

Purpose-Built Student Accommodation and Studentification: How is large-scale student housing impacting a neighbourhood?

A case study of Selwerd, Groningen



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Summary

Groningen is experiencing increasing numbers of admissions of students to both the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RUG) as well as the Hanzehogeschool Groningen (HAS). This puts pressure on the local housing market. A solution to accommodate the increasing demand is the development of so-called purpose-built student accommodations (PBSAs) that shelter high numbers of students. Such developments might have impacts on the neighbourhood and the existing community. This qualitative study aims to measure the impacts and assess the PBSA as an effective strategy to accommodate the increasing demand for affordable student housing at scale. For this, a case study is conducted of a neighbourhood in Groningen, which contains three PBSAs, namely the neighbourhood of Selwerd. The study incorporates interviews with residents of the case study neighbourhood to help draw a narrative of the impacts of PBSA on a neighbourhood in the Netherlands.

The findings suggest that impacts on the community are limited for the observed PBSA developments despite having a considerable local influence on neighbourhood composition.

The sensed impacts are neutral and living together of students and non-student residents is seeming without pressing issues.

1. Introduction

University cities across the globe have seen issues with housing shortages over the recent past. In particular, affordable housing is scarce in many university towns in Northwest Europe (Hansson, 2018). In the Netherlands, several university towns such as Delft, Leiden or Utrecht are experiencing those shortages (De Telegraaf, 2021). At Dutch universities, there has been an enormous increase in the inflow of international students over the last 16 years (CBS, 2022). The city of Groningen in the North of the country is no exception to that. The Rijksuniversiteit Groningen sees growing numbers of admitted students that come from countries outside of the Netherlands. In Groningen, the number of students has seen a large increase over the last ten years with over 66.00 students living in the city of which over 17% are international students (Basismonitor Groningen, 2021). Of those, the majority lives in the centre of the city and its older neighbourhoods (Gronometer, 2022).

International students are advised and warned by the municipality and the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen to not come to Groningen if they do not have guaranteed housing beforehand (Gemeente Groningen, 2022). In response to this situation, there is an ongoing policy debate over how to accommodate the growing demand for student housing.

Traditional forms of student accommodation, such as housing in multiple occupation (HMOs), in which family apartments are converted into shared flats, do not seem to fully meet the growing demand for housing. Several different forms of housing solutions have been introduced, including container housing which offers inexpensive, fast deliverable and sustainable student accommodation with high-profit margins for developers but often suboptimal living situations for the inhabitants (Vrablova et al., 2022). Additionally, international students lack a social network, increasing difficulties to find affordable housing (Kudo & Simkin, 2010). For that reason, international students are oftentimes directed towards the private housing market, where they settle for suboptimal housing (Sotomayor et al., 2022).

As an alternative, there are several purpose-built student accommodations (PBSAs) across the city of Groningen. Many of such developments are characterised by high-rise structures and high-density dwellings receiving high numbers of (international) students. This implies a high influx of students to otherwise rather homogeneous neighbourhoods. Increasing numbers of PBSA developments are the result of policies and an ongoing policy debate in Groningen about student housing. Those policies aim to regulate the number of apartments that are authorized to be remodelled into shared flats and rented out to students (Nul20, 2019). Such policies form a response to potentially negative impacts of studentification that might be sensed in neighbourhoods. Rauws et al. (2019) shed light on the tangible negative impacts of high concentrations of students in Groningen.

Considering the broader academic discussion, it becomes evident that much of the discourse on studentification stems from research from the United Kingdom. Sage et al. (2012) conclude that in a

studentified neighbourhood in the UK established residents, might perceive interactions with students negatively due to cross-generational variances in social encounters. Student populations are further characterised as young and their living situation is generally transitory as well as seasonal (Smith, 2006). Due to those characteristics, students might have less interest and little commitment to the local neighbourhood and its community. This in turn can hurt overall liveability, especially for non-student residents.

