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Brookfield, Katherine (2018) *Studentified areas as contested heterotopias: Findings from Southampton*. Area. pp. 1-10. ISSN 0004-0894

<https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12458>

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Studentified areas as contested heterotopias: Findings from Southampton

Katherine Brookfield 

Environment Department, University of York, York, UK

Correspondence

Katherine Brookfield
 Email: k.brookfield@york.ac.uk

Funding information

Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council; Economic and Social Research Council

The ongoing “massification” of higher education in the UK has generated increased demand for student housing. Some of this demand is being met by new, purpose-built student accommodation, but much is being met through an intensification of student properties in established “student areas”, and the expansion of student housing into neighbourhoods previously unaffected by high levels of student in-migration in a process termed “studentification”. Previous research indicates that the arrival of multiple student households in established residential areas creates conflict and adversely affects the non-student population. Wishing to understand better these effects, this paper draws on focus group discussions completed with 11 diverse residents’ groups based across Southampton, an English university city, which explored attitudes towards, and experiences of, studentification. Seeking a more robust theorisation of the sociospatial impacts of, and responses to, this process, the findings are considered in relation to Foucault’s concept of “heterotopia”. Reflecting previous findings, the residents’ groups emerged as firm critics of studentification. Considered against Foucault’s concept, it appeared that the “heterotopian” qualities of studentified areas formed the points of most concern. Implications for the future of studentified areas, and for the concept of heterotopia, are explored.

KEYWORDS

heterotopia, higher education, neighbourhood change, resident activism, studentification, students

1 | INTRODUCTION

The growth, widening and internationalisation of the UK’s higher education sector has generated increased demand for student housing (Allinson, 2006). Some of this demand has been met through the development of university and commercially operated purpose-built student accommodation (Sage et al., 2013), but much has been met through an intensification of multi-occupancy student housing in established “student areas” (Munro et al., 2009), and the expansion of such housing into neighbourhoods previously unaffected by high levels of student in-migration (Sage et al., 2012a) in a process termed “studentification” (Hubbard, 2008). This process, aided by the introduction of buy-to-let mortgage finance, low interest rates and conducive loan-to-value ratios on student properties (Smith & Hubbard, 2014), is associated with multiple social, physical, cultural and economic impacts (Allinson, 2006) as residential neighbourhoods turn into “studentified areas” (Kinton et al., 2016).

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Previous research indicates that the arrival of multiple student households in established residential areas often creates conflict and adversely affects the non-student population (Smith, 2008), although Hubbard (2008, p. 328) notes “varied social outcomes” are possible. Wishing to understand better these outcomes, this paper draws on focus group discussions completed with 11 diverse residents’ groups based across Southampton, an English university city, which explored attitudes towards and experiences of studentification. Where previous research has attended only to the occupants of studentified areas, these groups were drawn from within and outside Southampton’s more studentified areas, providing new insights into the spatiality of responses to studentification. With two universities, a large student population, high numbers of student households in several neighbourhoods and a policy context that has recently brought the supply of multi-occupancy housing under much tighter local government control (see later), Southampton forms an interesting city in which to explore these issues.

Residents’ responses to, and the socio-spatial impacts of, studentification are timely concerns. Aided by government moves to “open up” the higher education sector, expressed most recently in the Higher Education and Research Act, 2017, an increasing number of alternative providers are initiating courses in towns and cities across the country (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2013). This might bring the prospect of studentification to new neighbourhoods in new urban centres and/or intensify the process in existing student areas. Gaining a deeper understanding of the impacts of, and residents’ responses to, studentification might help local authorities, utilising new powers provided through revised national planning legislation (see later), to devise improved approaches to multi-occupancy student housing. Providing a robust theorisation of these impacts and responses might be particularly helpful. To this end, the focus group findings are considered against Foucault’s concept of heterotopia (Foucault, 1986, 1998). Heterotopias are real, tangible spaces that “organize a bit of the social world in a way different to that which surrounds them” (Hetherington, 1997, p. viii), they are “different spaces . . . other places” (Foucault, 1998, p. 179). The concept is employed here to explain studentified areas and to frame residents’ responses to these areas. Through these activities, new perspectives on heterotopias are presented.

