Student Housing as Social Opportunity
External Influences on International Students’ Housing Decisions

Simon Kuestenmacher

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Abstract
The thesis examines how and when external factors influenced international students in Melbourne, Australia, in their decision making regarding housing. Understanding why the student body of Australian universities is housed in a segregated manner, in which ‘international’ students rarely live in housing with ‘local’ students, is important because international students’ wellbeing is enhanced when they engage in meaningful cross-cultural contact.

Interviews with 30 international students from two universities in Melbourne were conducted to examine how they chose their accommodation. An international student housing timeline was created based on these interviews, which shows when housing decisions were made and what external influences impacted housing decisions.

Educational agents routinely channelled international students into segregated purpose built student accommodations. Both sampled universities heavily influenced housing decisions through their housing websites, online housing boards, and personal consultations. International students found these services very valuable. Surprisingly, the resulting housing outcomes at the two universities did not differ significantly. International students are not eligible for concession fares on public transport in Victoria. Therefore, many only considered housing in walking distance to campus. This limited the choice of housing types, as purpose built student accommodations dominated the areas around the universities. Visa regulations required underage students to move into homestays, which always resulted in low housing satisfaction. Further, visa regulations limited working rights which forced some international students to move housing when experiencing financial difficulties. Parents preferred booking initial housing from overseas. Only segregated purpose built student accommodations or expensive residential halls and colleges could be booked from overseas. Many had distant relatives offering temporary housing during international students’ first weeks in Australia. International students routinely followed their friends’ housing advice without considering alternatives. Therefore they reinforced existing, segregated, housing patterns. Only a few international postgraduates made some housing decisions based solely on their own preferences and prior experiences. In most cases external factors strongly impacted the housing outcome.

This thesis contributes to urban geography literature by showing when external influences impacted international students’ housing decision making. Such information will also be valuable to university housing offices or policy makers interested in mitigating housing segregation between local and international students. Inquiring when such influences occurred
allowed for the possibility that some international students purposefully chose segregated over cross-cultural housing options. However, no evidence was uncovered that any of the interviewees intentionally self-segregated. Also, focusing on decision making of international students showed that some interviewees made their housing decisions free from external influences and solely based on their own experiences and preferences. The number of students who made their housing decisions without external influences was small, but their housing outcomes could not have been explained by examining external factors alone. However, the results of the thesis also suggest that the urban geography literature’s concentration on external influences on international student housing is in most cases sufficient.
Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the MPhil,

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

(iii) the thesis is less than 50,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, bibliography and appendices.

___________________
Simon Kuestenmacher
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First and foremost I want to express the deepest appreciation to my supervisor Professor Ruth Fincher, who has provided strong, honest and extremely valuable feedback throughout many years. Without her supervision and generous advice this thesis would not have been finished.

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The presidents of the international student organisations at Victoria University and The University of Melbourne generously provided their help and space for interviews.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

General topic
Currently over 223,000 international students are enrolled in Australian universities, making the country one of the world’s most popular study destinations (Australian Government, 2012). Australian universities advertise the international student experience as offering the opportunity for international students to make lots of local friends while being integrated into a multicultural student body (University of Melbourne, 2012; Victoria University, 2012). However, much literature shows that international students in Australia live and socialise segregated from local students (Marginson et al., 2010).

Furthermore, in the literature cross-cultural friendships and high social connectedness are seen as desirable for international students as they are positively associated with academic progress, satisfaction with living arrangements, financial position, self-esteem and health (Rosenthal et al., 2006). By largely living segregated from each other, local and international students in Australia are missing out on opportunities to establish such beneficial cross-cultural friendships (Marginson et al., 2010). All research into segregated student housing in Australia is therefore contributing knowledge that can improve the wellbeing of international students.

Current research on international student housing
This thesis examines the housing segregation of international and local students in Australia primarily through the lens of urban geography. Two additional bodies of literature also inform this thesis: social psychology and educational sociology.

This thesis borrows from social psychology the knowledge about interventions that can minimise segregation. Contact theory (Allport, 1954) demonstrated that simply sharing the same environment, i.e. attending the same university, was not enough to facilitate cross-cultural friendships. Rather, individuals need to interact in an environment that enables meaningful contact. When individuals interact under equal status, are cooperatively interdependent, and can be categorised as a united group by a shared authority meaningful cross-cultural contact is possible (Pettigrew, 1998). In a university setting these prerequisites for friendship formation can be created in a classroom or an extracurricular setting. Housing in particular creates opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural interactions (Marginson et al., 2010; Nesdale & Todd, 2000). Based on social psychology, this thesis focuses on housing as it considers housing a manifestation of, a contributor to, and a solution to the segregation of the student body.
Educational sociology literature examines outcomes of formal educational institutions. This thesis focuses on one of these outcomes: ‘wellbeing’. The literature shows a clear connection between student housing and student wellbeing (see Chapter 2). For many international students housing allows for the establishment of a sizable social network which was linked to improved wellbeing (Marginson et al., 2010; Paltridge et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Rosenthal et al., 2006). Other studies highlighted the importance of housing in regards to other wellbeing related aspects of students’ university experience such as academic performance (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Riker & Decoster, 2008, 1971), social connectedness, homesickness and general satisfaction levels (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2010).

Contact theory shows that student housing can mitigate segregation and facilitate cross-cultural friendships, which in turn positively impacts student wellbeing. As the majority of international students in Australia wished they socialised more with local students (Rosenthal et al., 2006) it is puzzling why most end up living and socialising predominantly with other internationals.

Current urban geography literature explains the housing segregation among university students by analysing how external forces (institutional influences, cultural factors, the built environment, and market forces) channel international students into different types of accommodation than local students. Different housing patterns amongst local and international students are linked to different socialising and placemaking patterns. While external factors heavily influence the housing outcomes of international students, current urban geography literature does not examine the active roles of international students themselves in the creation of a segregated housing landscape. Most current urban geography research examines the topic of segregated student housing at a time when international students have already made their housing decisions and moved into segregated housing. The decision making processes leading international students into this segregated housing are not the focus of this research.

**Aims of thesis**

The general aim of this thesis is to add to urban geography literature and increase the knowledge about the role of housing in the segregation of the student body at Australian universities.

Chapter 2 shows that urban geography literature does not consider international students’ housing decision making, arguably because British and American universities routinely require their first year undergraduate students to live on-campus. Under such circumstances, students
do not make their own housing decisions. This explains the lack of focus on international students’ housing decisions in the international academic literature. In Australia however, all students can choose freely between different housing options and make their own housing choices. To understand the Australian situation, it is important to include the housing decision making processes of international students in answering research questions Q1-3. This is important for four reasons.

Firstly, current urban geography literature does not allow for the possibility that international students intentionally segregate themselves. When only institutional and market based mechanisms are examined, international students’ tendencies for self-segregation, should they be present, cannot be detected. Looking at international students’ decision making processes will uncover such preferences in case they are present.

Secondly, by looking at the segregated student housing landscape while individuals place themselves into housing opportunities for interventions countering such segregation might be more easily detectable. Creating new knowledge regarding when housing decisions were made and when different external influences impacted on housing outcomes is therefore important.

Thirdly, by looking at different external factors that influence housing decisions it also becomes apparent if, and under which circumstances, international students make housing decisions solely based on their own preferences and previous experiences.

Finally, outlining housing decision making processes explains why international students find themselves in segregated housing even though they express a preference for more cross-cultural contact (Kudo & Simkin, 2003; City of Melbourne 2008).

Consequently, this thesis puts forward three research questions about the housing decision-making of international students (see Figure 1) to add knowledge to the urban geography literature by explaining how institutional practices (Q1), policies (Q2), and social networks (Q3) influence international students’ housing decisions which often lead them into segregated accommodation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision-Making of International Students Regarding Housing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Research Questions
Plan of thesis
Chapter 2 reviews literature on housing segregation of international and local students in Australia. Research from urban geography, social psychology and educational sociology is introduced. These bodies of literature highlight the important role of housing in international students’ lives and point to the fact that the majority of international students are housed segregated from the local student community. The social consequences of this segregation and the importance of housing in cross-cultural friendship formation are also discussed. The literature review concludes that existing research does not specify how and when international students make their housing decisions. Neither does the literature specify how important students’ independent housing decision making is regarding housing outcomes. An argument is made that examining this decision-making process will benefit the urban geography literature.

To do so, this thesis relies on in-depth interviews with 30 international students enrolled at The University of Melbourne and Victoria University (see Methods, Chapter 3). The interview data allows for an understanding of the complex individual circumstances that led international students to choose their specific accommodation. International students’ own language and perceptions regarding their decision making processes were utilised to establish the ‘international student housing timeline’. This six stage model shows when students made housing decisions and what external influences impacted on their housing choices.

Chapter 4 answers the research questions (Q1-3) and shows when institutions, policies and social networks impacted housing decisions of international students the most. This is done chronologically by examining each stage of the international student housing timeline. This process shows how and when these external factors very strongly influence international students in their decision making. However institutions, public policy and social networks vary in their impact according to which stage of the housing timeline is examined. Some international postgraduates also make their own housing choices free from external influences.

