

**“Keeping them together”, University
Accommodation and the
‘International’ Student: A Case Study of
Loughborough University, UK**

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This dissertation is submitted in part fulfilment of the BSc Honours
degree programme regulations in the Department of Geography,
Loughborough University.

Abstract

As a result of a rapid growth of 'international' students seeking to study in the UK, many universities have embarked upon strategies to successfully internationalise the institution in such a way that both 'domestic' and overseas students may benefit. A common theme within such strategies is to encourage cross-cultural awareness within the student populace. Despite this, a wealth of literature has examined the ways in which intercultural connections between home and 'international' students have often been slow to form, and in many cases a separation exists between the two groups. The sharing of accommodation has been proposed as a potential remedy to low levels of cross-cultural interaction, assisting in the development of, inter alia, cultural competency, language acquisition and the development of mobility capital. This study however, aims to examine critically the role that university accommodation provision may have in enforcing, rather than alleviating, segregation. Equally, the paper seeks to advance the critical geographies of the university campus, through close examination of contested socio-spatial relations experienced within the spaces of university accommodation. Students' agency is fundamentally affected by their institutional context, which to a notable degree governs not only 'international' students' conditions of entry to the UK, but also their accommodation and opportunities for social interactions.

Key words

International, Student, Accommodation, Segregation, Institution, Discrimination

Introduction

Increased numbers of overseas students in British higher education, both nationally and internationally, have put pressure on institutions to advance their strategies to attract 'international' students and to provide an environment in which both 'domestic' and 'international' students benefit (Brown, 2009). The primary aim of these strategies is to foster cultural awareness in both the overseas and home student communities (ibid, 2009). For 'international' students an environment in which positive engagement with the host culture is encouraged has been attributed to myriad benefits, inter alia, improved language capacity, increased satisfaction, the acquisition of mobility capital and improved student experience (see for example, Ward et al. 2001; Brown, 2009; Waters, 2006a, 2006b; Bourdieu, 2008; Hopkins, 2011; Fincher, 2011; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). Similarly for 'domestic' students a multicultural campus may result in improved cultural competence, and aid social cohesion at a variety of scales (De Wit, 1995). It is argued therefore, that the influence of intercultural contact may be of benefit to more than those engaged in international student mobility, but may increase the intercultural skill of 'home' students without venturing out of national university networks (De Wit, 1995; Brown, 2009). The advantages of an internationalized higher education institution however, hinges upon nurturing a setting within which intercultural engagement readily occurs. Despite this, the rhetoric of the international campus has seldom manifested as reality (Ward et al, 2001). Low levels of intercultural interaction have been well documented, predominantly focusing on the formation of monocultural student groups (Ryan, 2005; Brown, 2009; Ward et al. 2005). Such studies have largely focused upon the formation of conational friendship groups which, reduce loneliness, and are familiar to overseas students in a new cultural context; thus obstructing the learning of the host culture by entrenching 'attachment to the origin culture' (Brown, 2009:158. see also, Bochner et al. 1977; Ward et al. 2001; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Ward and Rana-Deuba, 1999). This work predominantly places the responsibility of stimulating cross-cultural encounters on those engaged in international student mobility, despite an acknowledgement that the benefits of such encounters have a more holistic benefit than for only overseas students. This paper seeks to explore the ways in which institutional practices may result in the separation and grouping of students, with the potential outcome of fostering 'them' and 'us' relationships between 'international' and 'domestic' students. The study examines

Loughborough University in the UK, a campus university in rural Leicestershire. Currently over 2,500 'international' students representing over 130 countries are enrolled within the institution. Specifically the geographies of institutional accommodation strategies and their potential influences will be scrutinized, framed within the institutional space of the university campus. To achieve this the study positions itself between an investigation of the institutional geographies of the university and an examination of the impact on a group of Asian 'international' students attending Loughborough University.

Review of Literature

In this context the Institution refers to a built material environment, 'which seek[s] to restrain, control, treat, "design" and "produce" particular... versions of human minds and bodies' (Philo and Parr 2000; 513), the institutional space itself a factor in 'purposefully orchestrated change to the human subject' (Philo and Parr 2000; 514). The institution is an important point of inquiry as the power struggles and knowledge creation that takes place within this space have a profound effect in instilling particular 'discursive practices' in broader society (Foucault, 1991). Although research has focused on a variety of institutional contexts, critical geographies of the university campus are under investigated in human geography (Hopkins 2011). This however, is not to suggest that the geographies of the university campus have not been the focus of geographical enquiry, rather that critical investigation of the university as a space permeated by complex power struggles where social relations and difference are (re)formed have been comparatively neglected. Although not the primary focus of this study, it would be myopic to ignore that the urban presence of students has undergone extensive examination within studies of 'Studentification'. Studentification literature has explored the social, cultural, economic and physical transformations within certain neighbourhoods resulting from the dramatic growth of a student population (Smith 2005). Literature has examined the shifting social composition and modes of living within neighbourhoods due to an increased student presence, with a particular emphasis on housing issues (Smith, 2005; Smith and Holt, 2007; Fincher and Shaw, 2009, Sage et al. 2011). Hubbard (2008) notes that students occupy an uncertain place in socio-spatial hierarches, being culturally expressive (Chatterton, 1999),

possessing high levels of professionally prized knowledges (Smith, 2005), typically from middle class backgrounds (Dorling, 2005), often excluded from spaces of leisure and nightlife (Chatterton, 1999) and potentially subjects of socio-spatial marginalization from opportunities within a given area (Hubbard, 2008). The institutional shaping of student's lives and potentially marginal status are of particular relevance to this study. In the case of overseas students socio-spatial segregation, and the role of the university is particularly significant, influencing the personal enactment of separation at an everyday level (Fincher and Shaw, 2009). The institution determines the conditions of entry to the UK, their identity as students, accommodation and influences opportunities for social interaction (ibid. 2009).

