical (e.g. abandonment of housing) decline. It would appear that a re-evaluation of the (dis)advantages of a student population is taking place in such neighbourhoods (e.g. Coventry), although this is often underpinned by aspirations for a more balanced community of students and established residents. At the same time, some residual established residents have articulated concerns about which social groups may replace the out-going students in HMO, with growing anecdotal evidence of European (A8) migrants moving into the voids in the private rented housing sector in some destudentified neighbourhoods; thereby pointing to the return of (low-income) families and possibly give rise to new forms of social conflict (see Hubbard, 2004).

In other studentified locations, some private landlords are re-orientating their practices by (re)converting student accommodation into higher-quality, rental accommodation for young professionals, particularly as more graduates remain in towns and cities, such as Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham, after their studies. Some studentified areas are clearly being gentrified, and some students are being displaced to declining areas and former social rented housing estates (e.g. Bristol, Loughborough), thereby placing more constraints on the availability of affordable housing for low-income households.

These unfolding geographies of studentification emphasise the deepening complexities and diverse expressions of studentification in the UK, and the broader impacts of studentification on the wider operation of the UK housing market. The recent changing complexion of studentification also demonstrates that studentified areas do not merely trans-mutate, or follow preordained paths and trajectories, to the 'typical states' of urban gentrification. Rather, there is a substantial volatility and dynamism of the geographies of studentification which may have been previously under-stated (D. Smith, 2005). This suggests that the effects of HMO licensing will be uneven across the UK, and mandatory HMO licensing will have differential impacts within and between different places for mitigating the challenges of studentification.

4.2 Use Classes Order (UCO) and the production of student housing

The rapid conversion of family homes into student housing (HMO) by developers, builders and property investors (including some parents of students) since the mid-1990s is integral to understanding the emergence of studentification. According to some commentators, this phenomena is largely tied to the lack of planning powers held by local authorities to regulate the process of conversion, and the key factor here is the legislative framework of the UCO. This is a sentiment that has been consistently articulated by the National HMO Lobby, and, more recently, reiterated by the APPG and CBBC:

'A key problem in this planning policy, as well as all others in England and Wales (and also Scotland), is the fact that there are no effective powers to grant or refuse planning permission for HMOs. This means that HMOs are able to proliferate, regardless of the impact they have on the sustainability of the communities where they multiply unchecked' (National HMO Lobby, 28/3/07).

Planning permission is required for the material change of use of buildings, and this is founded on a number of categories of use defined by the national UCO. In England and Wales, HMO belongs to the same Use Class (C3) as family dwellings^{xiv}. Although an amended Order was provided on 21 January 2005^{xv}, which modified Use Class A3, this made no revision to Use Class C3 (ODPM, 2005); to the dismay of the National HMO Lobby (National HMO Lobby, 16/3/05), and as exemplified by the following statement:

‘We were very disappointed that the recent revision of the Use Classes Order did not include any new requirement for planning permission for HMOs (unlike the example set by Northern Ireland). It is this loophole in planning legislation which leaves thriving communities vulnerable to devastation by unrestricted growth of HMOs. In the interest of restoring the social contract in our beleaguered communities, we do exhort you to urge your colleague, the Planning Minister, to revisit this legislation’ (National HMO Lobby, 1/7/05).

Despite the publication of *A Review of the Use Classes Order* in England in September 2001, and the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions issuing a Consultation Paper inviting comments on proposals to change the UCO in January 2002, central government have been reluctant to revise the UCO, and have not provided a robust reasoning for this stance.

Crucially, the campaign for the revision of the UCO in England and Wales (with accompanying complementary local planning policies) gained sustenance and momentum following the adoption of a new UCO in Northern Ireland in November 2004. The Planning Minister, Keith Hill MP, was urged by the National HMO Lobby to follow this lead:

‘Dear Minister. You will be well aware that today the Planning (Use Classes) Order (Northern Ireland) 2004 comes into effect. I am writing on behalf of the National HMO Lobby to ask that in the light of this development in one part of the UK, you re-visit the Use Classes Order as it applies in England and Wales’ (National HMO Lobby, 29/11/04).