As Hubbard (2008) notes, it is common that there is a “fragile relationship” between non-students and student residents. This is a popular phenomenon characterising the relationship between universities and cities. In many cases, those two groups live side by side but do not interact with each other. In Groningen there is the notion of “stadjers” (referring to the non-student population of the city) and “studenten” (the students), reflecting on this relationship. Allison (2006) reflects on this relationship by providing evidence from various English university towns, where the “student lifestyle” is oftentimes perceived as having negative impacts on the liveability of a neighbourhood. Evidence from the medium-sized Spanish city Ciudad Real suggests that “vertical studentification”, in the form of PBSAs, might cause similar conflicts as “conventional street level” studentification (Garmendia et al., 2012). In light of the ongoing issues regarding student housing, namely the scarcity of affordable housing in desirable locations, this paper aims to explore the geographies of PBSAs and their impacts on an area, through a case study of the neighbourhood of Selwerd in the Dutch city Groningen. It is intended to add to the discussion of student housing and PBSAs and reassess the feasibility of such by investigating how they are perceived. For instance, Rauws et al. (2019; 2021) investigate studentification within the whole city of Groningen. Their work also considers various PBSAs across the city. This study aims to contribute to the debate on student housing and whether PBSAs are a valuable addition and response to the growing demand through a case study of a specific neighbourhood in the Dutch context and by that build on findings from the above-mentioned studies.

In specific, to achieve this study’s aims the following research question is formulated;

How is Purpose Built Student Accommodation impacting a neighbourhood?

This question is targeted at the specific impacts on the case study neighbourhood Selwerd.

To further investigate the relationship between non-student and student residents in a neighbourhood the question of *What effects do students and studentification have on social cohesion?* Is raised and aimed to be answered.

To add to the broader discussion of studentification the question; *How does a high concentration of (international) students affect life in a neighbourhood?* is aimed to be answered.

This paper will advance as follows. A theoretical framework is built by linking concepts such as studentification and social cohesion to the case study. For that, existing academic literature is adopted. Based on the theoretical framework hypotheses and expectations can be formulated that later on will be revisited. This section is followed by a thorough description of the methods applied in this research including motivations as well as justifications for the chosen methods.

The data will subsequently be discussed in the result section including various aspects of the study. To conclude the central points of the research will be summed up and the paper is to be finalised by reflections as well as further implications and recommendations. This paper, therefore, combines a review of the literature on studentification and social cohesion with the analysis of data and observations collected in the area of the case study of Selwerd.

2. Theoretical framework and Literature review

2.1 Studentification

The core concept of this research is studentification. The term studentification originating from the United Kingdom (Smith, 2002), describes the process of increased concentrations of students in neighbourhoods. This process can be characterised as vigorous and dynamic and can take different forms (Kinton et al., 2018). It forms part of the discussion of urban geographies as long as higher education institutes have been expanding. In many countries around the world, the number of students admitted exceeds the capability of universities to contribute decent accommodation (Ackermann. & Visser, 2016). An increasing number of students can have both positive and negative impacts on the neighbourhood and the city as a whole. Students may contribute to the liveliness of the city and strengthen the local economy with their purchase power. They also add to the development of knowledge. At the same time, the influx of students is putting more pressure on the local housing market as well as existing infrastructure (Rauws & Meelker, 2019). The process of studentification may also pose challenges to the existing residents, especially older people above 65 years old (Allinson, 2006; Lager & van Hoven, 2019).

Studentification is often linked to other, similar processes of urban (re)development such as gentrification (Miessner,2021; Moos et al., 2018). Universities can be actors of Neoliberalization in “the neoliberal city”, if not directly then indirectly by creating the urgency to provide living spaces for their students and staff (Bose,2014). This highlights the possible impacts of universities on the towns they are located in. Neoliberalization is, in this context, the process of market-directed social and spatial transformation (Brenner & Theodore, 2005). The term is employed to construct a framework for the process of studentification in university towns. Students are in some cases identified as “urban gentrifiers” (Chatterton, 2010), advancing the process of neoliberalism while forming and reshaping urban life. Due to

the temporary and transient nature of students living situations, studentification often contributes to sociospatial polarisation as well as neighbourhood change (Brollo & Celata, 2022). The broader trend of neoliberalism is arguably reflected in PBSAs by increasing social inequalities (Reynolds, 2020). The development of student housing is, however, not only driven by matters of supply and demand but oftentimes by urban planning practices and local economic demand. This holds especially true for so-called secondary cities (Heslop et al., 2022). “Secondary cities” play important roles on the national level, but often have weaker real estate markets than primary cities. Additionally, in such cities, the education sector is a significant aspect of economic and urban development. It is characteristic of such “secondary cities” to use PBSAs to vitalize urban development and provide options for relatively low-cost investments (Heslop et al., 2022). Groningen can be typified as a “secondary city”, meeting the attributes described above. Further, studentification might impact the local rental housing market and might lead to the forced dislocation of for example immigrant households (Jolivet et al., 2022).

