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Reducing the negative consequences of studentification in small-sized university cities

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Executive Summary

International and prestigious universities located in small cities are growing at a rate beyond the spatial capacity of their host city. Due to this, the presence of students and student housing in these cities has exponentially grown and resulted in a myriad of social, cultural, economic, and spatial impacts. This is known as 'studentification' which affects the co-existence and tolerance between the university community and the local community, particularly between students and local residents who lead entirely different and clashing lifestyles.

Existing research on campus-city relationships has primarily focused on the economic benefits of large universities in small cities, whereas research on student housing in the Netherlands has primarily focused on the shortage for both incoming and existing students. However, much less attention has been given to the current conditions of student housing qualitatively and what student housing typologies mean for other residents in Delft that may have the potential to shift perspectives from student growth to limitation. As tensions are at an all-time high and further expansion growths have been announced by TU Delft, a need to understand the fundamental conditions that contribute to the negative consequences of studentification is needed more than ever to thoroughly understand the studentification process and recommend a long-term strategic plan towards co-existence.

This policy brief highlights the effects of student housing in Delft and creates a strategic plan that is informed by practices of other European cities (Lund, Gottingen, and Loughborough) that is viewed through the political, spatial, and sociocultural lens of Delft to provide an evidence-based and comprehensive approach that transcends conventional practices. By proposing a pathway of policies, regulations, and strategies, a step-by-step process of mitigating the different conflicts and issues resulting from studentification may be mitigated.

Introduction

The growth of TU Delft has changed the relatively homogeneous population of Delft and introduced a new knowledge-based identity to the city (Gemeente Delft, 2021a); therefore, the topic of studentification is ever present in Delft as a small-sized historical city that attracts large numbers of students both locally and globally.

Studentification is broadly defined as "social, cultural, economic, and physical transformations of urban spaces resulting from increases in and concentrations of student populations" (Jolivet et al., 2022). It involves changes in demographics, commercial services, housing market characteristics, and more. The large presence of students, especially in small- or medium-sized cities is often linked to a positive increase in diversity due to the range of young students coming from different backgrounds and a broader impact on the economy due to the investments and employments coming from housing construction and spin-off companies (Macintyre, 2003; Rauws & Meelker, 2019; Rauws et al., 2021). The term 'studentification' is therefore not inherently problematic; however, there also exists a theoretical tipping point wherein the influx of students exceeds beyond the spatial capacity of the city and leads to a range of urgent issues and conflicts that impose burdens on the local community. Due to this, cities that have exceeded this tipping point need to tackle negative consequences considering existing student numbers and need to restrain further student influxes (Macintyre, 2003).

The main question of this study is therefore: What are the fundamental conditions of studentification that need to be tackled in order to stimulate better co-existence in Delft?