The Conclusion (Chapter 5) summarises and evaluates the findings of the thesis before discussing practical implications of the research. The evaluation shows that many findings are in line with former geographical research on the topic. It comes as a surprise that the institutional practices of both universities are very similar and impact housing outcomes in the same ways. The few differences in housing outcomes that exist between the two universities are largely due to demographic differences between the sampled students. No evidence for intentional self-segregation on the part of international students becomes apparent. But
institutional practices, public policies, and attitudes within the international student community unintentionally reinforce the segregation of the student body. The practical implications of this thesis (see Appendix A) are that universities, and to a smaller degree policy makers as well as friends and families, have the opportunity to lessen the segregation within the student body.
Chapter 2: Background and Literature Review

Introduction to Chapter 2
Firstly, a definition of the term ‘international student’ and background information regarding international students in Australia are given before explaining why Australia is a popular study destination. Secondly, the three different fields of academic research through which the topic of international student housing is approached in this thesis are reviewed. The main focus is on urban geography, while educational sociology and social psychology provide the justification for conducting cross-cultural communication and wellbeing related research in the housing space. A special focus is put on Australian research. Because the interview data used in this thesis was collected at two Melbourne based universities, the localities surrounding these institutions are introduced too.

Thirdly, it is argued that urban geography would benefit from new knowledge on the housing decision-making processes of international students. Such an approach allows for the possibility that international students intentionally segregated themselves. Furthermore, knowing when housing decisions are made improves opportunities for countering housing segregation. Additionally, it shows if some international students choose their housing independently from external influences. It also explains why international students live in segregated housing despite voicing preferences for more cross-cultural contact.

Background
Defining ‘international students’
Generally international students are defined as individuals acquiring primary, secondary, tertiary, or language education (and in some cases vocational training) outside their country of residence. In the context of tertiary education the term ‘international student’ includes different types of enrolment (full-time, part-time, exchange, coursework, research). Countries apply slightly different definitions of ‘international student’ (see Table 1).
Australia

‘International Students’ are those studying onshore with visa subclasses 570-575, excluding Australian funded scholarships or sponsorships or students undertaking study while in possession of other temporary visas. Students from New Zealand and those on Human Rights Protection visas are excluded as they do not require a student visa to study in Australia.

Canada

‘Foreign Students’ are temporary residents who have been approved by an immigration officer to study in Canada. Every foreign student must have a student authorization, but they may also be in possession of other types of permits. [...] 

France

‘Foreign Students’ are defined as foreign nationals who travel to France for the purpose of study or long-term and permanent residents in possession of French secondary qualifications. Data includes students who are permanent residents without citizenship and students from overseas territories such as Guadeloupe.

Germany

‘Foreign Students’ are divided into ‘mobile foreign students’ (those who travel to Germany for study) and ‘non mobile foreign students’ (those in possession of German secondary qualifications).

Japan

‘International Students’ are all foreign nationals who study in Japan.

New Zealand

‘International Students’ are foreign nationals who travel to New Zealand for education. Data excludes Australian citizens and students who hold permanent residency.

United Kingdom

‘International Students are students who are not UK domiciled and therefore include EU and non-EU citizens.

United States

‘Foreign Students’ are defined as all students who are enrolled at institutions of higher education in the US without being citizens, immigrants or refugees. The definition can include students, temporary trainees, temporary educational exchange visitors, and participants of vocational training programmes. Data excludes long-term or permanent residents.

Table 1: Examples of different definitions of ‘International Student’ by host country in alphabetical order (WES 2007)

Students without student visas are usually referred to as ‘local students’ or ‘domestic students’. The separation of the student body into ‘local’ and ‘international’ students is common practice in most host countries, educational institutions, academic writing and governments. For ease of language this thesis adopts the Australian definition (see Table 1) and differentiates between ‘international’ (individuals studying onshore in Australia while holding special student visa1) and ‘local’ students. This differentiation does not imply any judgement or rating of the individual students.

Not only do host countries define the term ‘international student’ differently but they also apply different concepts regarding tuition fees. In some countries both local and international students pay the same tuition fees (in Scandinavia education is actually free for all students), but most host countries charge international students higher tuition fees (see Table 2).

Australia belongs to the latter group and has established a profitable international education industry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tuition fees structure</th>
<th>Countries applying that structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher tuition fees for international students than for domestic students</td>
<td>Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same tuition fees for international and domestic students</td>
<td>France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No tuition fees for either international or domestic students</td>
<td>Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Tuition fee structures for international students in different host countries (Compare Annex 3 in OECD, 2012)

**Current statistics on international students in Australia**

Generally, international students flow from East to West and from non-English speaking to English speaking countries, meaning the four most popular study destinations (US, UK, Australia, Canada) were all Western, English speaking countries and hosted 40 percent of all international students (OECD, 2012). The US (661,000 international students) and the UK (367,000 international students) are the most popular study destinations, even though their share of enrolments sank as other host countries, especially Australia and New Zealand, became increasingly competitive in recent years (Choudaha & Chang, 2012). From 2000 to 2010 Australia’s share of the global educational market rose from 5 percent to 7 percent, hosting 257,000 international students in 2010 – an increase of 70 percent compared to the 179,000 international students in 2000 (OECD, 2012). Worldwide Australia has the highest percentage of international students in tertiary enrolments with almost 22 percent of all tertiary students in Australia being from overseas (OECD, 2010, 2012).

The largest sub-group of international students in Australia is from China and represents 29 percent of total international enrolments and 37 percent of tertiary international enrolments (see Table 3).
The high number of international students enrolled in Australian educational institutions translates into massive revenues for the country because they pay high tuition fees. Today international education is Australia’s third most important annual export ($15.8 billion, see DFAT, 2011) behind iron ore and coal.

**Reasons for high numbers of international students in Australia**

Australia did not always have a lucrative education industry. Various *push* and *pull factors* transformed Australia into a strong international education industry within a few decades (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; McMahon, 1992; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011).

**Pull factors**

The 1990s and 2000s saw the rise of the international knowledge economy which resulted in a global competition for skills (Marginson et al., 2010). This drove the internationalisation of education in Australia, making international student recruitment part of a national strategy aimed to attract highly skilled immigrants and create revenue through tuition fees. Holders of certain qualifications could now apply for permanent residency. This prospect motivated countless international students to enrol in Australian educational institutions (Marginson et al., 2010). Throughout the 1990s and 2000s universities engaged in entrepreneurial activities to attract more fee-paying international students (Hemsley-Brown, 2006). Despite ever rising tuition fees international student numbers constantly went up (Hemsley-Brown, 2006). Furthermore, the federal government introduced special student visas. Marginson et al. (2010) attribute the latest rise of international student numbers to these student visas and other attractive immigration policies during the 2000s.
Push factors
Since the 1970s, simultaneously with the financial struggles of Australian universities, many Asian countries developed rapidly growing middle classes (Goodman & Robison, 1996). These middle class families, driven by the desire to improve living conditions for their children, were able to purchase expensive international education. Because of the Asian economic boom, Australian immigration and visa policies largely targeted the Asian market which has resulted in Asian students representing over 85 percent of international students in Australia today (Australian Government, 2012). Analysing why Asian families send their children to study abroad, Waters (2005, 2006a, 2006b) shows that acquiring international education is aimed at acquiring financial, social and cultural capital:

“international education is transforming the spatial scales over which social reproduction is achieved: on the one hand, upper-middle-class populations in East Asia are able to secure their social status through the acquisition of a ‘Western education’, thereby creating new geographies of social exclusion within ‘student-sending’ societies. On the other hand, [educational institutions in Western countries] are able to harness the benefits of internationalisation in order to offset the negative effects of neoliberal educational reform, thereby facilitating local social reproduction.” (Waters, 2006a, p. 1046)

After having decided to purchase international education students and their families choose a specific study location. Australian universities are attractive because of cost, language, proximity to home country and reputable degrees (AEI, 2011; The University of Sydney, 2009). Additionally students choose Australia as a study location because of the exchange rate and prospects of permanent residency. Permanent Residency is an attractive option to many international students as Australia’s economy is assumed to provide lucrative career opportunities. Tsukamoto (2009) sees a strong connection between international education and migration to Australia because the country’s skilled migration programme offers holders of certain qualifications permanent residency.

Student housing
As shown above, a combination of push and pull factors lead to Australia hosting hundreds of thousands of international students, all of whom need to be housed. International students appear not to have been influenced in their university choice by housing opportunities, but focussed on the ranking, prestige and cost of prospective universities (AEI, 2011).