Research concerning the social and spatial relations *within* the university have received less attention, particularly the manner in which the space of the campus is constructed, managed, contested and experienced in marginalizing or empowering ways (Hopkins, 2011). There are however some notable exceptions, Hopkins (2011), for example, explores the ways in which the university campus is embodied through an examination of Muslim students' everyday lived experiences, and how broader geopolitical processes shape the experience of the university. Turner and Manderson's (2007) example of attendees of the 'Coffee House' at McGill University's Law School, a social event held for the institution's law students, investigated the way in which student's experienced social space within the university context. Within the institutional space power operates to privilege a certain model of attitude, behaviour and practice and marginalize alternatives. In this sense institutional practices and expectations are understood to influence and shape students, making young people into subjects that the institution intends them to be, based upon discourses of norms and expectations of what constitutes a 'good' subject (Fincher 2011). Fincher's (2011) study of international students in Melbourne discovered that student's with strong strategies for forging a cosmopolitan experience did so, conforming to the university's expectation to do so, but 'only because that is what they had decided to do anyway' (ibid, 2011:924). Recently increased media attention and violence towards overseas students in Australia and New Zealand have led to an increasing concern for 'International' student security. In this context security is defined as "...a low probability of damage to acquired values that encompasses physical, social and economic dimensions..." (Forbest-Mewitt and Nyland, 2008, 198). The requirement to relocate to an unfamiliar

environment exacerbates overseas students' feelings of insecurity. Paltridge et al. (2010) observed that due to this potential vulnerability, university accommodation provision benefits 'International' students when they first arrive at the host institution. It has been noted that, 'social groups still form predominantly, along cultural lines, although there were frequent exceptions to this', adding that this was not believed to be a result of prejudice, rather overseas students befriending those of similar cultural backgrounds (Paltridge et al. 2010). One may however, question the extent to which the forming of social groups is pre-structured by discourses embedded within broader society and the institution itself, which construct the 'international' student as 'Other'. As postmodern scholars have argued (Butler 1993, 1999), no social subject can escape the influence of preexisting structures of social relations. Individuals become invested in social differentiations through identifications of sameness and difference, reproducing them as aspects of the self. Claims that the formation of monocultural groups is definitively not a result of prejudice therefore may be difficult to justify without nuanced engagement with the underlying construction of 'international', and in this study, East Asian, students.

Constructing the 'International'

Fincher and Shaw (2009) noted that 'International student' and 'domestic student' are administrative categories deeply rooted within universities due to, 'the different levels of fees paid by students with and without citizenship or permanent resident status' (1887). It is further argued that the categorization of heterogeneous individuals for the purpose of administration becomes internalized, so that being an 'international' or 'domestic' student constitutes part of the students' identity (ibid. 2009). Furthermore, the descriptor of local and 'international' students signifies the power of local-international distinction that becomes reinforced by other dissimilarities primarily distinguished through embodied difference and, perceived distance between the dominant population and a discernable 'Other' (Marginson et al. 2010; Law 2002; Collins 2006). Distinguishing therefore, between 'domestic' and 'international' students is invested in a complex process of local-international 'Othering' formed along lines of national, physical (ethnic) and cultural difference. Reifying differences are initially enforced through stereotyping, which does not necessarily result in hierarchical superior-inferior relationships but hinders 'sympathetic and nuanced engagement'

(Marginson et al. 2010, 401). Stereotypes may have sinister potential, when used as the post hoc legitimization for discrimination based on naturalized, 'common sense' assumptions concerning a groups' characteristics based upon lines of difference. In Foucauldian terms, such 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1980) discursively frame 'international' as foreign and 'other'. Due to the dichotomy of local and international, the international assumes a paradoxical position (Devos 2003); via a process of 'Othering', both groups become homogenized. The 'international' constructed as foreign and exotic, and the local because it is 'not other' (ibid. 2003:164, see also Spencer-Rodgers, 2001; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). Pritchard and Skinner (2002) investigated the difficulties 'international' students could encounter in forging social relationships with 'domestic' students due to various perceived 'cultural' differences. They conclude that international students eventually 'adapted' to the host culture, developing 'intercultural competence' to negotiate and adjust to the host institution (see also Marginson et al. 2010). There is an underlying problematic assumption within such studies that the onus lies on the 'international' student to 'adapt' or 'adjust' rather than any need for the institution itself to accommodate the specific needs of other groups (Lee and Rice, 2007). This paper will argue that overseas students, specifically those from East Asia, are subject to processes of 'Othering' and representations fixated 'upon a fantasy of the geographical origin' of these students (Collins, 2006; 218). Collins (2006) argues that by a fixation on this racial identity, the discourses become about more than just international Asian students, indeed more than just Asian students, rather young Asian bodies and the micro geographies of the university campus (ibid 2006). Thomas (2005, 2009) notes that cultural, language and ethnic difference may result in racialization. She posits that 'racial' boundary construction is a constant process, yet one which appears natural and taken for granted (Thomas, 2005; Ahmed, 2007).

The Role of Accommodation

Educational mobility disturbs one's natural habitat, so that a process of de-location may manifest as a feeling of dis-location, in the sense that one is separated from familiarity for a less known world. Hoffman notes, 'we are creatures of culture' (1999; 49), and it is the separation from the deeply rooted culture and language of one's home that potentially can be painful for the overseas student (Murphy-Lejeune 2002).

Murphy-Lejeune (2002) noted that such dislocation results in varied strategies to negotiate their habitat, both constructive, such as exploration of the surrounding area, or preparation before departure, others defensive such as the search for spaces of refuge, 'reliance on the ethnic national group or dependency on friendly houses of social contacts' (154). Shaping one's personal habitat is an important first stage of taking root. In this sense the importance of accommodation is particularly apparent. For many students the mode of living will differ from that of the 'home' situation, symbolizing an area that students will embark upon with little prior knowledge. The host institution has been found to influence accommodation choice significantly, particularly for shorter terms of study and upon initial arrival. It plays a key role in the provision and allocation of accommodation, as well as making recommendations for suitable lodging for those engaged in international student mobility (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Fincher and Shaw, 2009; Paltridge et al. 2010). Murphy-Lejeune (2002) surmised that two distinct options arose for overseas students when making accommodation choices: "launching into the unknown just like native students, which gives them equal status and encourages mixed cohabitation, or else accepting institutional arrangements with the inevitable consequence of getting into a social network made up of other international students" (156). It is reasoned that cohabitation with 'natives' is the most demanding mode of accommodation, although the most potentially enriching to the experience of overseas students due to the benefit of constant language practice and socio-cultural discovery extending social networks of acquaintance outside the international student milieu. Furthermore residential facilities, which separate 'international' from 'domestic' students, produce a group effect that push towards categorization and the formation of 'them' and 'us' relationships (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). Such grouping dissuades 'natives' from trying to meet newcomers and discourages intercultural encounters between students (ibid. 2002). Such claims, seemingly places the responsibility to initiate intercultural encounters on the overseas 'newcomer' and explicitly states that 'equal status' (156) can be obtained if overseas students immerse themselves in mixed cohabitation with domestic students (Bevis, 2002). Culture in this sense is a learned set of symbols, knowledges, beliefs and norms that give an interpretation of the world for orientation and social behaviour (Otten 2000). Cultural distinctions are integral to social interaction, and are enshrined within institutions. Due to segregation it is possible that opportunities to form inter-

cultural relationships are hampered. Rather 'Othering' and boundary construction may be reiterated, legitimising further segregation.