The remainder of the paper is divided into five sections. The next section reviews past findings on the experiences of non-student residents living alongside student households. Foucault’s concept of heterotopia is then introduced and its ability to explain studentified areas explored. The methodology follows with brief details of the research site, Southampton, provided. Then, key findings from the focus group discussions are presented and are considered in relation to Foucault’s concept. The conclusions section summarises the main narrative that emerges from applying this concept to studentified areas, and to residents’ responses to these areas. This final section also offers new perspectives on heterotopian space.

2 | LIVING ALONGSIDE STUDENT HOUSEHOLDS

Large numbers of students moving into established residential neighbourhoods has been linked to multiple social, cultural, economic and physical transformations (Allinson, 2006) culminating, claim some, in a “trenchant restructuring of urban space and politics” (Smith, 2005, p. 74). Dwelling houses change into “houses in multiple occupation” (HMOs) (Allinson, 2006), shared dwellings occupied by three or more unrelated individuals who share certain basic facilities, to adopt the definition employed within planning legislation (Southampton City Council, 2016). The proportion of private rented properties increases (Sage et al., 2013). Local services and facilities are adapted to suit students’ tastes (Allinson, 2006), leading to the loss/displacement of family-orientated services like schools (Smith, 2009). Litter, noise, crime, parking congestion and anti-social behaviour are said to increase, the quality of the local environment deteriorates and community cohesion weakens (Sage et al., 2012b). Areas become synonymous with students; known and sometimes promoted as “student areas” (Sage et al., 2012a) or “student villages” (Long, 2016), they can form “exclusive geographies” within the city, introducing new forms of marginalisation and segregation (Chatterton, 1999). These changes, combined with some students’ “expressive lifestyles” (Smith, 2009), which can be perceived as deviating from societal norms and can identify students as “other” (Hubbard, 2008), often create a fractious relationship between the student and non-student populations (Munro & Livingston, 2012).

In response, some established residents move away from areas experiencing studentification (Long, 2016), while others turn to resistance and activism (Hubbard, 2008). These residents can organise into groups and engage in campaigns that seek to disrupt or limit the extent and impacts of the process (Smith, 2005). Sometimes these groups adopt the moniker “residents’ group” (Hubbard, 2008). Residents’ groups have long been observed to have an interest in an area’s social composition and the dominant theory of resident group formation posits that groups emerge when a “threat” to an area’s existing social or physical order is perceived (Short et al., 1986). The presence of residents’ groups as active participants in the critical politics that surrounds studentification (Hubbard, 2008) identified them as an interesting focus for study.

Although negative attitudes and experiences dominate, some more positive accounts of living alongside student households are recorded. Sage et al. (2012a) found that the long-term residents of a social housing estate experiencing significant student in-migration identified student-led demand as an important factor in driving forward appreciated improvements in the area's retail and transport facilities. Long (2016) found that the established residents of a studentified area reported positive experiences with students and noted that they contributed to the area's vibrancy. For these individuals, problems arose from a small minority of inconsiderate students and the high volume of student households within the area (Long, 2016). Munro et al. (2009) and Hubbard (2008) similarly found that concentrations of students, rather than students per se, constituted "the problem" for established residents. The next section employs Foucault's concept of heterotopia to explore further life within studentified areas.

3 | HETEROTOPIA

The concept of heterotopia, as presented by Foucault (1986, 1998), while not immune to criticism (Harvey, 2000) or free from problems (Johnson, 2006, 2013), offers potentially productive ways to define studentified areas and to frame residents' responses to these areas.

According to Foucault (1998), a heterotopia is a real, tangible "spatio-temporal" unit (Johnson, 2006) that is "absolutely different" to all other real spaces within a culture but that contests, represents and inverts all these spaces (Foucault, 1998). Heterotopias provide examples of how things can be done differently (Harvey, 2000). A kaleidoscope of spaces, from asylums to trains, honeymoon suites to boarding schools, are identified by Foucault as heterotopias (1986, 1998). So varied are the examples that the concept seems applicable to almost all spaces (Johnson, 2013). Introducing some demarcation, however, Foucault (1986, 1998) proposed a "systematic description" of heterotopias consisting of six principles/qualities.