By contrast to England and Wales, the new Northern Ireland UCO requires that planning permission is sought for the change of use from family home to HMO, with the category of HMO discrete from Class C (Residential Uses). Importantly, the Northern Ireland UCO includes an all-encompassing definition of HMO: ‘a house occupied by more than two qualifying persons, being persons who are not all members of the same family’. Not surprisingly, the National HMO Lobby implore ‘a similar revision of the Use Classes’ in England and Wales:

‘HMOs in concentration are of course primarily a planning issue. Local authorities can act only within the powers they have available. All concerned are agreed that the single most useful measure that the government could take to address the problems arising from HMO concentrations would be to introduce planning controls on HMOs - as has been done in Northern Ireland. We were very disappointed that the recent amendment of the Use Classes Order omitted to do so. We urge you to give this matter further and urgent consideration’ (National HMO Lobby, 10/5/05).

‘Community and Council are struggling with one hand tied behind our backs. There is no means of controlling the proliferation of HMOs, the root cause of

our problems. What we request is amendment of the Use Classes Order, such that HMOs are realistically defined (as they are in the Housing Act) and that they count as change-of-use, and therefore require planning permission (as in Northern Ireland's Use Classes Order)' (National HMO Lobby, 15/9/05).

In a similar vein to the debates taking place in England and Wales, and outlined above, the revision to the UCO in Northern Ireland was underpinned by concerns linked to urban transformations tied to rising concentrations of student (and other groups) HMO, and the disintegration of established local communities; thereby illustrating the wide-scale of studentification. As noted in the Review of the Planning (Use Classes) Order (Northern Ireland) 1989:

'the absence of controls over the density of HMOs in certain areas, is leading to problems in local communities in Belfast and elsewhere and is detrimental to regeneration efforts and to the creation/ maintenance of sustainable communities' (Northern Ireland Planning Service, 1989: 7).

The report concluded: 'The UCO should be amended to specifically list HMOs as one of the uses which is not contained in any class in the UCO' (ibid).

Growing support for a revision to the UCO in England and Wales was noted in national parliament from the end of 2004. On the 20 December 2004, Alan Simpson MP (Nottingham South) asked the Planning Minister to amend the UCO, and this request was reiterated on a number of occasions. The continuing standpoint of central government departments was for the non-revision of the UCO, as exemplified by the ODPM in communication to the National HMO Lobby:

'We do not think it is appropriate to amend the UCO with regard to HMOs. I appreciate that this is not the response you were hoping for, but there is nothing further we feel we can add' (David McKinlay, Customer Liaison Unit, ODPM, 21/11/05).

The campaign for the amendment of the UCO was further energized and extended by a *Sustainable Communities Seminar* (21/4/06), held in Durham, and organized by the Chair of the AAPG, Roberta Blackman-Woods MP (City of Durham). The main focus of the seminar was 'to address the damage to sustainability caused by studentification in Durham' (National HMO Lobby, 23/4/06).

This event would appear to have motivated a number of MPs to raise the issue in national parliament, via two adjournment debates on balanced and sustainable communities and HMO (see above). The debates, notably introduced by the Chair of the APPG and making critical reference to the Studentification Guide (UniversitiesUK, 2005), and the forthcoming NUS (2007) report, embedded the issue of studentification onto the agenda of national parliament. For instance, current Universities Minister, John Denham (Southampton, Itchen) (Lab) noted:

'If the great majority of the population changes from one year to the next, the number of settled, long-term residents is too few to sustain, try as people will, the community organisations and sense of neighbourhood, the social capital as it is called in the academic jargon, that make our communities work' (quoted in Hansard, 2006).

In response, the Minister for Local Government (Mr. Phil Woolas) reiterated the standpoint of central government, commenting:

'I have put across the point that we believe that we understand the problem. I believe that I do, and that there are options before us. We are concerned that the options that have been proposed by the campaign might not be the correct ones, but we will give the issue full consideration and report back shortly' (ibid).

Such comments would appear to place the precedence on a more effective management of HMO, as opposed to changes to the UCO. As noted by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Meg Munn):

'The key to **successful management** of the private rented stock is for local authorities to adopt **clear strategies** that recognise the need for co-operation between all concerned, including local authorities and universities, if student accommodation is an issue, as well as the local community, private landlords and, of course, residents' (ibid, **emphases added**).