2 Bourdieu (1984) considered social capital to include language, cultural knowledge and credentials, including education.
Internationally, cultures regarding student housing differ. Table 4 summarises housing practices of local and international students in a selected number of locations. The different international circumstances in which students, both local and international, are housed limit the ability to compare research across national borders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>United Kingdom, United States, Canada (Rugg, Rhodes, &amp; Jones, 2002; Winston, 1993)</th>
<th>Most common housing option for local students</th>
<th>Most common housing option for international students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Many universities require students to spend their first year in university owned housing on campus. Students who do not live on campus usually occupy shared properties on the free rental market.</td>
<td>International students’ housing patterns are similar to local students’.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia, New Zealand (Fincher et al., 2009; Ho et al., 2007; Marginson et al., 2010; The University of Sydney, 2009)</td>
<td>The majority of local students occupy shared property on the free rental market. It is also common practice for local students to continue living at their parents’ accommodation during their university years. A small minority lives in college style accommodation.</td>
<td>International students occupy property on the free rental market, often in the niche of purpose built student accommodation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most countries in the European Union (Ripmeester &amp; Pollock, 2010)</td>
<td>University affiliated housing is only occupied by a small minority of students with renting property on the free rental market being the most common housing practice. Depending on the country, living at the parents’ accommodation is a popular option as well.</td>
<td>International students show the same housing patterns as local students, except that locals live at their parents’ house – an option not available to internationals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Approaches towards student housing in selected popular study destinations for international students

As international students occupy different types of housing, the term housemate refers to the persons a student shares housing with. Sometimes international students live in a flat with a single housemate and sometimes they live in a residential college with hundreds of housemates (see Table 5).

Similarly, Marginson et al. (2010) point out that international students use the word ‘friend’ in a variety of ways, ranging from close and intimate relationships to general acquaintances. In the remainder of this text the term ‘friend’ refers to a person that has a close relationship to the student, someone they would socialise with out of their own motivation, rather than being ‘forced’ to socialise with through group assignments or through sharing accommodation with them. The term ‘housemate’ refers to people living in the same housing. While ‘housemates’ often were considered ‘friends’ the term ‘housemate’ does not imply a friendship. The term ‘housemate’ refers to whoever the individual student was sharing their accommodation with.
Table 5 provides an overview of who is referred to as a ‘housemate’ in different accommodations and introduces the six different housing types that international students in Australia usually occupy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who is considered a housemate</th>
<th>Number of housemates</th>
<th>Opportunities for interaction between housemates</th>
<th>Nature of housing type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shared housing on the free rental market</td>
<td>Other occupants of the same housing unit. Housemates are chosen by student.</td>
<td>Under 10; usually 1-4</td>
<td>Kitchen, common area, bills, rental agreements, household chores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential College / Hall</td>
<td>Other occupants of the same building. Housemates are randomly assigned or pre-existing friends.</td>
<td>30-250</td>
<td>Dining hall, common areas, organised activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose Built Student Accommodation and Rooming Houses</td>
<td>Other occupants of the same building. Housemates are randomly assigned or pre-existing friends.</td>
<td>5-300</td>
<td>Kitchen, common areas, in some cases organised activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living alone</td>
<td>No one</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family members living in the same building. Housemates are relatives.</td>
<td>Nuclear family +1</td>
<td>Shared household chores; bills and rent were usually completely covered by the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homestay</td>
<td>Host parents and host siblings living in the same building. Housemates are randomly assigned.</td>
<td>Nuclear (host) family +1</td>
<td>Assigned household chores; bills and rent were organised through a homestay agency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Definition of the term 'housemate' in different types of accommodation

**Review of relevant academic literature**

As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis analyses the housing segregation of international and local students in Australia using three fields of academic research: urban planning / geography, educational sociology and social psychology. This thesis focuses primarily on urban
geography / planning. Educational sociology and social psychology are helpful additions when reviewing the topic of international student housing. The next sections discuss these three literatures.

**Urban Geography**

**Introduction**

While significant divergences, particularly in approach, exist between urban planning and urban geography, the two literatures are presented under the same heading. Both literatures have a strong concern with the role institutions play in international student housing – especially with the interplay of institutions and the use of urban space. The reviewed literature on segregated student housing is divided into three parts.

Firstly, urban geography literature examines the spatial distribution of student housing in Australia. The gentrified areas around The University of Melbourne and Victoria University, where the research for this study was conducted, are both described. It is then shown how the presence of (international) students around both Melbournian locations adds to the revitalisation of the relevant suburbs.

Secondly, urban geography examines the connections between segregated international student housing and placemaking. Because of the nature of the segregated, purpose built students’ apartment with limited socialising opportunities in the building, many international students tend to socialise outside their home more often. When socialising outside their home they do so with their friends who are often internationals too. Outside their home they seek out other spaces than local students. In summary, which public spaces international students occupy (and give meaning to) depends largely on the composition of their social network, which is largely shaped by the housing type they occupy.

Thirdly, urban geography literature examining institutional, physical and social manifestations of the segregated Australian student body is reviewed. These manifestations reciprocally influence each other and are only separated into different subheadings to ensure a clear structure within this literature review. Institutional practices contributed to the segregation of local and international students in Australia. These include the role of educational agents, administrative practices at Australian universities, institutional expectations of Australian universities and the role of student clubs. The segregation of the student body also manifests itself in largely segregated housing. Historic and cultural reasons for this housing segregation are reviewed before segregated socialising habits of international students in Australia are reviewed. Additionally, non-Australian literature is included when it provides critical key insights.
It is concluded that most current research in urban geography only looks at external factors and does not take into account the possibility that international students themselves contribute through their active decision making to the housing segregation. Geography research does not take into account why and when international students decide to move into their housing. The argument is made that creating new knowledge in regards to international students’ housing decisions benefits urban geography in four ways. Firstly, because such an approach allows for the possibility that international students intentionally segregated themselves. Secondly, knowing when housing decisions are made improves opportunities for countering housing segregation. Thirdly, it is shown if some international students chose their housing independently from external influences. Fourthly, it is explained why international students live in segregated housing despite voicing preferences for more cross-cultural contact.

**Spatial patterns of student housing**

**Studentification**

Studentification literature uses similar language to the gentrification literature and describes similar processes. The research, which is mostly UK centred, describes studentification as transforming the social structural and environmental composition of urban environments through strong growth of the student population (Smith & Holt, 2007; Smith, 2005). Hubbard (2009, p. 1903) describes housing in such areas to be “implicated in processes of urban gentrification”. Studentification is caused indirectly and directly by students. For example, the presence of a large number of students attracts businesses targeted at that group, such as take-away eateries (Hubbard, 2009). These businesses displace traditional businesses targeted at different demographics such as families. The high number of student oriented businesses is not a result of direct actions taken by students, but a reaction to their presence. Property investors adjust their rental practices as student rental properties usually bring a higher-than-average return on investment. Housing prices rise substantially in the specific locality, making the area unaffordable for families. Consequently non-student residents choose not to occupy these areas anymore, making room for more students who can afford to live in these high priced areas because they share the costs of housing among more individuals in shared living arrangements. Additionally, developers introduce purpose-built high-rise buildings exclusively targeted at students. This effect can spiral on until a neighbourhood is primarily occupied by students. The presence of a large number of students also has direct effects on a neighbourhood as this demographic is said to behave in undesirable ways. In areas where such actions occur the strong presence of students is often described by mainstream media as the reason for a decline of the neighbourhood (Harris & McVeigh, 2002). Collins (2010a) argues
that an overemphasis on the role of studentification implies that international students are the sole cause of urban transformation. Instead the contribution of other factors also needs to be considered. Collins (2010a) focuses on the urban incorporation (Glick Schiller and Caglar, 2009) of international students through a particular emphasis on student settlement experiences and the role of policy in facilitating the provision of study and housing opportunities in particular parts of the city.

**Student housing in Melbourne**

In Melbourne’s inner suburbs wealthier middle class students (international students often belong to that group) can choose from a variety of expensive, often purpose built, accommodations (O’Hanlon & Hamnett, 2009). The relatively expensive housing options they occupy are located in prime locations, often near the city centre or universities. Their presence is a manifestation of the existing lucrative knowledge economies in these localities (Yigitcanlar, O’Connor, & Westerman, 2008). The presence of these purpose built student apartments is linked to the commodification of the higher education sector which has translated into the housing sector (Chatterton, 1999; Weller & van Hulten, 2012). Students, local and international, who are financially less privileged need housing too and are forced to seek cheap, often poorly maintained, housing options. The results of gentrification processes are criticised by Weller and van Hulten (2012) who show that the growing student population in Melbourne’s inner West (i.e. Footscray, the location of Victoria University) triggered increases in rental costs leading to a displacement of local low income households. While Footscray and other western suburbs only started gentrifying in the early 2000s (Department of Planning and Community Development Victoria, 2011), Tsutsumi and O’Connor (2011) highlight that the gentrification processes in Melbourne’s inner suburbs (including suburbs surrounding The University of Melbourne) started in the 1990s. Today the inner suburbs are premium priced real estate locations that host a large proportion of Melbourne’s student population (Fincher et al., 2009).

The following two paragraphs discuss how students have influenced the revitalisation of the suburbs around Victoria University and The University in Melbourne.