First, heterotopias are present in all cultures and, while taking multiple forms, can be classified into two main types: "crisis heterotopias" and "deviation heterotopias" (Foucault, 1998). The former are reserved for "individuals who are in a state of crisis with respect to society and the human milieu in which they live", with Foucault identifying adolescents, menstruating women, women in labour and older adults as examples (Foucault, 1998, p. 179). The latter are where "individuals are put whose behaviour is deviant with respect to the required mean or norm" (Foucault, 1998, p. 180). Depending on how students are perceived, studentified areas might be understood as either type of heterotopia. Being in a "liminal, transitional time between adolescence and adulthood" (Munro et al., 2009, p. 1688), in Foucault's view students might be considered "in crisis" and so studentified areas might be viewed as crisis heterotopias. Alternatively, with previous research indicating that established residents view students' behaviour as deviating from societal norms (Long, 2016; Sage et al., 2012a), from the perspective of these individuals, studentified areas might be viewed as deviation heterotopias.

Second, every heterotopia has a "precise and determined operation", but can be made to operate quite differently as society's beliefs, values and so forth alter (Foucault, 1998, p. 180). Studentified areas have the precise and determined operation of accommodating and entertaining student households, but, as a result of students' changing accommodation preferences, some are being made to operate differently. A process of "de-studentification", consisting of student de-population, rising vacancy rates, falling house prices, the closure of student-orientated businesses and environmental decline, is affecting some traditional student areas (Kinton et al., 2016).

Third, heterotopias can juxtapose in one real place several incompatible places. In the cinema, a three-dimensional space is projected onto a two-dimensional screen, for example (Foucault, 1998). Studentified areas juxtapose student and non-student space, an irreconcilable combination of places according to some established residents (Long, 2016).

Fourth, heterotopias are intimately bound up with time. They are usually linked to discrete episodes of time – "slices in time" (Foucault, 1986) or "temporal discontinuities" (Foucault, 1998) – beginning "to function at full capacity when men are in a kind of absolute break with their traditional time" (Foucault, 1998, p. 182). Some heterotopias are orientated around the indefinite accumulation of time, like museums, while others, temporal heterotopias, relate to time "in its most futile, most transitory and precarious aspect" (Foucault, 1998, p. 182). Studentified areas relate to a distinct episode of time – an individual's university years – while, within them, time is transitory, marked by constant inward and outward flows of students (Kinton et al., 2016).

Fifth, heterotopias always feature a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them accessible, although not freely accessible (Foucault, 1998). Entry is either compulsory, as in a prison, or it requires certain permissions, rites, purifications or gestures. Access to studentified areas is usually contingent on students securing rooms in rented properties, which may require entering into contracts with other students/letting agents/guarantors/landlords.

Finally, heterotopias have a function that relates to all other real spaces within a culture that “unfolds between two extreme poles” (Foucault, 1986, p. 27). This function is to either create a space of illusion that “exposes” (Foucault, 1986) or “denounces” (Foucault, 1998) all real spaces “as being even more illusory”, or it is to “create a different real space as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is disorganised, badly arranged and muddled” (Foucault, 1998, p. 184). Studentified areas are perfectly and meticulously arranged to address, and commodify, students’ tastes (Chatterton, 1999). Attention turns now to the study’s data collection method.

4 | METHODOLOGY

Focus group discussions (Krueger & Casey, 2015) were carried out with 11 purposively sampled (self-identified) residents’ groups based across diverse neighbourhoods in Southampton (population: 254,000; Office for National Statistics, 2017c). Home to two universities – the University of Southampton and Southampton Solent University – and a large student population, Southampton forms an interesting case study. Just over 36,000 students were enrolled on courses at its two institutions in 2015/16 (Office for National Statistics, 2017b). Facilitated by changes made to the Use Classes Order, it has recently revised local planning policy on HMOs, introducing, for example, an Article 4 direction (in 2012) to remove permitted development rights to change a dwelling house into a small HMO (Southampton City Council, 2016). Many of the city’s students live in private rented accommodation in established residential areas. Across the city, approximately 3% of households consisted entirely of students at the time of the 2011 Census (Office for National Statistics, 2017a). These households were unevenly distributed with the highest concentrations found near its universities and the edge of the city centre (Southampton City Council, 2016).