Although comparatively little work has dealt with the impact of institutional accommodation arrangements and their influence on the separation of 'international' and 'domestic' students (Paltridge et al. 2010; Fincher and Shaw 2009; Murphy-Lejeune), numerous scholars have tackled issues of discrimination towards overseas students. Schmitt et al. (2003) found that in the US context, treatment by a majority group was enough to result in the development of an 'international' student identity. This united heterogeneous individuals not on the basis of nationality, but a newly created 'international' student identity, based not on what they 'were' but what they 'were not' ('domestic' students). Li and Kaye (1998) found that Asian students experienced greater difficulty than students from Europe in terms of social integration (see also Lee and Rice, 2007). Barriers are often seen to emanate from the host society, but few studies consider how institutions may inadvertently marginalize 'international' students (Beoku-Betts, 2004; Lee and Rice 2007). Beoku-Betts (2004) provides a notable exception, studying African female graduate students in Western universities. She discovered that professors would frequently question the students' abilities, in some cases criticizing accents, and forcing students to take remedial classes due to racial prejudice. Marginalization therefore, was derived directly from prejudicial attitudes, which Beoku-Betts (2004) attributes to a colonial legacy and peripheral position of the students' home countries. Living in university accommodation has been argued to be a universal means to improve the experience and security of 'international' students (Paltridge et al. 2010; Forbes-Mewitt and Nyland, 2008). Such studies have suggested that 'international' students made friends with 'ease' in university accommodation, with numerous opportunities to interact with others. Furthermore it has been noted that 'while the barriers to integration... experienced by the broader international student population still exist in university accommodation, they are significantly reduced' (Paltridge et al. 2010: 362) and that such living arrangements act as a 'potential means for mitigating, or even eliminating' (362) many causal factors which hinder overseas student experience. If segregation exists in university residences then its potential benefits may be negated. Instead of encouraging interaction with a range of students from various cultural backgrounds it

may foster a grouping effect, and the development of 'them' and 'us' relationships (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002).

University accommodation therefore, has become posited as a potential panacea for some of the problems faced by overseas students. This paper questions the extent to which institutional accommodation practices impede intercultural encounters, and contribute to the 'Othering' and separation of Asian 'international' students from other student groups. The manifestations of separation to the international students themselves will also be examined. This paper will argue that the enactment of separation is fundamentally influenced by the segregatory institutional accommodation arrangements in which they are situated. Specifically the paper will scrutinize how overseas students become separated from other student groups through the housing to which they are allocated, limiting opportunities for social interactions, facilitated by the institutional setting.

Methodology

Thirteen interviews were conducted with East Asian 'international' students enrolled at Loughborough University, a senior representative of the Student Accommodation centre, and another with a senior student advice centre member. The group of students consisted of 4 females and 9 males. Their ages ranged from 18 to 25, and all had at some stage of their studies lived in one of the university's halls of residence. Only one student resided in a catered hall, the rest lived in a range of self-catered halls both on, and off campus (see Fig. 1). Although the representation of students in catered accommodation is poor, this was found to be reflective of more general trends in which international students tend to 'want' (or at least are perceived to 'want') such arrangements. 3 of the participants were from Brunei, 1 from Taiwan, 2 from Thailand, 2 from Hong Kong, and 5 from Mainland China, including one interviewee who had lived in Germany for 3 years prior to embarking on study at Loughborough University.

Semi-structured interviews

A qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate for the nature of the study. The principal motivation for the use of in depth semi-structured interviews was to get closer to the lived experience (Hoggart et al. 2002). The depth of understanding offered through qualitative techniques (Dunn, 2000; Valentine, 1997) was of critical concern in this study. Through the use of interviews the study aimed to make sense of the experiences and everyday nuances of the 'international' student experience. The aim of such techniques was not to survey the terrain, but to tap into and examine it in some depth (McCracken, 1988). The semi-structured nature of the interviews, and lack of rigid predetermined questions allowed the respondents, within reason, to exercise more power over the research agenda and for conversation to flow, putting them at ease over what had the potential to be sensitive topics of discussion (Longhurst, 2003). Allowing interviewees to have some control over the theme of discussion had the added advantage of allowing participants to speak freely and for a sense of themselves to emerge (see McDowell. 2000). Similarly the approach was believed to offer less potential to influence respondents, and great care was taken to minimize the possibility of leading interviewees throughout the course of question design, to the interviews themselves (Dunn, 2000). As part of this study has been to examine the ways in which segregation may separate 'international' students from other groups of students, possibly resulting in wariness and little interaction between the groups, the selection of interviewees was of vital concern. Participants were approached through a variety of means, through Loughborough's Chinese and Brunei Societies, as well as via a snowballing technique. Initially the study aimed to interview students from a variety of halls of residence, however it soon emerged that many halls housed only a negligible number of overseas students. As such the majority of interviewees came from a recurring set of residences. Nevertheless, it was felt that this did not detract from the quality of the research, as it soon emerged that these halls were generally most popular with 'international' students and therefore reflected broader accommodation trends.

Ethical considerations

When asking questions regarding potentially traumatic experiences care was taken not to cause such memories to re-traumatise participants (Dyregrov, et al. 2000:413). Before the interview commenced the students were made aware of the nature of the research, and it was made clear that if at any point the interviewees felt upset, the topic of conversation would be changed. All of the participants' contributions would be anonymous, both for the students and university representatives interviewed. Throughout the study pseudonyms were used in order to protect this anonymity, and exact job titles omitted from the research. The interviews with university officials were conducted at their respective places of work. In the case of the students it was felt that the interviews should take place in a neutral environment, where participants could feel comfortable (Longhurst, 2003). As such, social spaces of the university library were primarily used for these interviews. It is of note, that no space can ever be 'neutral' and power is fundamentally linked to the production of knowledge in 'safe space' (Stoudt, 2007). Nevertheless it was hoped that through conducting interviews in a mutual social space for all students the researcher's position of authority might be de-centred.