Overview of challenges

In Delft, the yearly rent increase is estimated at 15% (Savills, n.d.), making it difficult for lower-income individuals or young families to reside in the city. This is partially because private landlords take advantage of students by targeting this demographic and consequently lessening opportunities for other social groups. This is the process of housing commodification, whereby monetizing a basic need such as housing replaces its social value. Housing is now an investment opportunity for private landlords to gain profit by splitting single-family houses into rooms for students to rent without proper maintenance or quality. The increased presence of students in certain neighbourhoods of Delft then leads to poorer housing quality, cultural tensions, and conflicts. Newspapers in Delft have featured many articles on the anti-social behaviour of students and members of student associations, citing 'vomit on the street' and 'drug parties' as common nuisances that residents of studentified neighbourhoods experience (van Essen, 2021). Since student associations also own houses scattered around the city, the issue becomes more palpable and affects local residents' quality of life. The issue also lies in students not typically realizing the extent of their effect on neighbouring residents. Since they belong to close-knit groups, students often perceive their behaviour as normal for their age group despite the almost daily disturbances it causes others. However, the nuisance caused by students is not solely due to their behaviour, but also due to the quality of student houses with poor ventilation and sound absorption, as well as narrow streets in the neighbourhood that make noise nuisance worse. In 2021, residents of studentified neighbourhoods in Delft compiled a file of 335 pages citing the problems they experienced from students. The file weighed 1.9 kilos detailing the fear that residents have of their children growing up in neighbourhoods where antisocial behaviour is tolerated and the lack of solutions that speaking to student neighbours bring (van der Veldt & de Bruijn, 2021). It also served as a statement piece towards the neglect that local residents felt from the municipality in light of the situation. In severe cases, local residents are oftentimes pushed to the brink and left with no other option than to sell their houses for a loss and move to a less studentified neighbourhood. This form of displacement then leads to a higher concentration of students in the neighbourhood, forming a cycle within the city that exacerbates existing issues. Conversely, those unable to move due to high prices or a lack of suitable homes are not only forced to endure conditions that decrease their quality-of-life, but also feel out-of-place in their own neighbourhood.
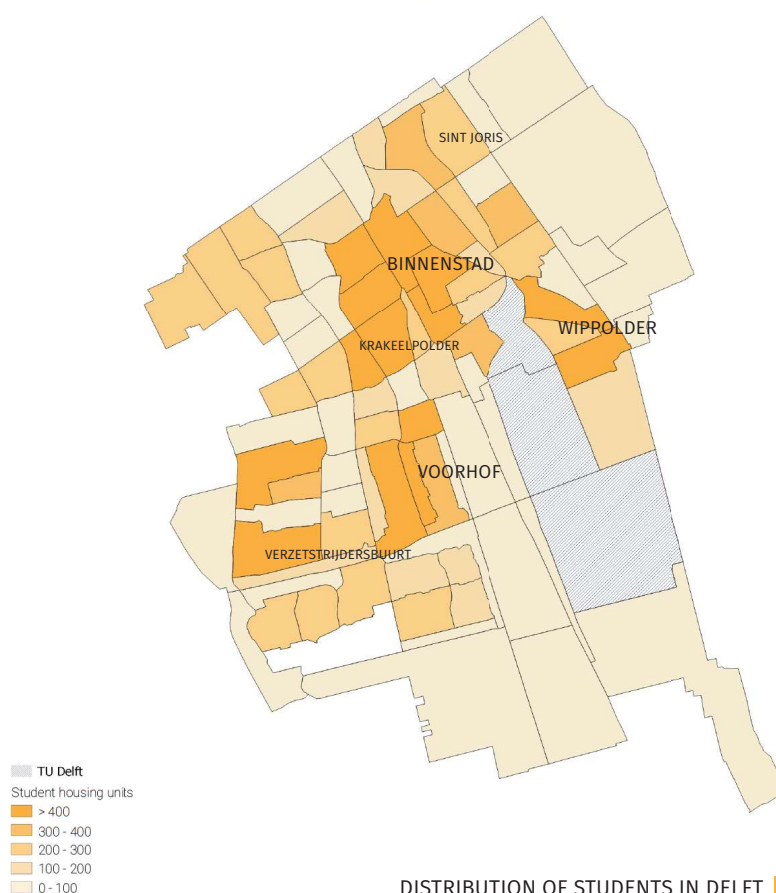
Key findings

Case analysis

To solve the complexity of studentification in Delft, case analyses of similar cities in Europe experiencing the same issues were done to identify potential solutions. These case analyses were used as inspiration for evidence-based practices that could be applicable to Delft. From Loughborough in the UK where studentification has also led to a strong divide between students and the local community, the role of a university community relations team was found to be a viable strategy that leads to different tailor-made solutions such as good behaviour campaigns, off-campus security patrols, and neighbourhood groups (Hubbard, 2008). Furthermore, the threshold approach used in Loughborough was found to be a successful method to limit the amount and concentration of student housing units in the city. This threshold regulation limited the amount of student housing units to 10% in the inner city and 25% in outer zones (Hubbard, 2008).