2.2 Social Cohesion

Strong social cohesion is suggested to be an indicator of the perceived liveability of a given living environment (Badland et al., 2014). Manca defines social cohesion as: “...the extent of connectedness and solidarity among groups in society. It identifies two main dimensions: the sense of belonging of a community and the relationship among members within the community itself.” (2014, pp. 6026).

Students tend to segregate themselves relatively more than other social groups (Munro et al., 2009). This is reflected by the increasingly different lifestyles of the student population and the transitory nature of their living situation (Haase et al., 2012). In some cases, it is conceived that students choose PBSA in an attempt to consciously segregate themselves from other (less privileged) students and other residents (Hubbard, 2008; Nakazawa, 2017). Apart from students segregating themselves, local residents might suffer from feelings of displacement and conflicts are to arise. This is to be seen in the context of PBSA and the introduction of such to a neighbourhood (Sage et al., 2013). Some people that live in areas that are more studentified suffer from diminishing social cohesion and community support networks (Sage et al., 2012). Older people seem to be especially affected by this (Lager & van Hoven, 2019). There is often a lack of interaction between the newcomer and long-term residents. Furthermore, neighbourhoods with little influx of new student residents show much higher perceived social cohesion than more studentified areas (Fabula et al., 2017). Increasing differences in educational status, income and lifestyle might pose challenges to social cohesion (Dekker & Bolt, 2005).

Students are oftentimes residing in middle-and upper-class neighbourhoods and generally in neighbourhoods that are popular and offer amenities sought after by students, identifying convenience as a key motivation for choosing accommodation (Allinson, 2006). It is to be noted, however, that it is

oftentimes assumed that students follow middle-class pathways and their complicated identities are not taken into account (Chatterton, 2010). This holds true for Groningen as well, with many students living in the inner city and in neighbourhoods that are popular to students, for the amenities and benefits of those areas. The majority of PBSAs in Groningen are, however, located in neighbourhoods outside the city centre with Paddepoel being the neighbourhood with the most PBSAs in Groningen (Rauws et al., 2021). Findings from Groningen add to that, by implying that studentification might have impacts on the social cohesion of a neighbourhood (Rauwers & Meelker, 2019). It is, however, concluded by Rauws et al. (2021) that PBSAs in Groningen are a suitable form of student housing and that they are perceived more positively than literature from other countries might suggest.

2.3 Expectations

Based on the literature and theory several expectations are formulated.

Firstly, it is expected that the PBSAs in Selwerd, akin to studentification, have various effects on the neighbourhood. It is expected that students living in the PBSAs are living isolated, separated lives. This links to the literature by Munro et al. (2009) and Haase et al. (2012). As PBSAs in Selwerd are seemingly well-integrated into the neighbourhood and existing for several decades, the feelings of displacement by residents are expected to be limited. Such feelings and arising conflicts generally occur when a PBSA is newly introduced to a neighbourhood (Sage et al., 2013). It is therefore expected that residents are acclimated to the existence of the PBSA and are living side by side with the student residents.

For the same reasons, there is not likely to be a lot of ground for conflicts. The introduction of a new PBSA to the neighbourhood would therefore probably be more impactful. Studentification in Selwerd might, however, be felt as a result of the city developing and altering leaving some people behind. As the neighbourhood gets renewed at various points, the PBSA was a major part of this renewal. It may now attract students coming from diverse middle-class backgrounds that could be an agent of studentification and gentrification. This process is, however, difficult to measure and would therefore require a case study over a longer period of time. It is not expected that there are any cases of unwilling displacement due to studentification. The renewal of the PBSAs might have impacts on the infrastructure and amenities that are available in the neighbourhood.

3. Methodology

With the aim to highlight the perceptions, opinions, as well as expectations of residents, this research is based on a case study of a single neighbourhood in a university town. As the location of the case study is in Groningen, the Netherlands, the empirical analysis of this paper is based on the Dutch and North-west

European context. Groningen was chosen as a medium-sized university town, with a high number of international students.