**Melbourne’s West**

For most of the 20th century Melbourne’s inner western suburbs, where Victoria University’s main campus is located, were dominated by heavy industry and manufacturing (Weller & van Hulten, 2012). Many residents lost their jobs in Australia’s shift away from manufacturing industries in the 1980s and early 1990s (ABS, 2011):
In the 1990s, by Melbourne’s metropolitan standards, ‘the west’ was not a fashionable place to live. Although the gentrification of Victorian housing had surged in other parts of Melbourne (Jager, 1986), the housing stock in the inner western suburbs remained run down. The area was eschewed by all but the most intrepid gentrifiers. Still, by 2000, its land was ‘cheap’ by metropolitan standards (Dodson & Berry, 2004).

Between 2001 and 2006 a large number of highly qualified professionals moved to the inner western suburbs. Today Melbourne’s inner west is undergoing significant gentrification. Well-qualified migrants from overseas arrived in Melbourne’s west and improved the business landscape, Victoria University also played a major part in this revitalisation of the inner west (van Hulten, 2010). Compared to Melbourne’s other major universities (RMIT, Monash, Swinburne, The University of Melbourne) Victoria University’s main campus in Footscray is surrounded by relatively few large purpose built student accommodations. As Victoria University only provides two student housing options itself (compared to eleven residential colleges at The University of Melbourne) the majority of students, who are not living with their parents, have to seek properties in the free rental market (Victoria University, 2009). Students, both local and international, poured into the inner Western housing market during the last decade, leading property owners to adjust their practices. These students became a lucrative group of housing consumers and initiated gentrification processes in Melbourne’s inner West, especially Footscray (van Hulten, 2010). Rasmussen et al. (2010, p. xii) analyse the role of Victoria University for the revitalisation of Footscray and the broader inner west of Melbourne:

“Victoria University is potentially a powerful institution that can help transform the West. However, its courses reflect the region’s historical requirements. Its primary antecedent body was the Footscray Institute of Technology, itself a reincarnation of Footscray Technical College, which had successfully served the requirements of local manufacturers for practical engineers and sound accountants since 1916 (Rasmussen 1989). The University is also a victim of structural change. The demise of manufacturing has adversely affected the demand for the courses it has traditionally provided, although its previous role as an educator of accountants has remained a comparative strength. […] [I]ts focus has been on the middle rung of the professions with those in the region seeking the ‘higher (income) professions’, travelling mainly to Melbourne University. VU’s opportunity is to exploit its traditionally close relations with industry to develop courses in emerging areas of demand. While its previous incarnations date back to early in the previous century, its mission as a university is less than two decades old.” (Rasmussen et al., 2010, p. xii)

Now acknowledged as a gentrifying area, the suburbs around Victoria University see land values and demographic composition change accordingly. The interviewees for this thesis who attend Victoria University all make their housing choices in this competitive housing environment. Similar processes of urban revitalisation leading to an expensive housing landscape started earlier around The University of Melbourne in inner Melbourne.
Inner Melbourne

Fincher and Shaw (2010) describe the redevelopment of Melbourne’s northern edge of the city centre over the last decade as characterised by high-rise, high-density purpose built student housing. These buildings were a response to the rapidly increasing demand of international students in Melbourne (Fincher et al., 2009). The buildings were built by the private sector with little public regulation. Generally these purpose built student apartments offer very small, high-density units at a relatively high price (Fincher et al., 2009).

Purpose built student apartments target a very particular submarket, are heavily promoted in South and South-east Asia and are rented almost exclusively to full fee-paying students from overseas. It is common practice for international students to enter into year-long lease agreements before arrival in Australia without physically inspecting the property. Fincher and Shaw (2010, p. 201) argue these practices continue because of the rolling demand for purpose built student apartments from each new yearly intake of international students. This is exacerbated by very low vacancy rates in inner-city Melbourne (below 1 percent). Therefore purpose built student apartment providers do not have to compete with the broader rental market which offers better and cheaper housing, and is the preferred housing option for local students who are living away from their parents. As a consequence, purpose-built student housing is almost entirely occupied by international students.

Fincher and Shaw (2010) report that purpose built student housing in inner Melbourne was built on the sites of disinvested shops and offices and land owned mainly by the universities and nearby hospitals.

“There was little if any displacement and no sense now of Marcuse’s (1985) concept of exclusionary displacement. It would be hard to argue that there is any class character to the transformation, or even that there was a transition from lower to higher socio-economic groups. [...] There is no question that a rent gap existed and that significant recapitalisation has occurred via this dense accommodation which [...] has a relatively high value per square metre, but the process could not be called gentrification. Nor could it be described as ‘studentification’: there is no evidence to suggest that the student population here represents “a potential grouping of future gentrifiers” (D. Smith, 2005, p. 86).”

Fincher and Shaw (2010) make the point that in the case of central Melbourne’s student population no concrete evidence for processes of studentification or gentrification can be found. Nevertheless students play an important role in the economic success of central Melbourne. Badcock (2001, p. 1560) disregards the discussion whether or not to label a locality as an area of studentification or gentrification as irrelevant:
“Gentrification is an inner-city phenomenon, and while the term was initially reserved for the process whereby middle-class home-buyers displace vulnerable tenants in the rehabilitation sub-market (Johnston et al., 1994, pp. 216–217), nowadays it makes no sense to try and separate it out conceptually from the broader transformation known as revitalisation.”

Regardless of how the spatial distribution of international students around The University of Melbourne and Victoria University is classified, both localities are relatively expensive and the housing market is highly competitive with low vacancy rates. Consequently all housing decisions that the 30 interviewees in this thesis describe were made in such an environment. Collins’ (2010a) examination of the relationship between the mobilities of South Korean international students in New Zealand and urban transformation shows that, while international students themselves play an important role in the transformation of urban spaces, profit oriented institutions (universities and educational agents), housing developers and local and national policies are the main drivers for urban transformation. Taking Collins’ (2010a) research into account, the next sections will focus on the role of institutions in the formation of international student geographies.

**Gap in urban geography**

The literature discussed above only examines given localities once (international) students have already taken up residence there. No detailed analysis of why students choose their specific housing is provided. Understanding why and when students decide to move into their housing deepens the understanding of the spatial distribution of students and allows for more targeted housing advice to be given to international students.

**Placemaking and international students**

**Placemaking**

The concept of placemaking is being debated mainly within urban design theory and applied through social planning for community development. Urban planning literature was once confined to notions of order and social control via regulation of the built environment, but increasingly planning processes are thought of as ways of changing a city’s economic, social, environmental and cultural sustainability (Sandercock, 1998). The process of placemaking aims to turn ‘spaces’ within the city into ‘places’, allowing citizens to add unique meaning to their surroundings (Winikoff, 1995). Placemaking capitalises on the assets, inspiration, and potential of the specific locality (Winikoff, 1995). The goal is the creation of ‘good’ public spaces that promote health, happiness, and wellbeing (Winikoff, 1995). This ties in with the creative city concept (Florida, 2004) which focuses on placemaking ideals when creating planning policy and regulatory processes. While the creative city remains a fairly abstract ideal, placemaking may be one way of encouraging a genuinely creative city as Fincher and Shaw (2011) suggest. As
the processes of placemaking are very much localized and depend on the group focused on, the reviewed literature focuses on placemaking and international students in Melbourne.

**Placemaking of international students in Melbourne**

The City of Melbourne bases its planning strategy on both the creative city concept and placemaking ideals (Yigitcanlar et al. 2008). Shaw and Fincher (2010) state that young and educated people with a cosmopolitan orientation are major players in the creative city. International students belong to this group and contribute through their presence to the establishment of creative precincts. Through an analysis of international students’ usage patterns and views of city spaces in Melbourne Fincher and Shaw (2010) show that local and international students use different spaces and engage in different behaviour in these spaces. Shaw and Fincher (2010) describe two different but parallel approaches to placemaking in central Melbourne.

The first approach is developer driven without much planning restrictions and follows a clear gentrifying agenda. Examples are large climate controlled private shopping centres like QV and Melbourne Central. The international students socialising in these centres (Shaw & Fincher, 2010) describe a very narrow set of experiences and the majority does not even actively choose the space they interacted in.

“It was quite common for the international student interviewees to not much like the places they were going. Very often they were going there because that’s where their friends were going, who were going because *their* friends were going there, and they were not moved at all by their experience of the city.” (Shaw & Fincher, 2010, p. 211)

Dunn et al’s (2011) “geography of racism” shows through spatial data that racist encounters most frequently occur in public spaces and that some inner city areas have particularly high rates of racist incidents. Their work shows how international students in Australia are embedded within geographies of power and difference that make them vulnerable as they live in and move through “struggle spaces of Australian cities” (Dunn et al, 2011, p. 84). Shaw and Fincher suspect that in Melbourne, like in Water’s (2006b) Canadian study, international students form lasting networks with other international students. These connections are very important to international students’ social and professional development and wellbeing. These connections are formed wherever students are socialising. In Melbourne these connections are likely to be formed in shopping malls (such as QV and Melbourne Central) and in exclusively international student housing (Shaw & Fincher, 2010).