The positionality of the researcher however, was a potential limitation to the success of the project. An interviewer must remain conscious of their own identity, and acknowledge the ways in which this may shape interactions with others (Valentine, 1997). As a male white 'domestic' student, interviewing Asian students was potentially problematic. It was feared that some respondents may feel threatened by the researcher's positionality (see McDowell, 1992; 2000). Similarly there were concerns that through trying to 'help' the research process spurious information may be obtained. It was also felt that the recording of interviews could be intimidating to respondents, introducing a 'silent but potentially political listener' to the room (Stoudt, 2007:291). The use of such equipment therefore, was explained in full prior to the interview and the option to 'opt out' was made clear in advance. The differences between the interviewer and the participants however, do not have to be negative, and wherever possible attempts were made to facilitate 'working with - rather than attempting to overcome - difference' (Pratt, 2010:100).

Keeping them together: the institution and accommodation

Students have the ability to specify a preferred hall of residence prior to arrival. In an interview with a university accommodation advisor it was revealed that international students, “tend to want ensembles” and self-catered accommodation. As a result of these preferences the respondents tended to occupy residences predominantly on the periphery of the campus (Fig. 1). The institution has the final say in room, and hall of residence allocation. The university’s accommodation centre therefore exercises considerable power over the living arrangements for those who choose to utilise halls of residence. This power allows the institution to decide the ‘best’ arrangements, typically those least problematic to the organisation. During a discussion with an experienced university accommodation advisor, it was noted that:

“Nigerians are very clean and like everything to be prim and proper, we’ve learnt this throughout the years, and basically if they’re with a group of Chinese they don’t like the way the Chinese leave a lot of things all over the place; but that’s a difference in culture, the way they leave the kitchen in a mess. So we then have to say we can’t put two Nigerians with a flat of Chinese students. We have to look at it and think, look that’s not going to work because they’re going to come in and say they keep the kitchen in a mess.” Accommodation Centre Advisor.

This extract exemplifies how cultural stereotyping may be employed to influence the accommodation allocations made on behalf of students. Such sweeping generalisations based upon, inter alia, cultural, national or ethnic difference homogenizes a vastly heterogeneous group of people. Nevertheless statements such as these mark a discourse embedded in the institution pertaining to cultural ‘norms’ of behaviour amongst international Chinese and Nigerian students. Here the term ‘discourse’ is used in a Foucauldian sense, in which a set of discursive practices is ‘...the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories’ (Foucault, 1993; 199). The assumption that Chinese students will universally neglect the upkeep of their accommodation characterizes a “regime of truth” embedded within the institution epitomized through the actions of the university accommodation centre advisor. The regime of truth in Foucault’s model of discourse comprises the unspoken, and naturalised assumptions that determine the kinds of

statements that can be made in the cultural and political context (Devos, 2003). This account, it is argued, is indicative of a politics of truth, in which certain types of discourse function as naturally true (Foucault, 1980). In this instance therefore, the discursive practice of separating certain groups of students due to perceived cultural differences based upon the students country of origin illustrates a discursive practice embedded within the institution. The respondent's position as an accommodation officer who has extensive experience in the allocation of accommodation to 'International' students, and has learnt 'throughout the years' the problems of mixing Chinese students with Nigerian, legitimises practices of separation based upon past occurrences. Consequently separation is justified in order to reduce organisational complexity, and avoid future complaints; if Chinese and Nigerian students live together *'they're going to come in and say they [the Chinese students] keep the kitchen in a mess'*. One must be wary of making generalisations based on the testament of one accommodation advisor, however the account does offer an example of an embedded institutional practice, relevant to the study of accommodation within the university. The naturalised practice of separating students on the basis of nationality, or country of origin, has not gone unnoticed among the international student participants. For example, one Chinese student interviewed had complained about being placed in a flat with only Chinese students, stating:

"My flat mates were very friendly. But it's just not what I expected, so I talked with someone from Imago, or some representative from the university, I don't really know. They said they try to mix as much as possible but they did have some problems sharing kitchens and things. They have had frustrating experiences before, so it is safer to put people from similar cultures together, because, well, you can understand your culture." 'Ed'. Male, Chinese student living in Falkegg.

'Ed' notes that he was told that due to previous problems concerning the mixing of Chinese students with other groups of students legitimised his placement in a flat with only other Chinese students despite his preference to live with a mixture of students from various backgrounds and cultures. The naturalised assumption that problems will arise if certain groups cohabit is clearly problematic for students such as 'Ed' who reasoned that living with students from a variety of backgrounds forms a major part of his reason for studying abroad. When examining the discursive framing of the 'international' student, one must not overlook the peculiar absence of 'domestic'

students from the narrative when discussing problems of accommodation. As previously noted, it has been observed that 'international' and domestic students are potentially problematic categories firmly rooted within the university (see Fincher and Shaw; Fincher 2011). Devos (2003) argued, the category of 'domestic' became constructed against the category of 'international' through a process of 'Othering'. 'Home' students become positioned as 'normal', being neither 'other' nor 'exotic', resulting in their invisibilisation within the institutional setting. Ahmed's (2007) work concerning the invisibility of whiteness perhaps is relevant in this context. She claimed that proximity, shared characteristics and familiarity have contributed to create implicit knowledges that make whiteness invisible. In this case, the familiarity of 'domestic' students goes unnoticed within the institutional space. To Ahmed (2007) spaces orientate around some bodies more than others, in terms of the institution they 'take the shape of 'what' resides within them' (157). This is not to reify institutions however, by presuming that they are given and fixed, rather institutional 'norms' become given over time through decisions and actions (Ahmed, 2007, 2004). 'Domestic' students therefore become the norm around which the institution is orientated, so that those who do not inhabit the category of 'domestic' become visible (Fincher, 2011). Through this orientation around a 'normal' body the university comes to privilege certain behaviours and attitudes, and marginalises alternatives (Turner and Manderson, 2007). It is the visibility and 'otherness' of 'international' students, and the associated stereotypical assumptions formed around this difference, which is in part responsible for treating overseas students differently from 'home' students in the allocation of accommodation. For instance, it is unreasonable to imply that Chinese students will, 'leave the kitchen in a mess' any more than a group of 'domestic' students. Nevertheless their difference, and therefore visibility, allows the formation of a stereotype in which Chinese students are seen as 'messy', whereas with a sense of irony, being untidy may be an attribute of students, regardless of 'international' or 'domestic' status.