Case studies can be an effective method to understand a wider and more complex process such as studentification that includes changes over time (Yin, 2014). It is a widely used method and a qualitative research type in the social sciences providing concrete case knowledge, which is arguably more valuable than mere theories and generalisations (Starman, 2013). Focussing on a specific case allows the researcher to study that process or trend in depth. Traditionally, case studies are seen as not fit for the purpose of testing hypotheses and should be applied therefore only in the preliminary stages of research, as the dictionary of Sociology of 1984 defines a case study: *“The detailed examination of a single example of a class of phenomena, a case study cannot provide reliable information about the broader class, but it may be useful in the preliminary stages of an investigation since it provides hypotheses, which may be tested systematically with a larger number of cases.”* (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1984, p. 46). This view is, however, seen as outdated and there have been various evidence and arguments for the sake of the case study as a suitable method in the social sciences even when seeking to generalize to some extent. Flyvbjerg (2006) concludes by considering five misunderstandings in case-study research and providing arguments against those, it becomes more evident that case studies do have strong validity in social sciences. Following that argumentation, a case study can be a valuable method to generalise a certain phenomenon and with that add to scientific development and contribute to the broader discussion. For the purpose of this research, an exploratory case study is chosen. An exploratory case study aims to gather and analyse foundational data (Rogers et al., 2013).

The subject of this research is of complex nature and in order to make an attempt to explain relationships and behaviours between student and non-student residents, it is crucial to capture emotions, opinions and experiences. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a tool for data collection, as this technique provides an informal setting, where a conversation is arising and the correspondent is given room to express themselves. At the same time, the researcher has some control over the conversation allowing for flexibility and adaptability (Knott et al., 2022).

For this research, a purposeful strategy was used. Participants were therefore selected for their applicability to the research. The aim was to obtain a sample that is representative of the population of Selwerd in terms of age and gender. Within that sample, older people were included more as they might be more affected by the impacts of studentification, which is based on supplementary theory and literature as well as assumptions and expectations by the researcher.

During the process of data collection, people were approached on the street, in proximity to the PBSA and in the centre of the neighbourhood, where various shops and other amenities are located. When approaching people, it was emphasised to first get into a casual conversation. It was then inquired whether

the respondents had some more time on their hands to answer some questions about the neighbourhood. Afterwards, the intentions of the researcher were clarified and it was indicated that the data would be treated confidentially and would not be used for any other purposes than this Bachelor thesis. The residents of Selwerd were most of the time willing to participate. There were some barriers to language as most of the participants were not very fluent in English. Most interviews were conducted in the Dutch language, in which I am not a native speaker either. This procedure seemed to work well and the main message could be transmitted properly. It might be, however, that some information did get lost in translation. The data that was collected is, nevertheless, of sufficient quality. The time of the day during which people were approached was a limiting factor regarding the sample as many people, especially in the working age group, were not at home but at work. In total there were five interviews conducted and recorded of which four were selected to be used for this research. The interviews have a duration of approximately 15 to 25 minutes. Participants are aged between 40 and 80 years.

Once sufficient data was collected, the coding programme Atlas.ti was used as well as notes that were taken, in order to analyse the data. The transcripts were subsequently coded by the author, employing thematic analysis, a method adopted by the work of Braun and Clarke (2006). This method allows for deriving information from the interviews by having subjects defined beforehand. Those subjects are based on the theoretical framework. Interpreting data in such a way draws on the interplay of the theory and the data (Baxter, 2016). The recordings as well as the transcripts are saved by the researcher and available for reproducibility, which is in line with ethical considerations regarding the participant's privacy. Additionally, interviews and conversations with workers and officials of the above-mentioned community centres and the “Wijkbedrijf Selwerd” as well as the initiative “Sunny Selwerd” were conducted.

3.1. Case study area Selwerd

Selwerd is a neighbourhood in the north of the town (*See Figure 1*). It is close to the Zernike Campus, where both the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RUG) and the Hanzehogeschool (HAS) have various faculties. In Selwerd live, as of 2022, 5.900 residents. The annual average income in Selwerd lies at 17.500€. This number is noticeably lower compared to the surrounding neighbourhoods (e.g. Paddepoel: 20.500€) and the average of the city as a whole (24.500€). The proportion of households that are around or below the social minimum is 19%, which is relatively high compared to the average of the whole Netherlands (7% of all households). Moreover, the neighbourhood is rather densely populated (AlleCijfers.nl, 2022).