Table 1 provides an overview of the 11 residents’ groups and their areas of activity, including the scale of their student populations. The focus group method, including its strengths and limitations, is well documented (Krueger & Casey, 2015), while using focus groups to explore the attitudes and preferences of residents is an established approach (Howley et al., 2009). Ethical approval for the research was provided by a University Research Ethics Committee. To ensure anonymity, all participants were provided with pseudonyms.

Focus group participants were members of the residents’ groups’ management committees. These committees comprise the most active segment of a residents’ group being responsible for the majority of administrative and organisational activities and decision-making (Short et al., 1986). It was anticipated that they would set the group’s agenda and determine any actions on studentification. Consequently, they seemed an appropriate focus. While engaged as group members, participants may have used the focus groups to advance distinctly personal views and agendas. The group setting curtailed the possibility that these could be presented as the group’s views or agenda, while active moderation by the author ensured discussion did not become captured by participants’ personal “bugbears”. The focus groups were small, involving between two and nine participants (see Table 1). Across all groups, 46 individuals took part with around half being female. Information was volunteered that suggested most conformed to the “typical” profile of a residents’ group member; individuals tended to be older, many self-identified as retirees, they were homeowners and many were long-term residents of their neighbourhoods (Short et al., 1986).

The focus groups investigated urban design preferences with the specific issues explored determined by the concerns of a larger study on urban land-use mix within which the focus groups took place. Besides discussion, the focus groups featured an interactive activity that involved participants working together to design their “ideal” town/city. They placed coloured discs that represented different land uses (leisure, greenspace education, health, housing, waste management, employment, retail and office) onto a large base sheet which featured the circular outline of a settlement boundary. Participants were encouraged to discuss their design decisions during the activity and after they had completed their ideal town/city.

The focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed. Fieldnotes were made within and after each focus group and captured volunteered participant information, plus information on group interaction and setting.

An inductive thematic analysis (Joffe & Yardley, 2004) was performed on the focus group transcripts in NVivo (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Beginning with line-by-line coding, as analysis progressed increasingly fine-grained codes added richness, depth and nuance to the analysis, while organising themes, capturing such issues as attitudes towards, perceived impacts of, and actions taken in response to, studentification, were created through the grouping together of related codes and categories. Attention now turns to the findings of this analysis.

TABLE 1 Sample

Item	Unit	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
All households	Hhs	493	623	1,457	3,070	1,344	1,170	393	185	214	117	119
Homeowners	Hhs	13%	45%	51%	50%	40%	23%	73%	51%	83%	92%	71%
Social rented	Hhs	61%	47%	16%	8%	35%	7%	11%	16%	8%	3%	3%
Private rented	Hhs	24%	6%	32%	41%	24%	69%	16%	32%	7%	4%	25%
Living rent-free	Hhs	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Student households	Hhs	1%	0%	7%	15%	7%	29%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Detached house/bungalow	Hh spaces	1%	6%	26%	17%	6%	8%	57%	1%	20%	87%	29%
Semi-detached house/bungalow	Hh spaces	3%	15%	32%	29%	73%	21%	6%	6%	44%	8%	9%
Terraced house/bungalow	Hh spaces	7%	50%	2%	10%	16%	24%	11%	17%	34%	2%	0%
Flat, maisonette or apartment	Hh spaces	89%	29%	40%	44%	5%	47%	26%	77%	2%	2%	62%
Size of residents' group		All hhs in area	All hhs in area	220 hhs	500 hhs	All hhs in area	All hhs in area	190 hhs	40–50 members	200 hhs	82 hhs	All hhs in area
Year established or years active in 2011 (when focus groups took place)		7 years	8 years	Early 1990s	Early 1980s	Disbanded 2005, reformed in 2009	1 year	2 years	Early 1980s	19 years	Group uncertain of years active and/or year formed	Group uncertain of years active and/or year formed
Size of focus group	Persons	4	5	3	3	3	6	9	2	5	4	2
Residents' group's interests		Similar interests across groups – planning, development, local environmental quality, litter, noise and parking. All groups were, at times, politically and/or locally active e.g., they commented on planning applications, lobbied councillors, responded to council consultations, hosted community events, met with community safety officers and council officers										

Notes: HHs – households. Census 2011 data collected at Output Area level.