The second approach to placemaking in central Melbourne described by Shaw and Fincher (2010, p. 212) “emphasises cultural production over consumption, creating very different kinds
of spaces and interactions”. In this process young people engage with unusual spaces and actively contribute to the fabric of the city with street art, fashion, music and theatre. Shaw and Fincher (2010) argue the minority of international students that are engaged in this second approach to placemaking produce and reproduce places that broaden equity and access. They are partaking in more meaningful inter-cultural interactions than those interacting in the environment of commercial shopping centres. As only a minority of international students engage in these meaningful acts of placemaking, the group as a whole stays socially segregated from local students.

These segregated international students usually find themselves living in Australia without traditional possibilities of political participation. Neilson (2009) describes how multiple subject statuses are attributed to the international student taxi drivers that participated in the Melbourne taxi strike after some of them were violently attacked at work. These individuals are at once international students, workers and migrants. Protesting international students blur the distinctions between these categories and challenge the notion that effective claims for redistribution and recognition can only be made on the basis of full membership in a political community. Neilson (2009) consequently views it as crucial to treat internationals students, such as the international student taxi drivers in Melbourne, as complex actors and emphasise the international student perspective in research.

The findings of Shaw and Fincher (2010) and Neilson (2009) fit in with Amin (2002) who emphasises the need for purposeful activities between spatially segregated groups and individuals in order to lessen that segregation. Amin (2002) is very critical of the idea that freedom of association in large public spaces necessarily leads to users acquiring a cosmopolitan urban civic culture. He instead points out the importance of everyday practices of cultural exchange. Amin (2002) views micro-public sites of daily interaction and conversation (like workplaces, universities, community facilities, housing) as the key for cross-cultural contact. These micro-publics are at the centre of his community development model aimed at overcoming ethnic differences through compulsory ‘prosaic negotiations’. Amin’s work shows that the mere shared occupation of space is not responsible for successful or unsuccessful cross-cultural contact. For spaces to be conducive to these ‘prosaic negotiations’ they cannot be segregated to start with as this cuts out the very possibility of meaningful everyday contact (Amin, 2002). Valentine (2013) also challenges the assumption that contact with difference necessarily translates into respect for difference. She argues that cities as centres of super diversity (Vertovec, 2007) do not necessarily translate into acceptance of differences but might reinforce prejudices and foster segregation. Solutions are places of
interdependence and meaningful interaction. Valentine (2013) agrees with Amin (2002) in calling for including the creation of such places in planning strategies.

Robertson (2013) sees international students in Melbourne as socially and spatially situated subjects who are impacted by and impact on the spatial organization of the city and campus. As such, international students are tied to the renewal of the urban area along the Northern end of Melbourne’s Swanston Street (compare O’Connor, 2005). Robertson views the renewed Swanston Street area as symbolic for the market expansion of international education in Australia which fundamentally impacts Australia’s cities in complex social and spatial ways rather than purely in an economic manner.

Furthermore, Robertson (2013) emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the social and political consequences of the “education–migration nexus”. Neilson’s (2009) analysis of the labour politics of international students as migrant workers, and Robertson’s (2011a) work around international students’ claims towards rights and citizenship and negotiations with the neoliberal immigration regime as they move across temporary international student and permanent migrant identities are examples of geographic research viewing international students through social and political lenses rather than as commodities in the context of a neoliberal education industry.

In Melbourne, newly arrived international students find themselves in a city where many urban spaces are dominantly used for socialising by either local or international students. When using the same public spaces, local and international students generally don’t interact with each other. International students need to interact with locals in places of everyday encounter (such as housing) if they are to experience urban spaces in Melbourne in a non-segregated manner.

**Gap in urban geography regarding placemaking**

Which urban spaces international students occupy and fill with meaning depends largely on the composition of their social network, which is influenced by the housing type they occupy (Fincher & Shaw 2011). Also, as Amin’s (2002) work shows, international students who have pre-segregated social networks enter pre-segregated micro-publics, making cross-cultural contact very unlikely. Because the majority of international students in Melbourne lives and socializes mostly with other internationals they consequently engage in segregated acts of placemaking. Fincher and Shaw (2011) do not specify under which specific conditions some international students share public spaces and engage in placemaking together with local students. This thesis creates knowledge regarding the circumstances under which international
students establish local friendships and consequently engage in placemaking together with local students.

**Segregation of international students**
The review of urban geography literature so far has highlighted that international students in Melbourne are segregated from local students in a variety of ways.

This subsection shows how this segregation is manifested in institutional, physical and social realities. Much like Hubbard’s (2006, p. 340) argument that studentification is “an ambivalent process whose cost and benefits need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, implying that policy responses need to be similarly tailored to fit local contingencies”, placemaking and segregation patterns of students need to be analysed in a local context. Therefore only literature dealing with these phenomena in an Australian context is reviewed.

**Institutional segregation**
Brooks and Waters (2011) show how international institutions shape the international education landscape in Australia and abroad. The authors describe how the World Bank, as the largest loan provider for educational programs, the UNESCO, through their promotion of international education through the “World Declaration on Higher Education” and the OECD, through their global agenda in education actively drive more students into a neoliberal international education landscape. Furthermore, Brooks and Waters (2011) describe how the European Union through its Erasmus Scheme and the Bologna protocol encourage inter-European education and consequently furthered economic and inter-cultural growth in member countries. A focus on institutions in the host country allows insights into drivers leading to the segregated student body at universities in Australia.

Robertson (2013b) argues that through the neoliberal lens international students in Australia appear as victims (“cash cows”) or as opportunists (“backdoor migrants”) rather than as complex individuals navigating a complex institutional and spatial landscape. Robertson (2013b, p.67) describes how recent government responses to international welfare issues in Australia were framed around concerns of damaging the “brand” of Australian education and criticises that international students are viewed by policy makers as “consumer-citizens rather than simply as human beings with basic rights”. Robertson (2013b) therefore calls for a wider perspective on issues regarding international students than the neoliberal lens allows for by including interactions between students and institutions.

Fincher et al.’s (2009) study on international students in Melbourne also shows that institutions viewed international students through a neoliberal lens with unintended negative consequences. Local institutions developed practices that encourage administrative
efficiencies but unintentionally discourage interaction between local and international students and contribute to the segregation of the student body.

The following subsection further demonstrates the importance of the institutional perspective in international student research.

**Education agents**

For many international students education agents are the first institutional contact (Collins, 2012). These agents assist with applying for university admission without cost to the individual student or family and make their profit through commissions from education service providers and general promotional activities (Collins, 2012). Fincher and Shaw (2009, p. 1894) point out that the role education agents play in the marketing of housing to international students and their families is “relatively unexamined”. While the official role of education agents is the recruitment of international students, they routinely assist in other aspects of international students’ transition to Australia:

> “Numerous students reported that agents make specific recommendations regarding housing, routinely recommending particular private housing providers rather than a range of housing alternatives. Many students arrive in Melbourne knowing only of the one housing option into which they were funnelled” (Fincher & Shaw, 2009, p. 1894)

International students routinely report their education agents were unknowledgeable about their university or city of choice (Marginson et al., 2010). Without local knowledge education agents cannot provide high quality advice about local housing markets. The literature does not provide information on education agents’ role in international students’ decision-making towards housing. It is suspected that agents receive commissions from certain housing providers and have an interest to channel as many international students as possible into that housing option (Collins, 2012). These housing providers manage purpose built student accommodations, which are exclusively occupied by international students, and contribute to the segregated student body at Australian universities.

**Administrative practices at universities**

Because international students hold special student visas, pay their tuition fees through different channels, and have different healthcare arrangements than local students, universities created separate administrative categories for ‘local’ and ‘international students’ (Fincher & Shaw, 2009). Fincher and Shaw (2009, p.1888) see these administrative categories as being so strong that they are “part of Australian university students’ identities”. The student experience at Australian universities is now shaped by these administrative categories as students approach different offices for organisational matters, use different queues for local
and international students, and attend different orientation sessions at the start of the semester.

“At the University of Melbourne [international student orientation sessions] begin a few days earlier than the local student orientation in order to address issues particular to international students. At RMIT University, separate activities for international students are run by the International Student Information and Support Office. There are perfectly understandable reasons that the orientation systems evolved this way – international students have certain collective needs that local students do not. But there are unintended consequences of these practices. Subsequent administrative organization can also treat international and local students separately.” (Fincher & Shaw, 2009, p. 1896)

Local students are not present at these international-orientation programmes and international students socialise amongst themselves.

“[I]t is hard not to conclude that there are opportunities being missed here for cross-cultural interaction, and that the administrative practices of convenience for university administrators might be modified to facilitate such interaction. Queues that mix ‘local’ and ‘international’ students won't necessarily lead to cosmopolitanism, but repeated administrative practices that separate these ‘groups' will certainly help to negate it.” (Fincher & Shaw, 2009, p. 1897)

With administrative practices unintentionally limiting opportunities for cross-cultural contact between students on campus other opportunities, such as housing, for such contact become more important.