Following on, when asked if there were any broadly identifiable halls of residence which are more popular with overseas students, the accommodation advisor remarked:

"We have mass groups who come from China who get slotted into 'Falkegg' [a university hall of residence] because a.) price wise and b.) They [the university] try and keep them together, working wise." Accommodation Centre Advisor

There is therefore, an assumption that Chinese students will 'want' to be kept together in the cheapest of the university's halls of residence, potentially due to the assumed inability to afford more expensive accommodation, and their collective work ethic. Although international students are extremely diverse in terms of ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, and socio-economic background there is substantive agreement in the opinion of the accommodation centre, that the group of Chinese students discussed would 'prefer' to be grouped together in close proximity. Spencer-Rodgers' (2001) study of 100 American college students discovered similar stereotypes to those implied here, notably claiming that commonly held, allegedly 'positive' qualities of international students were their studious natures and determination, whilst also being perceived as unfriendly, solitary and socially maladjusted. This is not to suggest that many students would not prefer to live with those of similar identity however, rather that institutional discourses and practices can limit opportunities to live with students from a variety of cultural, and national contexts due to inadvertently segregatory institutional accommodation procedures. Through separating Chinese students from students of dissimilar identity, a group effect may be reinforced, resulting in the rearticulation of 'them' and 'us' relationships and the perpetuation of cultural stereotypes (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). Such grouping may result in 'Othering' and discourage encounters between students. Fincher and Shaw (2009) observed the way in which particular types of apartment blocks were being developed with perceived 'cultural tastes' in mind. The construction of particular forms of living space in specific locations for certain 'types' of 'international' student has resulted in the segregation of 'international' students in Central Melbourne (Brooks and Waters, 2011). In Fincher and Shaw's (2009) study, similar stereotypes regarding the perceived strong work ethic of Asian students in particular proved one factor, which resulted in the legitimisation of the separation of Chinese students from Australian students. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) found that for the students in her seminal study, broadly two options for overseas student accommodation arose, 'launching into the unknown' in mixed cohabitation with both 'international' and 'domestic' students, or 'accepting institutional arrangements' with the 'invariable consequence' of forming social networks with other international students (156).

Navigating the unknown; the voices of 'international' students

For the international students placed in accommodation with other overseas students from similar backgrounds (often on the basis of nationality), it was found the experience was potentially contentious, often not meeting the students' expectations of their accommodation arrangements. The interview with 'Ed', a Chinese student allocated to the Falkner-Eggington ('Falkegg') halls of residence proved particularly enlightening:

"Well, what I expected was a mixed flat, but my flat contained, 8 or 9 students. 7 of them Chinese. In one way, it meant everyday I went home I could speak Mandarin Chinese, which is familiar. But really, it means you have no chance to have any contact with native students and learn another culture, which is kind of part of why I'm here". 'Ed'. Male, Chinese student living in 'Falkegg'.

Despite a strong desire to promote the internationalization of the campus, it may be argued that due to segregation within university accommodation, 'international' students are inadvertently denied the optimal route of improving language and developing intercultural knowledges (Ward et al. 2001; Brown, 2009). In relation to student mobilities out of East Asia fluency in English is perceived as extremely important (Brooks and Waters, 2011). Chew (2010) identified 'linguistic migration', highlighting the critical importance of language acquisition. Furthermore, English proficiency is thought to provide a positional advantage in the home labour market (Brown and Hesketh, 2004). To achieve this, Lee and Koo (2006) noted, there was a desire from the parents of educational migrants for their children to be immersed in an English-speaking environment. To an extent therefore, it may be argued that through the segregation of overseas students into accommodation with other students of similar origin they may be denied the benefits of living in an immersive English environment. Resulting in one respondent feeling, *"sort of cheated; part of my learning is to experience the other culture"*. A desire to interact with a mixture of students proved a common theme throughout interviews, and many felt that mixed cohabitation would be preferable to living with other students of 'similar background'. It must be considered that due to the positionality of the researcher as a 'domestic' student, implies that the respondents may already possess some desire to interact with 'home'

students, as illustrated by their willingness to be interviewed. Mai', a Chinese student living in university accommodation with five other Chinese students, indicated that she would, like to "*live with students from other countries*" in order to experience "*other cultures*". She goes on to say that due to living with other Mandarin speakers it is easier to speak Mandarin when outside of lectures, which she felt not only hindered her learning of English, but more importantly to Mai, limited her social interactions with students who did not also speak Mandarin Chinese. This finding is particularly important in relation to findings that in the UK context language difficulties present a major factor in mixing UK and overseas students (Li and Kaye, 1998). This problem becomes perpetuated as those with fewer opportunities to immerse themselves in an environment in which English is widely spoken, such as in culturally mixed accommodation, have few opportunities to acquire the necessary language competence to assist interaction with 'domestic' students. To 'Mike' a first year undergraduate student from Brunei meeting people of dissimilar culture was an integral part of studying abroad:

"You're here with international students from all over the world with all different cultures, all different backgrounds, it's definitively worth the effort to talk to friends and make friends with people from all different areas, so you can learn about different cultures. It's definitely going to help you in the end right? Say I go back to my country, and when people talk about Africa or something, I can say, 'hey, I've got a friend from there" Mike. Male, Brunei student living in 'Rutherford'.