Learning from Lund in Sweden where the social and cultural tensions between the university and local communities are minimal, it can be deduced that there may be a correlation between regulating student association activities to occur mainly on campus and including a broad demographic of members and types of activities, with reduced tension between students and local residents (Lund University, 2003; Nagl, 2015). Furthermore, the integration of the campus within the city has also been found to mitigate the divide between the university and the local community (Nagl, 2015).

Meanwhile, Gottingen in Germany where the student housing shortage is a growing issue, showed that private landlord regulation is important to solve studentification issues and prevent the concentration of students in certain areas (Miessner, 2021). This strengthens the findings from Lund wherein the dominance of housing association-owned student housing units is found to correlate with reduced residential nuisances, especially when these student

Current situation excluding campus
Total student housing units: 19,228
Total housing units: 55,066
Proportion of student housing units: 35%

TU Delft

Student housing units
- > 400
- 300 - 400
- 200 - 300
- 100 - 200
- 0 - 100

DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS IN DELFT **1**

housing units are located on campus (Nagl, 2015).

These findings were used as inspiration for evidence-based practices that could be relevant for Delft. To determine practices that are needed for the local context of Delft, further analysis of the city was done.

Socio-spatial analysis

In the quantitative part of this study, it was estimated that around 35% of housing units in Delft are student housing units that are concentrated in certain areas of the city (Gemeente Delft, 2021b). Estimates were

used due to the increasing number of illegal student housing conversions that the the municipality is unaware of. Student housing units are concentrated in the districts of Wippolder, Binnenstad, and Voorhof, along with the smaller neighbourhoods of Krakeelpolder, Verzetstrijdersbuurt, and Sint Joris as seen in Figure 1. Therefore, these areas are considered "studentified neighbourhoods" in this study.

Matching the estimated proportion of students per neighbourhood with municipal data on the proportion of local residents who experience a higher than average rate of residential nuisance, it can be deduced that when student inhabitants exceed 20% of the total population in a neighbourhood, local residents are more likely to experi-
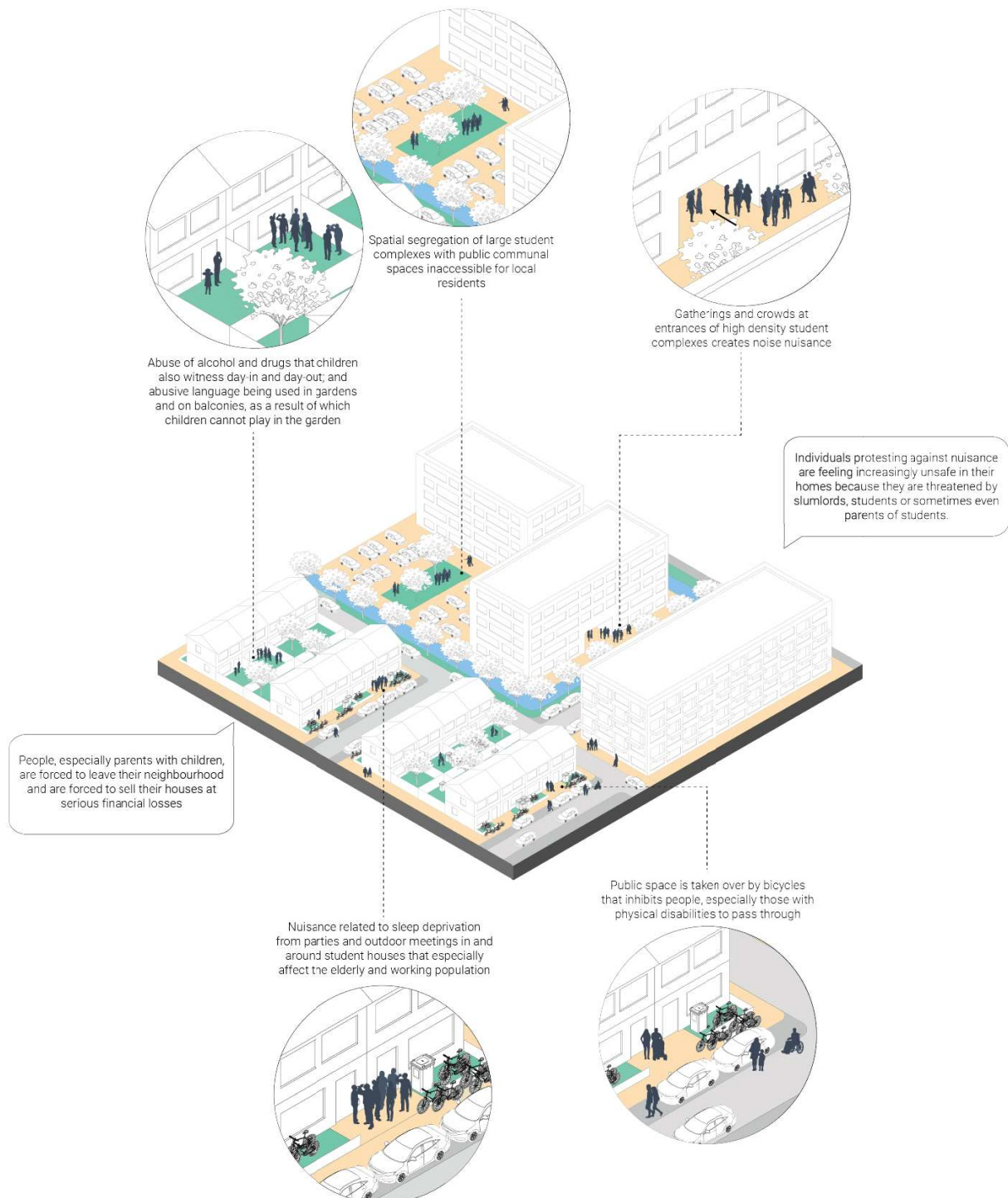
ence a higher rate of residential nuisance (Gemeente Delft, 2021b). To understand how studentification manifests in these areas, Krakeelpolder and Wippolder were thoroughly studied.