Seminally, on 12 December 2006 a number of MPs from a diverse range of urban contexts described the effects of studentification in their constituencies; thereby further raising the profile of studentification as a wide-scale national issue in parliament. Examples include:

'There is no doubt that studentification is a major and growing problem in towns such as Loughborough and in many cities in England. I welcome the fact that the Government are looking at proposals, because the Housing Act 2004 did not say very much about that growing problem. A recent UK Universities report stated that the key is joint working, which I welcome, but I also hope that the Government examine proposals to strengthen the ability of housing authorities to protect local citizens. The offset to the growth of universities is that many local people find it difficult to get into the housing market' (Mr. Robert Syms (Poole) (Con), quoted in Hansard, 2007).

'In roads in my constituency near the university, half the population turns over every year. When that happens, every other house has a "To Let" sign outside it, which is not a sustainable community. I know that the Minister is aware of the problem from her experience in Northern Ireland, but I wonder why the Government have set their face against imposing similar solutions not only to reduce the size of the population in an HMO at which point planning permission is required, but to require compulsory licensing for all small HMOs as well as large HMOs, which are included in the Housing Act 2004' (Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab) (ibid).

'Surely it is difficult to maintain sustainable communities in areas of high density student housing.... The problems in Tyne and Wear have been raised on the Floor of the House on several occasions. They have now been going on for more than a year. The Department has promised to do something about it, but so far has not. When will we hear what the solution

is?’ (Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend) (Lab)) (ibid).

Moreover, during this parliamentary session the Secretary of State was posed with a series of questions about the link between students and sustainable communities. Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough) (Lab/Co-op), for instance, asked: ‘What steps she is taking to promote sustainable communities in areas of high density student housing?’ (ibid). The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Angela E. Smith) responded, explicitly acknowledging the issue of studentification:

‘My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government recently met my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) and representatives from the university, the local authority and community groups, of which the Storer Action Group was particularly impressive, to discuss the issue. As a result of that meeting, we are now examining a number of measures in the areas of planning, housing, finance and local area agreements to try to find a sustainable resolution to the problems. The problem can be more general, and as part of our work to create sustainable communities, we supported the publication of the Universities UK guide on **studentification** in partnership with the Department for Education and Skills earlier this year, which outlines good practice to integrate students into the community’ (ibid, **emphases added**).

Again, these comments emphasise the hesitance of central government to revise the UCO, and this was reiterated by the following comment:

‘There are differences between the situation in Northern Ireland and the situation in Great Britain. The circumstances here may mean that UCOs are not suitable’ (ibid).

Although it was noted that central government departments:

‘are now examining a number of measures in the areas of planning, housing, finance and local area agreements to try to find a sustainable resolution to the problems’ (ibid).

Importantly, a key outcome of the parliamentary debates was subsequent meetings between the Minister for Local Government and Community Cohesion (Phil Woolas) and delegations of local MPs, councillors, local authority officials and community activists from Loughborough (8/5/07) and Nottingham (18/6/07), following a request from a local MP:

‘We want to pursue use classes orders, which are prevalent in Northern Ireland in determining the change of use that turns a particular property into a house in multiple occupation. Will the Minister agree to meet me and other representatives at some stage to pursue that particular point, which may not change the problem that we have at the moment but could help with future studentification problems around the country?’ (Mr. Andy Reed MP (Loughborough) (Lab/Co-op) Communities and Local Government, quoted in Hansard, 2007).

The willingness of a leading national politician to engage with, and 'listen' to the voices and opinions of local political actors and community activists, was key to the decision of central government to reconsider the merit of revising the UCO, as sought by the National HMO Lobby, CCBC and AAPG. As commented by the Officer with policy responsibility for the UCO:

'Following on from this meeting [as above], officials and Ministers will have further discussions on the issue of HMOs and 'studentification', including the role that the UCO can play, and I will feed the information and views you and others have provided into those discussions' (Alison Edwards, 8 May 2007).

This gradual realignment may have also been influenced by the findings of the House of Commons Committee for Communities and Local Government, which was charged with investigating (over)concentrations of HMO in coastal towns:

'We recommend that the Government examines whether local authorities need additional powers to address the problems arising in areas with especially large numbers of HMOs' (House of Commons, Communities and Local Government Committee, 2007: 20).