Part of the learning experience for the majority of interviewees therefore, was found to be the potential for cross-cultural experience. Equally accommodation was perceived to be conducive to the expansion of social networks and building of friendships outside of the international milieu (Murphy-Lejeune 2002). It is noteworthy however that 'Mike' sees the onus of initiating cross-cultural encounters. Here 'Mike' sees it as his responsibility to go beyond his comfort zone in order to make friends with those of other cultures, highlighting an implicit assumption that it is he, as an 'international' outsider who must make the effort rather than rely on 'domestic' students to initiate friendship (Marginson et al. 2010). It may be argued, that through the segregation of international and domestic students, the students' quest for inter-cultural interaction is hindered, albeit inadvertently. Interesting unlike Fincher and Shaw's (2009) findings of international students being corralled into purpose built student apartments in a

concentrated area, segregation in this context takes place on a much smaller micro geographical level. Students may be segregated into flats rather than broader geographical areas; this is in part due to room preferences such as self-catered ensuite rooms and longer terms of lease, which prove popular with international students. Although the segregation is perhaps less overt than in other cases, this paper argues that it is no less significant. Maloutas (2007) highlighted the importance of contextual parameters in relation to segregation in Athens. Here he notes that *within* buildings themselves segregation may take place. In the Athenian context, he identifies immigrant clusters in the lower levels of apartment buildings while more expensive accommodation higher in the buildings may be occupied by more affluent middle class groups. These buildings then are 'vertically-segregated' by social class (Maloutas 2007:748). In the context of this study segregation is not explicitly a classed phenomenon, rather, other social or institutional categories, such as an 'international', 'domestic' student dichotomy, may form the basis of institutional segregatory accommodation practices. Typical measures of horizontal segregation may therefore obscure the complexity of segregation in the Loughborough University context; in which groups may live side by side in the same student halls of residence yet remain separated.

The invisible force

A common theme raised by the interviewees, was an initial difficulty in forming relationships with the 'domestic' students they lived with, and feelings of discomfort. The students themselves seemingly attribute this to multiple factors. Many students felt 'domestic' students treated them differently; one particularly recurring theme was receiving 'looks' or feeling 'out of place'.

"In the beginning it was hard to socialize. I suppose you have to be confident to speak out as an international student in a new place, if you don't you just drift along. I found that out pretty early though, so I thought, screw this, I'm just going to talk to everyone. I guess, I feel in the beginning, there're just this invisible force. Everyone is repelled away from the Asian, I don't know why [laughs]. It's just weird, people wouldn't want to be friends so quickly with people who are different... I guess." Mike, Male, Brunei student in 'Rutherford'.

"I don't know, it's not like [pause] obvious I guess, it's kind of like, people will look at you like, why are they here?" Aran. Male, Thai living in 'The Holt'.

"The way they look at you, they think you are quite strange. Actually, my bicycle was stolen by a person nearby and my mobile a few days ago. I don't think that's international students." Alex. Male, Chinese lives in 'John Phillips'.

"It's like, if you see the girls, they won't talk to you straight away. If you talk to the girls they'll be like, "oh ok then", and just try to avoid speaking to you, guys too. I feel it, I don't know, but I feel it." Mike. Male, Brunai student in 'Rutherford'.

These comments illustrate the ways in which the body of the international student can become seen as 'out of place' in certain spaces, typically through physical bodily differences (Nagel and Staeheli, 2008). To Foucault (1991), such observation can be employed to regulate the body. Here being an Asian overseas student takes on a racial dimension in the sense that the respondents felt that it was their different cultures, languages, and ethnicities that served as modes through which they self identified as racialised (Thomas, 2009). The "*invisible force*" 'Mike' witnesses epitomizes the way in which the 'international' Asian student is seen as 'out of place' within certain institutional space, a naturalised manifestation of the 'otherness' of the overseas student. The acknowledgement and reproduction of such a 'force' results in boundary construction, which, inadvertently rearticulates difference within the institution. It has been noted also that ties with other 'international' students and locals may heighten the 'newcomer's' cultural identity by encouraging them to compare their culture with other cultures, resulting in greater recognition of their own distinctiveness (Kashima and Loh, 2006). The encounters noted here are clearly painful for the students involved and as Ahmed (2004; 2002:21) posits, pain 'rearranges' the social body, such that one is never the same following pain. One should not ontologise pain however, rather it is through sensation that different surfaces are established. In this sense one becomes aware of a boundary, or surface, through a painful encounter, or a feeling of being 'out of place'. This then forms the basis of judgment, to be cautious or feel 'unsafe' around 'domestic' students (Ahmed, 2004). One participant in particular

felt that such encounters resulted in him feeling 'uncomfortable' with domestic students, commenting that, "*there is a sort of danger going out in the UK*" (Ian, a Chinese student in 'John Phillips' Hall of Residence). Lee and Rice (2007) observed similar feelings of discomfort amongst some 'international' students, claiming that such discomfort may be attributed to cultural difference and not partaking in the usual cultural activities of peers. Thomas' (2005) case study of racial segregation within the socializing practices of students in a US high school is perhaps also relevant in this context. She notes that racial boundary construction which caused students to consistently racially cluster in a cafeteria, takes considerable effort, but that this effort was seen as 'natural' or taken for granted. The acceptance and reproduction of the authority of race that configures social and spatial meaning involves the naturalisation of the outcomes of racial difference, for example segregation. By taking these outcomes for granted, such as forming social groups or living only with other students of a similar background, the students 'themselves rearticulate difference through everyday spatial activities and practices' (Thomas, 2005:1247). In order to understand segregation the relationships between people are important, as well as their 'measured juxtaposition next to each other on maps demarcated at various scales' (Fincher and Shaw 2009:1890).

Although there appears to be universal consensus among participants regarding a desire to develop inter-cultural connexions, not all the students interviewed wished to live in mixed accommodation. Indeed, there was a minority of participants who felt that living with other international students proved 'safe' and 'familiar', in an otherwise unknown environment. Certainly, other studies have found mixed cohabitation has been observed to be a more demanding living arrangement for overseas students (Murphy-Lejeune 2002). This proved particularly relevant in the early stages after arrival in the host institution. 'Lucy' a Chinese student living in a flat with five other Chinese students stated that, she preferred to live with other students of similar national background as, "*In my opinion it's hard to make friends with foreign students, I always stay with Chinese students*". In contrast to Lucy's example, one student used friends' accommodation consisting of students of familiar cultural backgrounds as an initial refuge before branching out into their own mixed accommodation. He noted that before moving into his halls of residence staying in a house with other overseas

students also from Brunei provided a safe haven where social relationships and a sense of belonging could be established.

"I was staying at their place for a week before I actually moved into my halls. I would say their place is one of the places where I can talk to everyone, feel easy, like it's a place where I don't have to make much effort to be there. It's like you'll hang out with your own friends. Slowly, after two months or something, everything just feels alright now, you have friends everywhere, so everything is alright now, so it doesn't matter that much anymore" 'Mike'. Male, Brunei student living in 'Rutherford'.