Krakeelpolder contains a segregated student complex with over 500 students in the neighbourhood, while Wippolder contains a spread of students residing in either converted ground or upper floors with local residents as neighbours living above or below them in the same housing unit. Despite

the different spatial configurations of these areas, results show that local residents experience the same level of nuisance. The sheer density of students residing in the student complex of Krakeelpolder leads to high levels of nuisance due to parties, gatherings, or even daily activities between 16-18 students in each apartment unit that greatly disturb the local residents opposite the complex. Meanwhile, the uninsulated and unmaintained pre-war homes of Wippolder that have been converted into

multiple housing units, lead to tension between students and local residents residing on different floors of the same housing unit due to different lifestyles and active hours. In both areas, private and monofunctional spaces dominate the space with a lack of community or meeting spaces to engage students with the local community, thereby creating a strong sense of divide and spatial claims between these two groups.

Initially, the research intended to propose a co-creation process to redesign

Spatial segregation of large student complexes with public communal spaces inaccessible for local residents

Gatherings and crowds at entrances of high density student complexes creates noise nuisance

Abuse of alcohol and drugs that children also witness day-in and day-out; and abusive language being used in gardens and on balconies, as a result of which children cannot play in the garden

Individuals protesting against nuisance are feeling increasingly unsafe in their homes because they are threatened by slumlords, students or sometimes even parents of students.

People, especially parents with children, are forced to leave their neighbourhood and are forced to sell their houses at serious financial losses

Public space is taken over by bicycles that inhibits people, especially those with physical disabilities to pass through

Nuisance related to sleep deprivation from parties and outdoor meetings in and around student houses that especially affect the elderly and working population

2 SUMMARY OF STUDENTIFICATION ISSUES IDENTIFIED FROM THE SOCIO-SPATIAL ANALYSIS

these areas with both students and local residents as participants; however, qualitative interviews showed that local residents perceive their almost daily problems to be unsolvable solely through a spatial design intervention. Representatives of neighbourhood groups indicated their disappointment with the TU Delft as an institution and regarded the co-creation workshop as another way for the university to avoid real solutions and focus on unhelpful communications instead.