Perhaps what is more fully needed in these debates of (over)concentrations of HMO is a clearer rationale of the substantive benefits of revising the UCO, and how this may support and concur with the political aspirations for sustainable and balanced communities. There would appear to be some accord that the revision to the UCO is important for restricting the future scale of the conversion of family homes to student (and other) housing. This may be particularly pertinent in neighbourhoods that are currently being studentified, or which may be ripe for studentification in the future; although it is equally important to halt the intensity of student HMO in some existing studentified neighbourhoods.

In this sense, one of the key predicted fruits of a revised UCO is to minimise the further geographic diffusion of studentification across the UK. Other important factors which may aid this aim is the current slowing-down of the marked expansion of universities and student populations, the increasing number of home-based students (Holdsworth, 2005; Christie, 2007), and other possible effects differential 'top-up' tuition fees.

Of course, the previous conversions of family homes to student housing will not be reversed by a revised UCO. Other financial incentives and subsidies may be required to bring current student housing back into use for families (e.g. the use of Section 106 monies in Nottingham), if such local population restructuring is sought by local authorities and other stakeholders.

Nonetheless, a revision to the UCO would clearly enable local authorities to more effectively monitor and regulate the patterns of HMO, and to intervene when the proliferation of HMO undermines the imperatives of sustainable and balanced communities. However, it is plausible that such a revision to the UCO will only take place when the wider impacts of a revised UCO have been more fully thought through. This will be an important theme for the forthcoming HMO Taskforce (see below) to consider. Perhaps the campaigns of the National HMO Lobby, CCBC and APPG would be strengthened and have more bearing on the stance of central government if a fuller consideration was given to the possible effects on the wider economic buoyancy of local, regional and national housing markets. Other important issues include the impacts of a

revised UCO on the vivacity of the private rented housing sector, developers and other institutional actors, and on the broader delivery of sustainable communities.

4.3 Areas of Housing Mix and the spatialisation of student areas

One of the key ways that local authorities have sought to counteract and regulate the intensity of (over)concentrations of student housing and student populations is to designate particular areas for the promotion of student housing and the rebuff of the development of student housing within Local Plans. This represents a deliberate attempt to ensure a more scripted spatialisation of student areas within university towns and cities. Examples include the Selly Oak Plan in Birmingham^{xvi} (National HMO Lobby, 6/12/06), and a Supplementary Planning Document in Loughborough (see Hubbard, 2008) (National HMO Lobby, 13/10/05), and other similar ventures have been pursued in Sheffield and Nottingham. These areas of designation are broadly term ASHOREs (Areas of Student Housing Restraint), although this term has recently been superseded by Areas of Housing Mix (AoHm), as outlined below.

The origins of the ASHORE concept can be traced back to the *Review of the Leeds Unitary Development Plan (UDP)* in 2002. Identifying the geographies of studentification in Leeds in 'a number of core areas [Headingley, Hyde Park, Burley and Woodhouse] where students comprise 50 to 100% of the total population and surrounding areas where they comprise more than 20%' (p.46), and noting some unfolding new geographies of studentification in: 'the residential areas just beyond which have a smaller student population but are under pressure from investors seeking to acquire owner occupied property to let' (ibid), the review advocated the designation of an ASHORE to impose restraints on subsequent development of student housing in both the latter and former areas.

Enshrined within Policy H15A of the Leeds Unitary Development Plan, the review proposed that the following developments would not be permitted in the ASHORE:

'student halls of residence and alterations, extensions and re-developments of existing halls which would result in a net increase in bed spaces', and ii) extensions to existing student housing which result in an increase in habitable rooms, and iii) houses in multiple occupancy, and flats of 3 or more bedrooms unless subject to an occupation condition prohibiting occupation by full time students' (p.47).

Conversely, Policy H15A asserted that a new set of residential geographies of students would be promoted in Leeds, with student housing developments to:

'be encouraged outside of the area of student housing restraint [ashore] in locations which: i) are a) within the city centre or b) within other areas which are well connected by public transport, or c) which will be well connected by public transport as a result of improvements, at an appropriate time relative to the development. ii) Would be or have the potential to be attractive to students as places to live, and iii) can assimilate student population growth without prejudice to the amenity and viability of the existing community' (p.48).