Sources: Office for National Statistics; National Records Of Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2017. 2011 Census aggregate data. UK Data Service.

5 | RESIDENTS' GROUPS' RESPONSES TO STUDENTIFICATION

The 11 residents' groups included within the study were uniformly negative about the arrival in established residential areas of large numbers of student households, or houses containing a large number of students. Negative attitudes were present whether groups operated in areas with or without a noticeable student population (see Table 1). Groups did not need to live with or through studentification, then, to form a negative opinion of its effects. Participants could also report positive experiences with student neighbours, "they were absolutely great" (Participant, Group D [PGD]), but still be opposed to students living within established neighbourhoods in large numbers. Positive interactions with students did not, then, translate into a positive view of studentification.

The factors that identify studentified areas as heterotopias often emerged as the factors that most concerned the residents' groups. In particular, studentified areas, and areas becoming more studentified, were seen to feature concentrations of people (students) who deviated from societal norms, a situation thought unwelcome, and the juxtaposition of incompatible student and non-student space, which was seen to negatively affect established residents' quality of life and generate conflict. Further, these areas were seen increasingly to possess the function of accommodating and entertaining students, a situation groups resented and felt produced undesirable, and sometimes actively contested, social and physical changes. The following discussion expands on these points.

Students were seen by some focus group participants as a population apart; they were, as others have found (Sage et al., 2012a), perceived as "other". According with previous findings (Hubbard, 2008; Long, 2016; Munro & Livingston, 2012; Sage et al., 2013), students were seen to practice different hours, have different interests, require different facilities and take a different approach to domestic duties: "the bins aren't put out because nobody is responsible for it" (PGD). Relative to non-students, they were seen to follow different, incompatible lifestyles: "it's a clash of lifestyles" (PGG).

Groups suggested that neighbourhoods and properties had been re-organised to address students' "different" needs. Matching the views others have identified among established residents (Long, 2016; Sage et al., 2012b), groups reported that the nature and range of services within areas had changed: "the shops are just, basically it's all takeaways" (PGI). Properties had been redesigned, or "carved up" (PGC), to accommodate large numbers of students, "from a five bedroom house [the landlord's] now stuffed eight students in there" (PGD). Reflecting previous findings (Sage et al., 2012b), there were concerns about how landlords were re-developing properties – "people were worried about the house falling down there were so many holes being put in it" (PGK) – and about the size of the properties being created. Again aligning with other studies (Munro & Livingston, 2012), there were also concerns about the maintenance of student HMOs by both landlords – "the people who own them and who don't upkeep them very well so they tend to be scruffy" (PGD) – and student occupiers – "[the landlord] had to refurbish it because they had left it in such a, they'd trashed it" (PGD).

Emphasising the perceived "otherness" of students, peppering participants' comments were sets of binary distinctions – students/"residents" (PGG), students/"ordinary residents" (PGC), students/"local people" (PGC), students/"the community" (PGD), students/"normal family unit" (PGD). Others have found similar examples of established residents drawing distinctions between student and non-student residents (Sage et al., 2012a). It appeared that the residents' groups desired students to give up their "other" identity and become more like the non-student reference points:

If you had a sensible number of people in the house, say if you had a three bedroom house and you had three or four students in it, if parking was controlled, if the waste was controlled, if all those elements were controlled, and they were expected to behave like ordinary residents. (PGC)

If it was only four or five people [in the student house], and maybe the landlord lived there himself, you would probably have a different situation entirely and people would behave like a normal family unit, even with single people. (PGD)

An influx of student households, with their "different" lifestyles, behaviours and preferences, was seen to fundamentally alter the nature of a neighbourhood: "too much of any one thing changes things too significantly, like students and HMOs" (PGF); "the essential character of the place has been totally degraded by university students, frankly" (PGK). Others have noted similar attitudes among established residents (Long, 2016; Sage et al., 2012a). Neighbourhoods were said to have changed from "desirable areas" (PGC) populated by "residents" (PGG) and "local people" (PGC) into "student ghettos" where non-student residents were "very sorry" to live (PGC); "some people are just so desperate to get out of the area because of the students" (PGD). Participants recounted their own negative experiences of how life changed following the arrival of multiple student households. The problems noted matched the problems other studies with established residents

have identified and included issues with noise, parking congestion, anti-social behaviour, household waste and environmental decline (Hubbard, 2008; Long, 2016; Munro & Livingston, 2012; Sage et al., 2013). These factors attracted concern and attention because they profoundly affected participants' quality of life: "we have had a lot of trouble, a lot of trouble ... it does affect your quality of life quite badly actually" (PGD).