Among that population is a significant number of students. This high number of students might also be influencing the counts on average income within the neighbourhood. The students are housed mainly at four distinct locations. At the northern edge of Selwerd, there are three, more or less identical, PBSAs located. Another accommodation, not exclusively for students though, is situated on the southern edge of Selwerd. Each of those buildings houses over 300 students. The three northern PBSAs will be the main focus of this paper. The developments are owned by Lefier. The rooms are, however, rented out by the Stichting Studenten Huisvesting (SSH), an organisation aiming to provide student rooms for international students (UKrant, 2021).

The “Selwerdflats” are one of the oldest student accommodations in Groningen. (DVHN, 2019). The PBSAs in Selwerd can therefore be seen as an example for newer developments to learn from. “Selwerd I, II, and III” are consequently a suitable option for a case study. The PBSA are well-established within Selwerd. Each of the buildings has seen renovation works over the past few years with “Selwerd III” being finalized in 2021. The differences in perceptions before and after the renovation will be of interest. Renewals included improvements to the individual rooms providing each unit with a private bathroom as opposed to shared bathrooms. The kitchen area remains shared. Additionally, the buildings are now connected to the heating network of *WarmteStad* providing sustainable energy in the form of heating and warm water. This is achieved by reusing excess heat that gets reintroduced into the network. This is part of a sustainability initiative by the Dutch government, making Selwerd (and Paddepoel) one of 27 districts in the Netherlands that receive energy independently of earth gas (RVO.nl, 2018). *WarmteStad* is cooperating closely with the project group “Sunny Selwerd”, which is an initiative focussing on the renewal of the neighbourhood of Selwerd. It was involved in the renewal of the PBSAs as described above. The initiative is occupied with many projects across Selwerd and has an office in the centre of the neighbourhood, providing information and support to local residents. It aims to include residents in the decision-making process and asks for active participation (sunnyselwerd.nl, 2023). Moreover, Selwerd hosts two community centres as well as a “Wijk Bedrijf”, where various activities and workshops are provided and offered. Those seem to be an integral part of the neighbourhood and its community.



Figure 1: Map of the city of Groningen with an indication of various neighbourhoods. Selwerd is located in the North of the city. (groningenlife.nl)

4. Results

The results that could be obtained on the basis of the data are threefold, aiming to answer the three research questions stated at the beginning.

Firstly, we consider how students and studentification are impacting social cohesion within the neighbourhood it seems that there is little to no interaction between student residents and non-student residents. The overall social cohesion of the neighbourhood is relatively high as well as strong bonds within the community are sensed. In addition to that conflicts between students and non-students are limited. The social cohesion within the community appears to be affected minimally by the presence of students. Students do also not form part of the community feeling. It can be therefore assumed that the specific PBSAs of the case study are not impacting the neighbourhood negatively.

Lastly, there are concerns raised that due to ongoing neighbourhood renewal and urban change, the process of studentification might increase and people are to be displaced. This relates to the third research question and provides implications for other PBSA developments in similar contexts.

4.1 Interaction

Residents of the neighbourhood stated that they rarely interact with the students living in the PBSA. A woman who used to live in the PBSA 20 years ago stated the following:

“When I was living here, and I think it is the same from what I am observing nowadays, is that you as a student come to the centre of the neighbourhood to make groceries and then you go back home, cook and go do sports... but there is no real interaction between students and the rest of the inhabitants.”

This statement reflects on the separate lives students live. This could also be observed while walking around the neighbourhood. There were not many students visible in the streets around the centre of the neighbourhood. The student's activity space, referring to the space which an individual uses for their daily activities (Golledge & Stimson, 1997), lies mostly outside of Selwerd. Seemingly, there is no effort by students to integrate themselves into the existing community. This can be partly explained by the fact that students know that their housing situation is temporary and transient. Another barrier to more interaction that was noted was the differences in languages. This was expressed by a 42-year-old male resident, who has no common language in which to communicate with many international students living there. It is further conveyed by two participants (male, 42 and female, 66) that it is understood by them that students need a place to stay but that they are not certain whether they are adapting to the place. By this statement, they are referring to them doubting the integration of students in the community of the neighbourhood.

4.2 Social Cohesion

It was stated by a man that is 80 years old that he has good relationships with his neighbours in general and feels at home in Selwerd since he moved there twelve years ago. When asked whether there is a lot of interaction with students, he acknowledged the presence of the PBSA and students in general but did not recall any recent contact with students.