Following a Public Inquiry on the Leeds ASHORE in 2004, the report of the Planning Inspector was published in November 2005. Importantly, the Planning Inspector's

Report explicitly acknowledged the concerns of the Leeds HMO Lobby and other parties in Leeds, and described the effects of studentification:

'I believe that concerns about a loss of overall balance in the community, particularly as manifested through the transience and seasonal nature of student occupancy, are well founded; and that a continuing and significant growth in the number of students living in and around Headingley could in time seriously erode the range of choice of housing and the level and quality of services such as education' (p??).

Nevertheless, the report rejected the concept of the ASHORE, and recommended a revised planning and land use concept: 'Area of Housing Mix' (aHoM). This proposed that:

'planning permission will be granted for student housing (and extensions thereof) where the stock of housing, including that available for family occupation, would not be unacceptable reduced' (p.4).

Underpinning this recommendation was the premise that:

'Within the limits of what is possible under planning powers, seeking to manage such change, and maintain a better community balance, are valid planning objectives, best achieved through policy measures to maintain diversity in the housing stock' (p.6).

Although the National HMO Lobby retorted that the AoHm 'would offer no protection at all, as it stands', it was noted that 'It's not entirely disastrous'. Instead, the advice of the National HMO Lobby to local HMO Lobby groups seeking local ASHORES in their respective areas, was to: '(a) give it a positive slant (not restraint, but mix or balance or diversity), and b) don't target student housing.' At the same time, the National HMO Lobby commented: 'we hope to subvert the Report!', by proposing a definition of 'unacceptable reduction', and well as manipulating other clauses within the Report (National HMO Lobby, 6/12/05; 12/1/06; 16/2/06). This has clearly had a major bearing on recent calls for AoHm's in other locations across the UK, and brought to issue of the 'tipping-point' of studentification to the fore (see below).

One of the most significant outcome of the AoHm in Leeds is the onus that has been placed on the need to 'identify opportunities for provision of new purpose built student accommodation' (Leeds City Council, 2006). This has led to some dramatic changes in the residential patterns of students, and ultimately, fuelled different expressions of studentification in Leeds. Most notably, the subsequent granting of planning permission for numerous developments of student housing on brown-field sites away from the existing studentified areas, has facilitated the formation of a new residential geography of students which is dominated by large-scale, high-density, purpose-built student accommodation by private sector developers (The 'Kirkstall Road island'). In essence, this new geography, or what D.Smith (2006) terms the 'second-wave' of studentification, comprises a series of discrete, gated-communities (Atkinson and Flint, 2003), and has resulted in the increasing segregation of student and established residential populations.

Some local commentators contend that the development of the new purpose-built student developments has been a key factor in the over-supply of student accommodation in Leeds, and the increasing number of empty bed-spaces and voids in

the private rented housing sector (Blakey, 2007); a trend which also apparent in other university towns and cities (e.g. Manchester, Liverpool, Nottingham). One of the unintentional consequences of the AoHm in Leeds is that some (former) studentified areas are therefore witnessing destudentification, and severe economic, social and physical decline.

From a critical perspective, it is highly questionable if these new purpose-built developments of student housing in Leeds fulfil the policy criteria of being 'well connected by public transport', are 'attractive to students as places to live', and assimilate 'student population growth without prejudice to the amenity and viability of the existing community', as embedded within Policy H15A (see above). Suffice to say, the example of Leeds stresses the need for the adoption of more holistic approaches to regulating the wider residential patterns of students, and the supply and production of student housing and accommodation, particularly if the virtues of balanced and sustainable communities are to be realised via new private-sector developments of student housing to offset unbalanced concentrations of students in other parts of university towns and cities. It is clear that the wider costs and benefits of strategically moving student populations into and out of distinct residential enclaves of university towns and cities needs to be more fully considered, before planning permission is granted for the development of new student housing.