In this example the familiar space of a friend's house is used in order to establish roots. Once some level of belonging has been negotiated 'Mike' found the importance of the initial space of refuge faded as he became familiar with other spaces within the institution. Here it can be said that after two months Mike had developed the relevant intercultural 'competence' in order to interact positively with members of the 'domestic' culture. Culture in this sense is perceived to be an invisible, shared design that unconsciously determines the actions of people defining interaction. 'Our daily lives are governed by shared, implicit and unconscious expectations of behaviour of ourselves and others of which we may be dimly aware' (Kikoshi and Kikoshi 1996:19).

Amongst respondents a significant factor in the success of overseas students' development of friendships with those of other cultures with whom they lived, particularly 'domestic' students, was a previous exposure to a 'European' culture prior to arrival. Typically undertaking study previously in the UK or at an international school was correlated with those respondents who actively sought to live with a mixture of students from various cultural backgrounds. Of the students interviewed three had significant experience of a European environment before embarking upon study at Loughborough. All three respondents lived in student halls of residence with a mixture of domestic and international students and all felt strongly that living with 'local' students was an integral part of their experience. In particular, 'Dan' a Chinese student, who had lived and studied in Germany for three years before arrival at Loughborough, felt that in his own words he has, "*got use to the European culture*" which he believed made him "*more integrated than fresh off the boat Asians*". 'Dan' went on to say that, "*I feel I get along better with Europeans than Asians*". Thomas (2009) notes that through pressure to conform and build solid identity, young people

may reproduce racial-ethnic identification by accepting the same categorizations of difference present in broader society. She noted that in some cases young people may identify themselves as members of a certain category, in her example based upon ethnic differentiation, and make a conscious effort to distance themselves from the stereotypes associated with said groups. In doing so however, dominant discourses of 'international' as different are inadvertently reproduced through such performances. It is this perceived greater feeling of affinity with 'home' students and cultural competence that resulted in 'Dan' moving from his original student hall allocation to a hall which better suited his accommodation expectations. 'Dan' reported feeling little in common with the other overseas students he was living with, as well as spatially segregated in an off campus hall of residence often favoured by 'international' students. As 'Dan' notes:

"I was living with a few other international students from Thailand and Kenya but we had nothing in common really. It was so far from the campus too; it's the only hall which is really segregated. I like the Holt, but my flat was just so quiet, I was having dinner almost everyday on my own with no one to talk to." 'Dan'. Male, Chinese student, living in 'William Morris'.

International students in situations in which accommodation does not meet with expectation have the ability to resist by requesting to transfer to another room, or hall of residence. In Dan's case moving to accommodation that comprised of 'domestic' students improved his experience considerably.

Accommodation matters

As Murphy-Lejeune (2002) comments, by and large neither students nor the institutional authorities were always aware of the importance of accommodation to the overall process of developing inter-cultural connexions and student experience. Learning a new spatial organisation following mobility means in the first place organising one's own territory. Accommodation therefore, marks a first step towards a feeling of belonging, as well as serving as a basis for social relationships. Sharing accommodation with those of varied cultural backgrounds is conducive to the extension of social networks outside of the monocultural milieu (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). This paper mirrors these findings, and in the majority of respondents suggested

that living with a mixture of cultures was an important aspect of the international student experience. However, in some cases institutional factors and the actions of home students impacted heavily on the ability of overseas students to live with a mixture of students from various backgrounds, contrary to Paltridge et al. (2010) who suggested that university accommodation may improve the welfare and ease in which social networks are formed. Through inadvertent segregation of students into groups based on cultural background and 'international' student status, it was found that students felt deprived of an opportunity to develop, inter alia, inter-cultural relationships, English language proficiency and the acquisition of knowledge of other cultures.

Those in Mixed accommodation overwhelmingly felt their student experience was enriched through intercultural encounters; encounters which all respondents sought, albeit with varying degrees of success. As Volet and Ang (1998) have noted, a wealth of literature has explored the tendency for 'international' students to collect together into same-cultural groupings, but has largely overlooked similar phenomena amongst 'domestic' students. It may be argued that part of this absence from the literature is due to the invisibilisation of 'local' students, and naturalisation of 'domestic' student groupings. This also relates to feelings amongst respondents that the onus of initiating communication with 'domestic' students lay with 'international' students. More work is needed to explore the extent to which both groups share responsibility for a lack of intercultural contact (Volet and Ang, 1998; Fincher, 2011). Clearly successful cross-cultural encounters hinge on the mutual acceptance from both parties involved. What this study has tried to illustrate is that an institutional discourse regarding accommodation that, encourages the separation of certain groups on the basis of perceived cultural stereotypes may limit the opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural encounters to occur, and thus impact on the experience of students. It is of interest that segregation not only impacts upon 'international' students, rather, through successful cross-cultural encounters, all students may raise their awareness of social variety and develop an ability to accept cultural diversity without feeling a threat to their own shared identities (Christensen and Thielen, 1983). Individual behaviour and organisational structures are not cultural universals, and an institutional bias towards a dominant culture may develop towards a majority culture. A high level of formalisation

too, may enforce the ethnocentrism of the host culture and maintain asymmetrical cultural relations (Liedke, 1997). As Otten (2000) comments, this may be overcome if intercultural encounters, which potentially may result in friction and tension, are not suppressed or rejected. This is not to suggest that there is something intrinsically wrong with living with students of same-culture networks. Nor that such networks necessarily rule out cross-cultural relations or hamper student learning (Marginson et al. 2010). However, by legitimising the separation of students through stereotypes or previous experiences, both students and the institution's goal of providing an 'international learning experience for all students' is potentially hindered (Loughborough University, 2012). The university itself is committed to providing the best possible experience for all students. For the Asian 'international' students interviewed however, that experience was marred by, amongst other things, entrenched institutional strategies, which resulted in an unintentional segregation. As Lee and Rice (2007) commented, not all of the issues faced by 'international' students can be blamed upon matters of adjustment, rather there are serious challenges presented by the host institution and society, 'the responsibility is often left to the student to 'adjust' or 'adapt' to the host culture rather than for institutions to understand and try to accommodate their unique needs' (385).