“Oh, you mean the big buildings over there. Yes, yes I know that students are living there. I talk to my neighbours just like we are doing right now... I can not remember to have talked to students lately.”

This underlines the established presence of the PBSA and its fixed role in Selwerd as an accommodation that just exists there. It also highlights the relationship with other non-student neighbours. Another participant (female, 66 years) living down the lane of “Selwerdflat II” expands on the neighbour relationship by stating that they *“often visit each other for tea or dinner”*. This further reflects the rather strong social cohesion within Selwerd. Upon asking about the PBSA she reacted cheerfully and stated that

she is happy about its presence and the influx of young (international) people to the neighbourhood. She also expresses, however, that she is rarely interacting with students living close by in the neighbourhood. This correlates with the findings by Munro et al. (2009), Haase et al. (2012), Hubbard (2008) and Nakazawa (2017), that students and non-student residents often live side by side and students isolate themselves. It can be reinforced by observations made during the research process. It was a common picture to see people stopping on the street for a small chat when seeing a familiar face.

As mentioned above there is a lot of activity happening around community work within the neighbourhood and the community centres. This is both voluntary labour as well as paid skilled labour. This ranges from workshops teaching skills, over services offered for elderly people to just a place where one can have a cup of coffee. The people I have talked to that are working there explained that students rarely come to visit nor take part in activities. The only thing that was mentioned was students coming by to a repair course when their laptop was broken. A woman working at “Sunny Selwerd” answered the question of whether students would come to the office by saying:

“Students know how to help themselves. The people who come here are usually not highly educated and not that resourceful.”

This statement reflects on the different lives of the two groups living side by side. It also provides insights into the way students are part of social activities within the neighbourhood which are frequently visited by non-student residents.

4.3 Neighbourhood change

Linking observations to the concepts described above, it can be forecasted that the ongoing urban renewal happening in Selwerd might lead to a reinforced process of studentification. This process might lead to both positive as well as negative impacts on the neighbourhood and the people living there. The renewal of the PBSA was one of the first actions taken as part of the renewal of the neighbourhood. The PBSA is now supposed to be safer, and offer more comfort and improved amenities for its residents (Iefier.nl, 2022). This view could be biased as it is the objective of the housing cooperation initiating the renewal. It is to be seen whether this will prove to be true in the future.

Residents in Selwerd are aware of the ongoing developments as was noted by the participants. The attitude towards neighbourhood renewal is both positive as well as negative.

“I like that they are improving something here. The developments look better now.” (42 years old, male)

The participant is here referring to the PBSAs when talking about the developments.

“We want to stay here. We feel at home and have everything we need. If we were to move so much would change. We are hoping that it will not change too much here in the neighbourhood.”

This statement is similar to what a female participant aged 66 years expresses when she says that she hopes she will be able to stay in the neighbourhood. Here, it becomes clear that there is some anxiety around the ongoing developments regarding the unknown.

The renewal might attract more affluent students in the future and lead to a more isolated PBSA. At the same time, the renewal includes a “Buurtrestaurant” in one of the buildings, that aims to attract people from the neighbourhood and beyond. This initiative could strengthen the social cohesion of the neighbourhood and increase potential interaction between students and non-student residents. This lends evidence to the development being inclusive and accounting for the neighbourhood as a whole. Active attempts are made to not see the PBSA as isolated buildings but aim to integrate them into the neighbourhood. It has to be awaited what other future developments in Selwerd will look like and how they aim to be integrative. Developments such as a new apartment complex in the Berkenlaan, realised in cooperation with SunnySelwerd claim to have actively involved residents during the planning process. Approaches like this might counter the possible negative impacts of segregation.

5. Discussion

5.1 Policy debate on student housing

PBSAs are a widely implemented response to the discrepancy between supply and demand for student housing as they offer large-scale solutions which are relatively easy to realise. Additionally, PBSAs are often seen as a way to commercially exploit this discrepancy (Wilkinson & Greenhalgh, 2021). In the context of Groningen PBSAs are also a common phenomenon. This is also partly due to policies that put a limit on houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), allowing not more than 15% of HMOs per street in certain neighbourhoods (Lager & van Hoven, 2019). Such policies aim to regulate the number of students within inner-city neighbourhoods. They also form a reaction towards sensed negative impacts of studentification in Groningen. PBSAs are often an attractive alternative to still meet the alternative. They present more decentralized housing options.