Interviews with different stakeholders highlighted the confrontations between communities in Delft. Firstly, students and local residents live entirely different lifestyles that conflict with each other, leading to issues as seen in Figure 2. As a response, TU Delft coaches and funds student associations to perform voluntary activities for the local community instead of creating policies to limit antisocial behaviour; therefore, these voluntary activities are perceived as unfitting to the extent of issues faced by local residents and creates the second confrontation between the university and the local community. Lastly, the growth of private landlords favouring students and the lack of resources for the municipality to mitigate this also create confrontations between different inhabitants in Delft, private landlords, and the municipality.

Although many strategies are in place to combat these problems such as the conversion permit that prevents student housing conversions, enforcement is still lacking and many illegal conversions are still occurring (Gemeente Delft, 2020). There are also existing strategies to integrate students within the local community such as Wijstad (university projects dealing with local and social issues) (Domingo & Lockhorst, n.d.), the student task force (monitoring which student houses are creating noise nuisance) (Gemeente Delft, 2020), and the alcohol prevention program (aiming to mitigate binge drinking among students) (Domingo & Lockhorst, n.d.); however, these mainly occur ad hoc and temporarily, which does not create a significant impact to the issue of studentification.

Strategic recommendations

The negative consequences of studentification in Delft are complicated and involve many stakeholders requiring a combination of tailor-made strategies. As a response, best practices from the three case studies were either limited or expanded on through the spatial, political, and socio-cultural context of Delft. The recommendations to reduce the negative consequences of studentification in the city can therefore be summarised in essential preconditions with three supporting pathways: housing, university, and behaviour. This is a process that incorporates existing policies and strategies along with best practices, as seen on the right.

Essential preconditions

- Expand the municipality enforcement team
- Establish a TU Delft community relations team
- Encourage participation of local inhabitants in stakeholder meetings
- Establish a community-university working group

Housing pathway

- Active tracing and logging of student housing data
- Threshold approach in student housing
- Regulate standards of shared student houses
- Establish municipal partnerships for student housing

University pathway

- Designate indoor spaces on campus for student (association) events or gatherings
- Increase student housing stock on campus
- Create a residential environment on campus with recreational and non-academic functions
- Disseminate knowledge and services to local residents

Behaviour pathway

- Regulate student association activities
- Establish a neighbourhood watch
- Establish an iterative good neighbourhood campaign
- Establish and empower neighbourhood groups to take control of their space

Key take-aways

1. Delft is past its maximum capacity with its student population. The disadvantages of studentification now outweigh the advantages.

2. Studentification has far-reaching implications, including displacement and financial loss. Various factors contribute to this phenomenon including housing commodification, long-standing institutional practices, and normalised behaviour.

3. Current strategies and policies fail to consider the extent of issues resulting from studentification, relying on ad hoc and temporary solutions. Municipal enforcement is lacking and TU Delft has been criticised for their inadequate involvement in local social issues.

4. An understanding of the interplay between different perspectives, spatial data, and practices abroad is crucial to effectively tackle studentification. This approach allows for responses that align with the extent of problems in studentified neighbourhoods.

5. Strengthening the university-community partnership and spreading out the spatial distribution of students are crucial for effective policies and interventions. Only after these conditions are met can interventions to integrate students within the local community be accepted to achieve co-existence.

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Colophon

In the conduct and dissemination of this policy paper, we have adhered to the highest standards of ethical research practice. The study upon which this policy brief is based was approved by an Ethics Committee at the TU Delft. We acknowledge any potential conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise, that could influence the execution or interpretation of this work, and state that there are none. Where applicable, we have obtained permissions for copyrighted material and have been transparent about any affiliations, funding sources, or institutional backing which could constitute a conflict of interest.

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