Groups strongly favoured distributing student households across the city rather than concentrating them in particular locations: "so spread it about, yeah, spread it about" (PGF). Previous research has found similar opposition to concentrations of student households (Long, 2016; Munro & Livingston, 2012). Distributing student households more widely would, claimed the participants, bring benefits:

If they were spread through the community more evenly it would mean, if we talk about university students for example, they would be more inclined to be part of the community instead of being, what they are now, instead of the community. (PGD)

Groups opposed both the notion and creation of student-dominated areas and of organising areas around students. Indeed, some groups, typically those in areas featuring some concentration of student households, engaged in an active, microscale critical politics to "defend" their neighbourhoods from this perceived "threat". Focusing on their small areas of activity, which could extend no further than a cul-de-sac, they monitored and made representations on planning applications for new HMOs, lobbied the city council for regulations on HMOs, contacted local elected representatives about student housing matters and engaged with national HMO campaigns and with Southampton's two universities. As others have found (Hubbard, 2008; Smith, 2008), residents' groups actively contested the scale and range of changes that transform places into studentified areas.

Groups engaged in local political and policy forums to press their concerns, but doubted their ability to influence outcomes. Groups felt that the interests of HMO developers and landlords, "business interests", took priority in local decision-making: "if it's business coming into an area the planners will change policy to encourage business at a cost to the local residents" (PGC). Long (2016) found similar views among some resident activists in a studentified area in Leeds. Groups reported struggling to get their concerns heard: "we had hell's delight trying to get the council up to look at what has been going on along here" (PGK). However, suggesting that their interventions eventually had an impact, between 2012 and 2016 (after the focus groups took place), facilitated by changes to national planning legislation and responding to community complaints on HMOs (Southampton City Council, 2015, 2016), the city council introduced new planning and HMO licensing policies that addressed many of the groups' concerns. For example, as mentioned, an Article 4 direction was used to remove permitted development rights to change a family home into a small HMO, new supplementary planning guidance was introduced allowing HMO applications to be refused in areas with high concentrations of HMOs and in situations that would "sandwich" a dwelling house between two HMOs (Southampton City Council, 2016), while, across multiple electoral wards, new HMO licensing schemes, requiring HMO operators to demonstrate such things as satisfactory HMO management arrangements, were introduced (Southampton City Council, 2015). On the evidence of these interventions, it seemed that the groups' concerns regarding HMOs had become the local authority's concerns.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

Focus group discussions with 11 diverse residents' groups located across Southampton revealed strong opposition to studentification. Highlighting the spatial extent of anti-studentification sentiments, an issue yet to be explored in the studentification literature, groups were critical of the process, whether they operated in areas with or without a notable student population. Negative effects on quality of life, local services and the quality of the neighbourhood environment were reported, reflecting previous findings (see Hubbard, 2008; Long, 2016; Munro et al., 2009; Sage et al., 2012a, 2012b). Students were identified as a population apart; they were, as previous studies have revealed, perceived as "other" (see Hubbard, 2008; Sage et al., 2012a). An influx of student households appeared, as others have found (see Hubbard, 2008; Smith 2008), to turn established residential areas into sites of contested space where a microscale critical politics, focused on limiting the scale and perceived impacts of multi-occupancy student housing, is fostered. Rather than producing the "variable social outcomes" Hubbard (2008) suggests, as confirmed again by this study, studentification appears to produce, at least from the perspective of established residents, consistently adverse outcomes.