Perhaps more importantly, the designation of AoHm or similar land use restrictions beg fundamental questions about the most appropriate point for the intervention into processes of studentification by institutional actors, and the need to pin down thresholds for identifying when a residential population becomes unbalanced. Not surprisingly, there is little agreement on what constitutes a balanced community. The National HMO Lobby suggest using the parameters of 'when HMOs exceed (say) 10% of households, and thereby 20% of the population (as HMOs are disproportionately crowded) - then communities lose balance' (National HMO Lobby, 10/5/05). In Scotland, Fife City Council use the boundary: 'within a given street or block, the proportion of properties in multiple occupancy should not exceed 5%', as part of Policy H6 to control concentrations of HMO (Fife City Council, 2005). In Northern Ireland, the Belfast HMO Strategy 'bans HMOs above 30% per street in 21 HMO Policy Areas' (Belfast City Council, 2006). Clearly, a universal and fixed cut-off point to restrict the concentration of HMO is not appropriate given the specific contingencies of locations. If the planning and land use concept of AoHm is to be more widely pursued, place-specific and flexible thresholds will be required which are sensitive to the diverse geographies of studentification in the UK.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This paper has explored the formation of the politics of studentification in the UK. In many ways, the discussion celebrates the fervour of the critical actions of the many individuals and groups that are embroiled in local and national campaigns to more effectively address the challenges of studentification. Collectively, the movements have spawned a balanced discourse and deeper understanding of the complexities of studentification, when compared to the late 1990s. Moreover, it can be argued that the politics of studentification is imperative if the substantial economic, social and cultural benefits of universities and student populations are to be harnessed in ways which benefit the majority of society, and if the multiple remunerations of students and universities are to be more transparent and apparent to established residential communities. This is one of vital ingredients for the maintenance of cohesive towns and

gown relations in contemporary university towns and cities, where students often reside within residential communities.

The growing consensus to integrate student populations into established residential communities in sensitive ways more fully complements the leading urban policy aspirations for balanced and sustainable communities, and is vital for encouraging established residents to remain in situ. This is important given the general depopulation of children and families from central and inner areas of towns and cities (Holt and Bowlby, 2007) and the impacts on demands for local services (e.g. nurseries, schools); an issue which is noted as a leading-edge societal concern by eminent planner Peter Hall (2007).

By contrast, this paper has argued that the unregulated and unchecked rapid in-migration of student populations into established residential communities, tied to the proliferation of HMO and the loss of family homes, can contradict the idealistic visions of social mixing, conviviality and community cohesion within diverse and inclusive population structures; although, arguably, there may be positive seasonal, spin-offs for a minority of social groups (i.e. higher demands for public transport, doctors, dentists, and retail and leisure services during term-time).

In light of the absence of a national policy on the production and supply of student housing, which dictates *when*, *where* and *how* enlarged student populations should be integrated into established residential communities, or dispersed to other parts of university towns and cities, it would appear that a revision to the UCO, in conjunction with the more effective implementation and monitoring of mandatory licensing (and where appropriate selective licensing) and the wider designation of AoHm, may be the best way forward to enable more effective interventions in the processes of studentification. Clearly, this needs to be supported by binding and well-equipped housing management systems, such as landlord accreditation (e.g. ANUK, 2007), and the fuller use of other current powers of intervention (i.e. environmental health, anti-social behaviour orders, noise nuisance). The uptake of local accommodation bureaus to govern and police standards of housing management, such as the recent extension of Unipol to Nottingham (and possibly other locations) from its base in Leeds and Bradford, is important here.

In tracing the biography of the politics of studentification, this paper has charted the positive, gradual realignment of central government departments to this way of thinking. Recent comments of a leading official of the DCLG are emblematic of the less ambivalent attitude of central government to studentification:

‘we believe that there is a range of non-planning steps which we can take to address the problems caused by ‘studentification’ and that, to make a real impact in this area, a coordinated programme of action, bringing together a number of policy levers, is needed. To achieve this it is important to engage the key stakeholders – principally local authorities, private landlords, the universities and students themselves’ (DCLG, 2007).

At the same time, it is vital that strategies (e.g. the development of purpose-built student accommodation) which seek to reduce and / or halt (over)concentrations of student housing and student populations do not give rise to the ‘ghettoisation’ of students in gated-communities. Strategies which yield the growing segregation between students and established residential communities do not complement the underlying virtues of sustainable and balanced communities, and are likely to extinguish the many benefits which can accrue from social and community interactions between students and established residents. Indeed, it can be argued that some purpose-built developments

of student accommodation have simply displaced the challenges of studentification from other studentified areas (D.Smith, 2006; NUS, 2007); although there are some good examples of purpose-built student accommodation which could be more usefully disseminated and shared.