Concluding comments

This paper has set out to examine the ways in which the separation of students into groups of similar background is facilitated by accommodation practices embedded and naturalised within the institution. To achieve this, the study has explored the voices of East Asian international students at Loughborough University, but further work is needed to explore the subjectivities of 'domestic' students and other groups of overseas students in a variety of institutional contexts. Similarly this paper argued that through a process of invisibilisation the 'domestic' student body has become a 'norm' around which the institution is orientated. It is hoped that such critical examination will encourage future investigation concerning the construction of a hegemonic 'domestic' student identity. Through naturalised discourses within the institution and stereotypical assumptions regarding certain groups of 'international' students, an inadvertent segregation on the basis of cultural background, or country of origin, is occurring. This

segregation is perhaps less overt than in other cases in which, institutional spatial strategies result in areas becoming principally occupied by monocultural groups (see Fincher and Shaw, 2009). Within Loughborough University segregation was found to occur at the micro-geographical scale, whereby students lived in the same halls of residence with those of various identity, yet occupied flats and 'blocks' within these buildings that were predominantly monocultural. Via the separation of 'international' students through accommodation practices, students were not only denied an optimal opportunity for language acquisition (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Ward et al. 2001), but also the international experience sought by many overseas students (Chew, 2010; Lee and Koo, 2006). Although in a minority of cases, the overseas students' overwhelming desire to engage with students of other cultures did not necessarily translate into a wish to live in culturally mixed accommodation. The majority of interviewees felt that living in flats consisting of mostly those of similar background deprived them of an important aspect of the international student experience. The study focused on a relatively small group of 'international' students, consequently more scholarship is required to establish if similar discourses that influence segregation are present in other institutional contexts.

Through acknowledging the role of both the institution and the voices of East Asian 'international' students themselves, this paper aims to contribute an alternative perspective to existing literature, which largely focuses on the tendency of 'international' students to form monocultural groupings, but remains, by comparison, oblivious to the influence of institutional practices on cross cultural encounters (Volet and Ang, 1998). One cannot claim that accommodation is alone responsible for the separation of 'international' students from other groups of students, however it is hoped that through this study, future research pathways may be opened which question the extent to which a lack of intercultural encounters may be a result of institutional processes, as well as the subjectivities of the students themselves.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mr. Michael Hoyler, for his helpful comments, erudite knowledge and support. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Heike Jöns for her input, and useful contributions when designing the research project. A special thanks is due to Dr. Hannah Deakin and Eleanor Trigg who both dedicated a considerable amount of their valuable time to keeping me sane during the writing of this project, and I am deeply grateful for their endless patience and unfaltering support. Finally, I must give thanks to my parents, not only for their act of procreation, but also for my maintenance during my 22 years on this Earth.

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List of Figures

- **Figure 1:** The Spatial Distribution of the Participants' Halls of Residence in Loughborough University

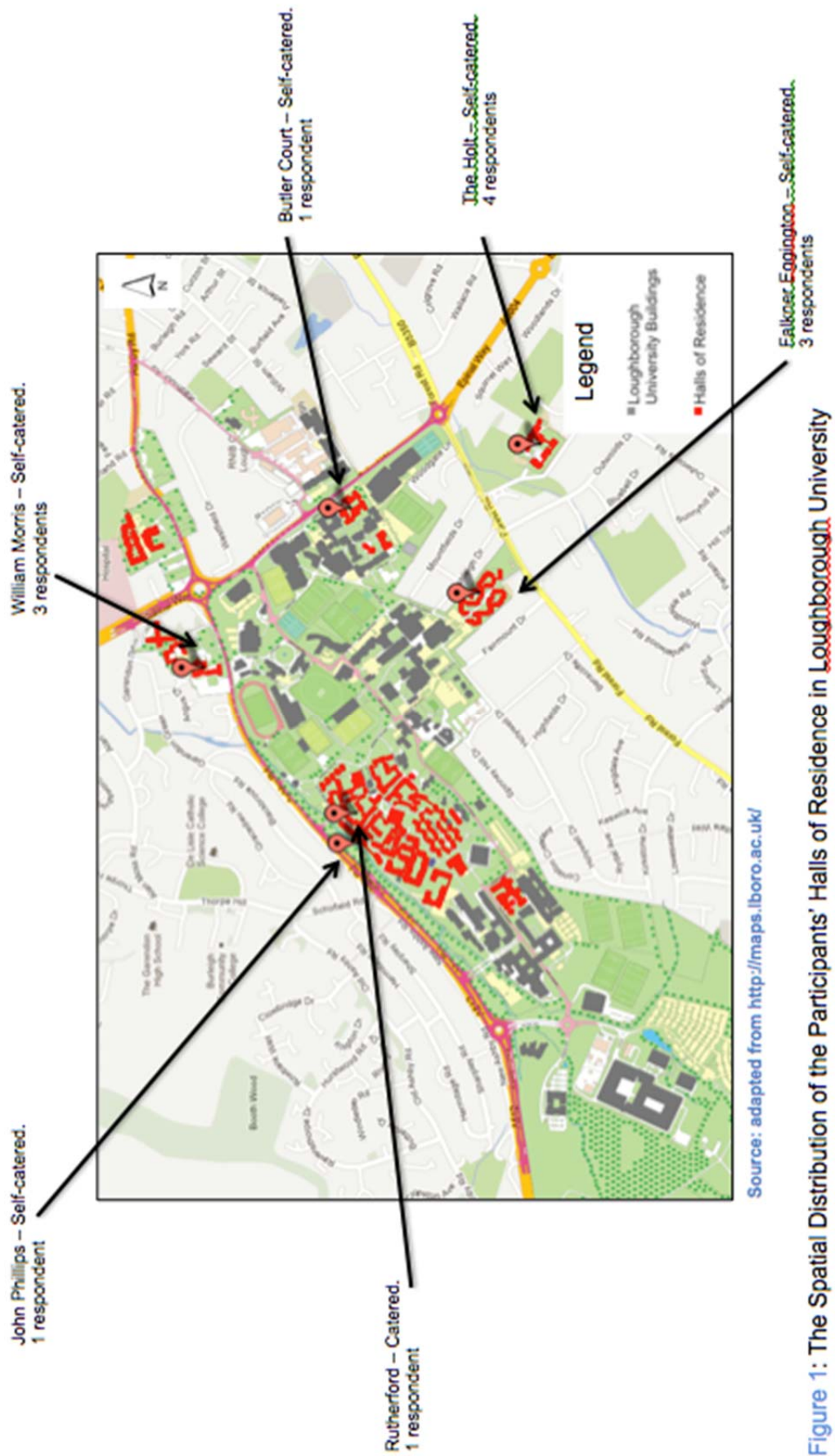


Figure 1: The Spatial Distribution of the Participants' Halls of Residence in Loughborough University