For the residents' groups, a neighbourhood's acquisition of the characteristics of a typical student area, such as the development of multiple student HMOs, was contested, as was the final stage in this process, the production of the

“studentified” area. Considered through the lens of Foucault’s concept of heterotopia, it appeared that the process of becoming heterotopian, of acquiring the tropes of this space, was contested, as was the final stage in this process, the establishment of a heterotopia. Foucault said little if anything about how, even if, places might become heterotopias. The heterotopias he presented, the ship, train or prison, for example, typically originated in this state. Drawing on the example of studentification and the production of studentified areas, it is suggested here that places can become heterotopian and that this process, which might be termed “heterotopification”, may (necessarily) be steeped in conflict. Those who do not reflect the particular variant of “difference” embodied by an emerging heterotopia might rebel against it, as the residents’ groups rebelled against the student-centred mode of difference that emerged in their neighbourhoods. Expanding the concept of heterotopia to address this issue of origin and evolution, perhaps using the process of studentification as an initial framework, might usefully increase its explanatory and analytical power.

The combination of characteristics that allow studentified areas to be understood as heterotopias emerged, as noted, as key points of conflict. The potential for heterotopias to be themselves sites of conflict was another matter about which Foucault (1998) said little. Indeed, Harvey (2000, p. 185) argues that “in some sense”, Foucault implied that everything that happens within a heterotopia is “acceptable or appropriate”. The findings presented here dispute this position. The heterotopian characteristics of accommodating concentrations of people (students) who were assumed to deviate from societal norms, of juxtaposing incompatible (student and non-student) space and of possessing a (disputed) precise and determined function (housing and entertaining students) were seen to undermine established residents’ quality of life and were firmly contested.

To reduce conflict in studentified areas, attention might be directed towards their most “controversial” heterotopian qualities. Observing Southampton City Council’s responses to HMOs, it appears that these items have indeed been a concern. For example, revised planning policy should limit the intensification of HMOs in existing student areas, the creation of new concentrations in other areas, and the immediate juxtaposition of student and non-student space. It should limit the possibility of new studentified areas emerging and the intensification of student-centred difference in those that already exist. Such a process of “smoothing out” points of difference, while perhaps making a heterotopia more agreeable to those who do not embody its form of difference, might make it less able to support those who do. Heterotopias are said to support the flourishing of “difference, alterity and ‘the other’” (Harvey, 2000, p. 184). Limiting a heterotopia’s difference, making its ordering of the social world less alternative (Hetherington, 1997), might reduce its ability to facilitate such flourishing. A less “studentified” student area might be less supportive of students, perhaps. Possibly only in heterotopias where all members are “other” might it be feasible to avoid conflict and support difference. In regards to student housing, purpose-built student accommodation might be an example of such space. Like Foucault’s examples, these schemes appear heterotopian from the start, being purposively constructed to house students, individuals who, on some understandings, are seen to deviate from societal norms (Sage et al., 2012a), are “other” (Hubbard, 2008). However, even these spaces are contested. They have been criticised for increasing socio-spatial segregation in the student population (Smith & Hubbard, 2014), for fuelling potentially damaging processes of urban gentrification (Hubbard, 2009), for producing adverse student–community relations, and for displacing established residents (Sage et al., 2013, p. 2623).

In closing, perhaps the larger conclusion to draw from the preceding discussion concerns the seemingly contradictory relationship heterotopias have with conflict. It appears that all heterotopias – whether heterotopian from the start, like purpose-built student accommodation, or acquiring this status through a process of heterotopification, like studentified areas – are sites of potential conflict, contested by those within and/or outside their borders. A heterotopia’s conflict with all other spaces in society may necessarily provoke conflict with the occupants of these spaces. Further, while the former type of conflict shapes and sustains a heterotopia, a point made by Foucault (1998), the findings presented here – on residents’ opposition to studentification, and the creation in response to community complaints of policy that limits this process – indicate that the latter type of conflict might well prove a heterotopia’s undoing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the ESRC and EPSRC. The focus group participants are thanked for their participation. The anonymous reviewers are thanked for their comments.

DATA ACCESSIBILITY

Due to ethical concerns, supporting data cannot be made openly available.

ORCID

Katherine Brookfield  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4947-5624>

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How to cite this article: Brookfield K. Studentified areas as contested heterotopias: Findings from Southampton. *Area*. 2018;00:1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12458>