It would be beneficial for this wider, and fluid, perspective of different types of student accommodation to be woven into the remit of the forthcoming HMO Taskforce, since this will have an important bearing on:

‘the difficulties that can arise with large concentrations of dwellings with group occupation and recognise that there may be a case for amending the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended). We therefore propose to consult next year on proposals to amend the Use Classes Order in relation to HMOs’ (DCLG, 2007).

Another fundamental issue which the HMO Taskforce could usefully consider is how best to identify the moment when the ‘tipping-point’ of studentification is realised. This is problematic since the social, economic, cultural and physical effects of studentification will be interpreted in different ways, and will mean different things to different people (UniversitiesUK, 2005). This conundrum begs the important question: how can policy makers and institutional actors most effectively intervene in neighbourhoods ‘where the spectre of studentification hangs in the air’.

A good starting point may be to explicitly anchor debates of studentification to the wider framework of sustainable communities. With this in mind, it may be useful to fully deconstruct the current working definition of sustainable communities (see Table2), as espoused by central government (see DCLG, 2007), and to pin down: when, where how and why the social, economic, cultural and physical changes necessitated by growing (over)concentrations of student HMO support and / or contradict the formation or maintenance the different dimensions of a sustainable community. A plausible hypothesis here is that established residents within studentified areas will have a high probability to deliver a series of vociferous and unanimous ‘no’s’, when posed with such a list of questions in studentified areas.

Table 2: Exploring the sustainability of balanced communities

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do established residents and students want to live and work in studentified areas?• Do studentified areas meet the differential needs of existing and future residents?• Are established residents and students sensitive to their environment?• Do established residents and students contribute to the general quality of life?• Are studentified areas safe?• Are studentified areas inclusive?• Are studentified areas well planned, built and run?• Do studentified areas offer equality of opportunity?• Do studentified areas offer good services for all?

This manoeuvre would provide a useful barometer to gauge the pervasiveness of studentification, and would capture the different perceptions and experiences between stakeholders and alliances within the partnerships of the HMO Taskforce. This

compulsion for partnership working is in line with the current outlook of central government departments to engage with:

‘interested local authorities and universities to explore how these measures [to assist in addressing many of the issues faced in areas with high concentrations of HMOs] might be brought to bear. These measures include activities such as neighbourhood management schemes, landlord accreditation and additional licensing for HMOs. We will ask the Taskforce to present their recommendations to Government in spring 2008’ (DCLG, 2007).

It is important that the issue of studentification does not get ‘lost’ or ‘hidden’ within the wider discussions of sustainable (and balanced) communities. This point may have particular resonance for some recent directions in the politics of studentification. For instance, and as its title implies, the purpose of the APPG (and similarly the CCBC) has been recently modified to focus on broader issues connected to concentrations of HMO and other social groups residing in HMO (National HMO Lobby, 28/6/07). There is a possible danger that the issue of studentification may be diluted within the discussions of the APPG, and conflated with different processes of urban change (e.g. coastal towns). The specific dynamics and processes underpinning the concentration of students in HMO (or purpose-built student accommodation) and the distinct social, cultural, economic and physical outcomes of student geographies (i.e. the prevalence of student-oriented retail, leisure and recreational services, seasonal occupancy, specific cultural and temporal practices (i.e. student parties)), are strikingly different to the processes and effects of other social groups (e.g. asylum seekers, young professionals) residing in high concentrations of HMO; although there are clearly some themes of commonality irrespective of the type of resident in HMO. At the same time, and as noted above, the residential geographies of students are increasingly being mediated by the supply of purpose-built student accommodation, which is also giving rise to some of the similar concerns (noise nuisance, car parking, crime, litter, change of local retail and leisure services) more closely associated with over-concentrations in HMO (D.Smith, 2007).

In conclusion, this paper has attempted to shed light on some possible lessons for institutional actors and other stakeholders concerned with urban policy and contemporary urban changes, by drawing upon some of the notable contributions of the politics of studentification. These insights may have resonance for both critical scholars and policy makers seeking to stimulate and nurture more equitable forms of urban change, which yield new, safe and sustainable urban geographies with diverse and inclusive populations, and where: ‘people want to live and work, now and in the future’, and ‘contribute to a high quality of life’ (see DCLG, 2007).

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