**Institutional expectations**

It was just shown how, in Australia, international students' identity is fundamentally affected by their institutional context, which labels them clearly as being different from local students. Furthermore institutional expectations free local students from the responsibility to initiate cross-cultural contact as it is portrayed that only international students can benefit from this kind of social interaction (Fincher, 2011). The universities celebrate the multicultural and cosmopolitan composition of their student body. A typical example for this can be found on studyinaustralia.gov.au, a website set up by the Australian Trade Commission to promote Australian universities to future international students:

“Australians value the wealth of cultural diversity and social sophistication that international students bring to our campuses and communities. We take great care in looking after international students and helping them adjust to the Australian way of life.” (Australian Trade Commission, 2012)

While acknowledging the wealth of cultural diversity that international students bring to Australian universities the above quote indicates that the cultural exchange between
international and local students is a one way street. This shows how cosmopolitanism is only expected from the international students, who are given the responsibility of actively initiating friendships, while local students are spared such expectations. Such institutional preferences suggest that the “host community’s way of doing things is preferred” (Fincher, 2011, p. 924).

As the upcoming literature review on social psychology shows, cross-cultural contact only leads to meaningful interaction and friendship formation when no power difference between the two parties is involved. Institutions advocating a world view of international students having to do all the adjusting in cross-cultural contact are not able to provide a suitable environment for meaningful contact.

**Student clubs**

Student clubs are important institutions which can provide an environment suitable for enabling contact between local and international university students as they enable interaction based on shared interests or hobbies. However, these student clubs often further strengthen the segregation of local and international students by having a nationality specific focus:

> “Of the University of Melbourne’s sixty-three student clubs, more than half are nationality specific. There are extensive and productive interactions within the broader transnational grouping as well, represented by a variety of international students' clubs and societies such as the International Engineering Students Society, Arabic Culture Club, Catholic Overseas Students Down Under all driven by the common bond of being 'an international student'. But local students are rarely associated with any of these groups, even if they are from a similar ethnic or national background as group members” (Fincher & Shaw, 2009, p. 1898).

The high proportion of student clubs with a nationality specific focus might stem from the fact that local students are less reliant on university clubs for social interaction as they have pre-existing memberships in local sport and community groups (Rosenthal et al., 2006a). Involvement in student clubs provides opportunities to socialise to establish friendships with others. This minimises social isolation, loneliness and homesickness amongst international students. However, because many student clubs have a nationality specific focus and are segregated they are not helping to establish meaningful cross-cultural contact. While actively minimizing social isolation, student clubs are often reinforcing the segregation of local and international students.

**Physical segregation and housing segregation**

It was just shown how institutional practices drive an unintended segregation of international students in Melbourne.
The following subsections show that most international students in Melbourne also live segregated from local students and tend to socialize with other internationals and in different locations than local students. Research from New Zealand and Australia is presented to show how neoliberal institutions drive the physical segregation of international and local students.

This physical segregation, especially in the realm of housing, only allows for very limited opportunities for cross-cultural contact which further explains the social segregation of local and international students.

Hubbard (2008), in writing about British cities, argues that the development and marketing of purpose-built student accommodation is targeted at a subgroup of students willing to pay a premium for an inner-city lifestyle. The inhabitants of such purpose-built accommodations are effectively segregated from the rest of the community because the nature of these buildings minimises opportunities for mutually beneficial interactions between groups and encourages the segregation of groups based on lifestyle and life-course differences (Smith, 2008).

In Melbourne an inner-city cluster of purpose-built student apartments fits this category (Fincher et al., 2009). Unlike the examples in Hubbard’s research (2008, 2009), the purpose-built student apartments in Melbourne are occupied exclusively by international students resulting in the occupants being segregated not only from the general population but also from local students. There are historical and cultural reasons for purpose-built accommodations in Melbourne only being occupied by international students.

In the 1990s central Melbourne faced the challenge of providing housing to the rapidly increasing population of international students because the universities and government bodies lacked a strategy to house these students, private developers stepped in and created large quantities of purpose built student housing close to the large universities which transformed the urban landscape (Fincher and Shaw 2011).

These private developers were driven by the opportunity to capitalize on the fast growing population of international students and built high-rises to house large numbers of students. As these student apartments are located in high-priced real-estate locations, student housing in Melbourne is significantly more expensive than housing on the free rental market. Fincher and Shaw (2009) describe the housing situation for international students in Melbourne as unique in the sense that in European and American cities student housing was routinely cheaper than private rental. This is mainly due to the fact that student housing in America and Europe is usually provided by university bodies and not by private developers (Winston, 1993). Because the developers in Melbourne were driven by profit maximization rather than
improving student wellbeing the individual student apartments were kept small in size (Fincher et al., 2009). Consequently, purpose-built student housing in Australia consists mainly of small and relatively expensive apartments in high-security high-rises. These buildings have few communal facilities and are, as mentioned previously, marketed exclusively to international students (Fincher & Shaw, 2011). Such buildings often cumulate around educational institutions. Collins’ (2010a) research shows that the emergence of particular “student spaces” is not an isolated process but is linked to longer-term shifts in Auckland’s built environment, governance and the demographic consequences of changing migration patterns. A focus on policy is therefore imperative for understanding the role of international students in urban change (Collins, 2010a). The case of Auckland illustrates that neoliberal local governments who encourage market-led urban development are drivers of the urban outcomes of the internationalisation of education. Students certainly contribute to the emergence of new urban spaces but they do so only within the context of these broader institutional changes. In this respect, the work of Collins (2010a) suggests that there are serious limitations to the focus of student geographies on the notion of studentification.

In Melbourne universities welcomed the initiatives of private developers as student housing options close to campuses increased their attractiveness to international students (Fincher & Shaw, 2009). Private developers provided more housing opportunities to house international students but neither the government nor the universities have had significant influence on the form of the housing, rent levels or manner of pastoral care (Fincher & Shaw, 2011). Private developers built as close to the inner city universities as possible because there were no incentives in the planning system to develop student housing in other parts of the city (Fincher & Shaw, 2009). Accommodation close to inner city campuses is known to be more attractive to international students because they, unlike local students, are not eligible for public transport concession and therefore seek out housing options in walking distance to university (Fincher et al., 2009; Marginson et al., 2010).

Collins (2010a) describes the pattern of international students moving out of homestays, which are located in suburban neighbourhoods, and relocating to privately rented inner city apartments with co-nationals. This pattern is not simply the result of international students seeking familiarity. Rather, international students’ decisions to reside in such housing relate to their own negative experiences in homestay arrangements, the feeling of social and physical isolation and fear in the suburbs, the cost and accessibility of public transport, and the role of social networks. Collins (2010a) finds it difficult to distinguish international students’ housing choices from the fact that most international students study in the inner city simply because this is where most educational institutions are and because the new high-rises in the inner city
area result in reduced rental costs. Together these urban forms, and the actors and processes that produced them, construct a particular pathway of incorporation that most international students take simply because it is available. The focus on international students’ housing experiences and its connections to the existing physical and socio-cultural character of the host city is therefore of relevance to the broader study of “student geographies”.

Parallel to the success of large-scale purpose-built student apartment blocks many small-scale private providers started offering housing specifically targeted at international students in converted suburban family homes across Melbourne (Marginson et al., 2010). By renting out individual rooms to one or more international students the landlords can collect more rent than by renting out the whole building to a single tenant. These accommodations are referred to as rooming houses and have to follow federal government regulations. However, some landlords do not register their properties as rooming houses which allows them to breach health and safety regulations (Marginson et al., 2010; Rugg et al., 2002). Many international students still move into these places as they find it hard to compete on the free rental market with local tenants who have a regular income and a local rental history. Also, these housing types allow for overseas booking through the internet (Marginson et al., 2010). Marginson et al. (2010) describe many examples of international students having problems with their rooming house landlords. Despite all the problems associated with rooming houses (legal or illegal) the rent individual students pay is relatively low and therefore this is an attractive housing choice for students with limited financial resources.

One reason for local students not occupying purpose-built student apartments is that these housing options are designed and marketed towards international students. The extremely high rates of international student occupation, Fincher et al. (2009) estimate 95-100 percent in inner city Melbourne, can also be explained by the lack of interest in these housing options by local students. Over many generations local students in Australia followed a different housing strategy as they commonly attend a local educational institution and continue living at their parents’ house, or move to a different location within their home city. These local students commonly live in shared housing arrangements with other young (commonly local) people, rather than travelling interstate or abroad for their tertiary education. Because local students are usually familiar with the local housing market they occupy housing in the inner suburbs which are cheaper and more spacious than the purpose-built student apartments occupied by international students (Fincher & Shaw, 2011). Therefore social interaction between international and local students cannot happen in a housing context (Fincher & Shaw, 2011). Fincher and Shaw (2009, p. 1895) draw the connection between institutional practices of
segregating students into ‘local’ and ‘international’ and the housing segregation of the two groups:

“For local students housing choices are not only about costs and a wider range of options, but include strongly voiced views about not wanting to live in housing that is pitched at (and filled with) international students.”