5.2 Literature versus data collected in Selwerd

The broader academic discussion on studentification draws a rather negative image of this process. The challenges that are posed to a neighbourhood by studentification can include neighbourhood change, deterioration of the neighbourhood, and impacts on social cohesion and community feeling (e.g.: Saget et al., 2002). Experiences and attitudes that are reported by residents of Selwerd are more nuanced. People feel the existence of students. There are, however no disturbances or nuisances reported. As the concentration of students in Selwerd is not enormously high and more or less limited on the north of the neighbourhood, the sensed impacts are limited. This might have changed since the renewal of the PBSAs

has been completed and policies have been implemented regulating the influx of students to the neighbourhood. Attitudes towards students might have been more negative in Selwerd before those events (Lager & van Hoven, 2019). Conclusions that can be drawn from the data collected provide a more nuanced view of the impacts of PBSAs. A seemingly conflict-free coexistence is the result in Selwerd. This might be partly reasoned by actively seeking participation in the renewal process, which intends to contribute to inclusive neighbourhood development.

There were some concerns raised regarding the overall neighbourhood change. It was expressed that there exists fear to some extent. This fear concerns possible displacement in the future as an outcome of neighbourhood change and renewal. Students can be seen as agents of change and the process of studentification might accelerate resulting possibly in unwanted displacement. The positive impacts of the neighbourhood change were, however, also noted and appreciated by the residents.

5.3 Studentification in Selwerd and its implications

Following the data and the discussion it can be concluded that the state of studentification in Selwerd is not problematic and the existence of the PBSAs is not imposing negative consequences in the neighbourhood. The current situation seems to be fairly well balanced and is not impairing liveability standards for other residents. This balance should be kept and regulated. Policies that aim to coordinate the influx of students are an important measure to conserve the positive attributes of the neighbourhood valued by its residents. Further studentification should therefore be impeded.

5.4 Limitations

Limitations of this study include time as a limiting factor. In order to measure the impacts of processes such as studentification more profoundly, research over longer periods of time are necessary. It has to be noted that the impacts of PBSAs are context dependent. Although the implications of this study might be applicable to similar situations, they always have to be seen in the context of Groningen and its particularities as a well-established university city.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the experienced impacts of studentification on residents of an urban neighbourhood in Groningen. For this qualitative methods were applied. Studentification is often imposing challenges on various aspects of life. The results of this study imply a more balanced view of the impacts of studentification than much of the existing literature. To answer the research question, it can be said that the impacts are limited, though existent. This study contributes to comprehending the experiences of people living in a neighbourhood with a high number of students and the presence of

decentralised student housing. It can be concluded that there is next to no interaction between students and residents that are not studying in Selwerd. At the same time, there are almost no conflicts between the two social groups. Separate lives and lifestyles give a reason for that. Due to the isolation and to some extent segregation of the PBSAs a more or less harmonious cohabitation is possible. The missing interaction is not impairing the overall social cohesion in the neighbourhood, which is strong and creates a sense of belonging. Ongoing neighbourhood change might impose broader social issues on the neighbourhood. Implications for further research include therefore investigation of how neighbourhood renewal is impacting studentification and the attributes discussed in this study. By adding to the broader discourse on student housing in Groningen, this study reflects on PBSAs in particular and provides evidence on the coexistence of large-scale student housing and non-student residents.

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Appendix

Interview guide

What is your opinion on this development?

What do you like/dislike?

What has changed in the neighbourhood since the accommodation has been here?

How do you feel connected to the neighbourhood?

Feeling of belonging to the neighbourhood and people living there?

Is there a feeling of community?

Interaction with (international) students living in the neighbourhood?

-good experiences/bad experiences?

How do you think it would be if student flats were removed and students would live in regular housing instead? Live outside of the neighbourhood?

Are you aware of the overall housing shortage in Groningen by which students are affected?

What do you think of this kind of housing? How would you like to live as a student or being that age?

How do you think the students are experiencing Selwerd and the community?

Observation Checklist

What is the proportion of students as pedestrians on the street? Are students visible in daily life?

Is there visible street life and a sense of community?

In what state are the residential buildings?

How is the state of those compared to the renovated PBSA?