Local students choose to live in residential colleges, free rental market, and homes of relatives. This only allows for cross-cultural housing contact in colleges or on the free rental market.

Fincher and Shaw (2009) analyse how the form and location of purpose-built student accommodation contributes to the unintended social segregation of local and international students. They argue the kind of housing occupied by international students and the “precise streetscape location of [this] housing” are significant contributors to the segregation of local and international students (2009, p. 1889). Because of the small size of the purpose-built student apartments, crowded living circumstances in rooming houses, or simply a lack of communal areas inside or around their accommodation international students are forced to seek out entertainment venues in the city when socialising with their peers. International students often experience the inner city entertainment district as a rough, disorderly and frightening space, and consequently choose to socialise in patrolled and walled shopping malls (Fincher & Shaw, 2011). Local students tend to have a different perception of the same entertainment district and do not avoid socialising there. Furthermore local students tend to live in bigger shared houses which provide larger socialising spaces and minimise the need to venture into public spaces for socialising.

**Social segregation**

So far the literature has shown that the segregation of local and international students on an institutional level contributes to a form of physical segregation. This physical segregation in the realms of housing and spaces frequented for socialising leads to a social segregation of the two student groups.

Collins (2008) describes how international students in New Zealand developed the social practice of switching between traditional national food cultures and host country food culture, to overcome the splitting of memory and lived experience. These acts of remembrance serve to overcome the estrangement of migration by remaking the relations with spaces that appear to be unfamiliar through the process of re-inhabiting such spaces by reprocessing practices and experiences from their home culture. Because few opportunities for cross-cultural contact between local and international students exist, the two groups are unlikely to form friendships
and the student body of Australian universities stays segregated and international students have to find their own ways of dealing with their existence in a foreign environment.

**Cross-cultural contact amongst international students**

Fincher and Shaw (2011, p. 549) argue that while universities are aware of their responsibility to provide opportunities for cross-cultural opportunities the practice of grouping students under the labels of ‘international’ and ‘local’ is no justification for the view that cross-cultural interaction is solely to occur between students with the respective labels. International students come from a diversity of countries and often interact across their national groupings. The outcome of such interaction is of course cross-cultural communication as well and is to be appreciated as much as interactions between local and international students. Fincher (2011, p. 910) points to racist undertones of considering only cross-cultural contact across the local-international divide:

“[I]f the local group of students is assumed principally to be Anglo, in the Australian context, then expecting the most beneficial social interaction for international students to be with members of that local group is an assumption of the superiority of whiteness which cannot be justified.”

Cross-cultural interaction between students labelled as ‘international’ is in no way inferior or superior to cross-cultural contact between ‘international’ and ‘local’ students. Examining only interactions between ‘international’ students and ‘local’ students can in a Western, predominantly white, country (such as Australia) be interpreted as asserting the dominance of whiteness in cross-cultural exchange. While some studies (for example Montgomery & McDowell, 2009) avoid such assertions and examine international students interacting among themselves and in doing so form nationally-diverse communities exclusive of local students, most research on cross-cultural interactions between students focuses on international-local interactions. Nevertheless, for this literature review and the remainder of the thesis the focus is on cross-cultural communication between international and local students. The labels of ‘international’ and ‘local’ are used with their dangerous implications in mind. This follows the general trend in the urban geography literature to examine only the cross-cultural contact between local and international students.

**Segregated university experience**

The social segregation of local and international students at Australian universities has long been known to the academic literature. For example Smart et al (2000, p. 9) conclude that the literature on the social interactions of local and international students

“reveals a picture of two parallel streams of students proceeding through university – the Australian and the international – within close proximity, but, in most cases, with
little or only superficial contact and interaction. A variety of exit and other surveys confirms this fairly common experience and record repeated expressions of disappointed expectations by international students who had hoped to meet and form close friendships with Australian students, visit Australian homes and experience local culture first hand.”

Reviewing dozens of international studies about friendship patterns of international students in England Brown (2009, p. 185) concludes “a low incidence of bonds between international and local students has been long and widely documented”. Instead of cross-cultural friendships with local students or cross-cultural friendships with the ‘international students’ category, the most common friendship group noted in studies of friendship patterns is the mono-cultural bond with co-nationals. Brown (2009) refers to this as a ‘ghetto pattern’. An exit survey at the University of Melbourne (2005) found that 38 percent of international students had continuous problems socialising with local students and 22 percent experienced problems socialising with local students in the past. Only 40 percent did not experience socialising with local students as problematic.

Studying contact patterns of international students in New Zealand Ward and Masgoret (2004) found that social interaction with local students was the exception (see Table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In social settings with:</th>
<th>Never in %</th>
<th>Seldom in %</th>
<th>Sometimes in %</th>
<th>Often in %</th>
<th>Very Often in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-national students</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other International Students</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In study session with:</th>
<th>Never in %</th>
<th>Seldom in %</th>
<th>Sometimes in %</th>
<th>Often in %</th>
<th>Very Often in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local students</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-national students</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other International Students</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Socialising patterns of 2736 international students in New Zealand (data from Ward & Masgoret, 2004)

The fact that the reviewed studies on friendship patterns show international students to be socialising predominantly with co-nationals is contrasted by the fact that a survey of 417 international students at Monash University in Melbourne (King and Chenicheri, 2005, p. 1, quoted in Fincher and Shaw, 2011) found “[international students] want opportunities to develop relationships with domestic students”. Brown (2009) found that the absence of contact with the host community also was a source of great regret for international students in the UK. In conclusion, the existing social segregation of local and international students is not a
desired outcome that international students consciously chose but the result of a multitude of external factors.

Co-national friendship groups help international students to produce feelings of comfort, a feeling of belonging to a certain place, of being among certain people where social and cultural practices are shared (Collins 2010b). According to Ahmed (1999, p. 345) this is how international students are “forming a community through the shared experience of not being fully at home – of having inhabited another space”. Collins (2010b) argues that often these co-national friendship groups would not have occurred in the country of origin and consequently these groups are to be seen as a product of individuals’ shared experience of being an international student and the resulting shared negotiation of the spaces they occupy.

However, current research in urban geography does not explore the step by step decision making that underlies each housing outcome of an international student. Without examining decision making processes it is not possible to conclusively say that international students do not play an active (and potentially unintended) role in creating the current segregated housing landscape.

**Summary and gaps in urban geography literature**
This review of the urban geography literature shows that the suburbs around the two universities examined in this thesis are gentrified and expensive but cannot be labelled as studentified. The literature review on placemaking and the segregated distribution of local and international student focused mostly Australian research as these processes need to be assessed in their local context and findings are not necessarily transferable from a non-Australian context. A multitude of factors contribute to the segregation of local and international students in Australia. Institutional practices at Australian universities dividing students into ‘local’ and ‘international’ foster a physical segregation of the student body. Longstanding housing practices in Australia lead to local and international students occupying different types of accommodation which minimised opportunities for cross-cultural contact in a housing setting. Consequently, the two student groups socialise largely amongst themselves and in different locations. This often leads to segregated experiences of public spaces because certain public spaces are visited by international students and other spaces by local students. International students in Australia commonly regret that they did not establish local friendships. The literature review also explained how institutional processes and marketing strategies channel a large proportion of international students into segregated housing which hinders cross-cultural contact.
Urban geography focuses on external factors and does not take into account the possibility that international students themselves contribute through their active decision making to the housing segregation. Concentrating on external factors alone excludes the possibility that international students want to live segregated and actively segregate themselves from local students. Consequently, it can currently only be assumed why most international students live in segregated housing options and also socialise segregated from local students despite also voicing the wish to be in contact with local students more often.

Furthermore, current urban geography research cannot detect if some international students make their housing choices independently from external factors. Examining the decision making processes of international students would show if international students made active and independent housing decisions.

**Educational Sociology**

Educational sociology examines how institutions and individual experiences affect education and the outcomes of education. The term ‘education’ includes formal and informal education systems but most research is concerned with formal educational institutions like schools and universities.

This literature review limits itself to the branch of ‘education outcomes’ within the broader field of educational sociology (Hallinan, 2006). While the majority of research on ‘education outcomes’ in educational sociology concerns itself with academic and class related outcomes this chapter focuses on wellbeing related outcomes. Because international students have a special standing within Australian universities (Fincher and Shaw, 2009; 2010; 2011), only research concerning the wellbeing of this specific subgroup in an Australian context is included in this chapter.

Wellbeing is defined as the state of being happy, healthy and prosperous (Merriam Webster, 2012). In the case of international students ‘wellbeing’ refers to the quality of the built environment, physical and mental health, education, recreation and leisure time, and social belonging individual students experience during their time abroad (Gregory, 2009).

The biggest and most comprehensive writing in educational sociology dealing with issues of international student wellbeing in Australia is *International Student Security* by Marginson et al. (2010). The authors single out major fields of research of what they refer to as the international student security regime. When combining Marginson et al.’s work (2010), with research from New Zealand (Ho, Li, Cooper, & Holmes, 2007; Ward & Masgoret, 2004) five subcategories of research on international student wellbeing outside of the academic performance / classroom setting emerge: safety, health, finances, social connectedness and
housing. Research papers in educational sociology seldom look at one subcategory in isolation but consider these five fields to be overlapping and influencing each other. For this thesis two fields are of specific relevance and are discussed in more detail: the effects of social connectedness on wellbeing and the effects of housing on wellbeing.

**International student safety, healthcare and finances**

Regarding the other three fields of research in wellbeing related education outcomes in educational sociology it is sufficient to note that they are linked to international student wellbeing.

As shown earlier, perceived safety is an important factor for international students when choosing a study location (AEI, 2003; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) and the Australian education sector depends financially on a good safety reputation (AEI, 2003; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Perceived safety also impacts international students’ wellbeing. The safer students perceive their environment to be, the higher their reported wellbeing (Marginson et al., 2010).

Similarly, reviewing literature on international student health issues, Marginson et al. (2010) point to the direct correlation between physical and mental health and wellbeing. Poor health severely decreases the student experience and affects academic performance negatively (Marginson et al., 2010). While some international students, especially Chinese students (compare Marginson et al., 2010, p. 181), are often reluctant to use health care services, those who do report high satisfaction levels. A different study (Russell et al., 2007) shows that many international students in Melbourne underuse both mental and physical healthcare services, but those who do report mostly positive experiences.

An American study (Abu-Ein, 1995) pinpoints financial problems to be the area of biggest concern for international students and links it with poor academic performance and increased levels of stress. Asian students at an American University who are not supported by scholarships face greater difficulties than their domestic counterparts in a variety of areas: selection and admission, orientation, English language, academic advising, academic record, social–personnel, living–dining, health services and student activities (Xia 1991). Studies from the UK replicate these results and also single out financial problems as the largest concern of international students (Li & Kaye, 1998). In a New Zealand study Ward and Masgoret (2004)

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3 In Australia international students are not eligible to access the publically funded healthcare system (*medicare*) and, as part of their visa requirements, have to purchase private health insurance (*Overseas Student Health Cover, OSHC*). Healthcare is provided by local health practitioners and university health services.
present the fact that 30 percent of all international students believe they have insufficient funds available. All these studies suggest strongly that poor financial circumstances directly affect the wellbeing of international students. In Australia 35 percent of international students experienced financial problems (Marginson et al. 2010). At the University of Melbourne a similar percentage (29 percent) of international students experience financial difficulties, in particular inadequate financial support was positively correlated with poor wellbeing (Rosenthal et al., 2006).

**International students’ social connectedness and wellbeing**
The literature of urban geography shows that local and international students socialise largely amongst themselves and that cross-cultural socialising has been rare in Australian universities. This chapter makes the point that the size and composition of international students’ social networks impacts wellbeing. Social isolation, in the form of a non-existing social network, results in poor wellbeing and high social connectedness improves wellbeing.

The literature on social connectedness of international students unanimously suggests that size of international students’ social networks affects their wellbeing. High social connectedness, in the form of a large social network, is positively associated with student satisfaction, academic progress, living arrangements, financial position, self-esteem and health (Rosenthal et al., 2006). Levels of low social connectedness are common amongst international students in Melbourne, with 65 percent of international students in Melbourne having experienced periods of loneliness or isolation (Sawir et al. 2007). In another study 60 percent of students reported feelings of loneliness and isolation (Deumert et al., 2005). In conclusion, high social connectedness positively impacts international student wellbeing.

Not only the size but also the composition of their social network influences international students’ wellbeing. Limited or non existing social contact with local students is tied to feelings of loneliness, depression, and stress (Chen, 1999). An Australian study shows that higher cross-cultural connectedness is positively associated with academic progress, satisfaction with living arrangements, financial position, self-esteem and health (Rosenthal et al., 2006a). International students in Australia who are paired with local students in a peer support programme for eight months receive higher marks and are less likely to drop out than those not part of the programme (Westwood and Barker, 1990). Kudo & Simkin (2003) show that female Japanese students in Australia desire cross-cultural friendships and argue such friendships need to be encouraged. Poyrazli & Lopez (2007) describe the positive effects of cross-cultural friendships:
“Once students start building relationships with people from the host culture, however, their experiences are more likely to be positive. Relationships with other students from the host culture and faculty members tend to lower stress (Abe, Talbot, & Geelhooed, 1998; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Further, engagement in extracurricular activities enhances international students' adjustment and results in a lower level of acculturative stress (Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002; Yeh & Isone, 2003). Therefore, international students are more likely to have positive experiences and achieve their educational goals, if they have a satisfying contact with the host culture and live in a pleasant social atmosphere (Prieto, 1995).”

Another study (City of Melbourne, 2008) indicates that only 56 percent of international students have the opportunity to experience Australian culture. In the same study respondents voice their desire for greater interaction opportunities (through activities and events) with local Australian students.

In summary, international students with more local friends claim to be more satisfied, content, and less homesick. They report to have a better overall student experience than those with fewer friends from the host country and describe themselves as more satisfied, content, and socially connected. At the same time only a minority of international students actually makes local friends.

**International student housing and wellbeing**

It was just shown that international student wellbeing is affected by size and composition of their social network. The following paragraphs show that housing is an effective way for international students to increase the size of their social network, make local friends and consequently improve their wellbeing.

Marginson et al. (2010, p. 352) point out that housing is more important in creating friendships than sharing a course of study or workplace:

“For students not living with family or host family or in university residences, the core friendship group was often shaped by the shared house or apartment. Many had made good new friends when thrown together in this way. Often shared houses were minihubs in which each member bonded with the others and became more loosely connected to their networks of family and friends. The closer the extent of sharing in the house – common finances, meals, studies, leisure activities, friends – the more intensive the centralising hub effects. Interviewees were asked who they saw most often. Most reported spending the largest amount of time with housemates. Some said their housemates were their only friends, the people they would turn to for advice, help and support when in trouble.”

International students who feel comfortable in their accommodation experience fewer problems with security, loneliness and socialising (Paltridge et al., 2010).
Furthermore Riker and Decoster’s work over several decades (2008, 1971) shows that students’ academic performance is directly related to their housing situation. Their findings have been affirmed several times in international (Pascarella & Edison, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005) and Australian contexts (Rosenthal et al., 2006a).

Rosenthal et al. (2006) show the significant relationship between housing satisfaction and international students’ experiences of social connectedness and cultural stress in Melbourne. The better students are socially connected, the more satisfied they are with their living arrangements. Other indicators of wellbeing are also associated with housing satisfaction. Students with the highest level of housing satisfaction report significantly lower levels of depression, anxiety and stress, than those who are not satisfied with their living arrangements.

**Summary of educational sociology**

Educational sociology provides evidence that international students’ wellbeing improves when they report high social connectedness and establish friendships with locals. Not establishing friendships with locals is linked to loneliness and stress. Housing can provide opportunities to establishing such large and diverse social networks.

**Social Psychology**

**Introduction**

If educational sociology demonstrates that the segregation of the student body negatively impacts on the wellbeing of many international students, social psychology has developed interventions for reducing this segregation and consequently improving wellbeing. The most prominent one, *contact theory* (Allport, 1954), suggests that by promoting contact between segregated groups, prejudice can be reduced and friendship formation across group borders can occur (Pettigrew, 1998). Social psychologists analyse which conditions need to be present for friendship formation to occur across group borders and present evidence that housing provides especially favourable conditions. Social psychologists today still agree with Allport’s *contact theory* from 1954, as a recent meta-analysis of research publications (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) shows. If the contact is ‘meaningful’, interactions with out-groups reduce prejudice, enhance patterns of social interaction and enable friendship formation.

Firstly this section shows how prejudices are formed, people are categorised into in- or out-groups, and how people act out their prejudices. Secondly it explains under what conditions contact with out-group members reduces prejudices. Thirdly research showing housing as an enabler for prejudice-reducing contact is reviewed – a special focus is put on research around different student groups being housed together.
**Circle of segregation according to social psychology**

“Everywhere on earth we find a condition of separateness among groups. People mate with their own kind. They eat, play, reside in homogeneous clusters. They visit with their own kind, and prefer to worship together. Much of this automatic cohesion is due to nothing more than convenience.”

(Allport, 1954, p. 17)

Allport (1954) views the self-segregation of human groups as a natural process. Because it is convenient to be around ‘people similar to themselves’ people categorise others. The creation of these categories is not based on evidence. Once formed, these categories form clusters for guiding daily life. Spencer-Rodgers (2001) agrees with Allport (1954) and Pettigrew (1998) and views social categorisation as a necessary precursor to stereotyping. In order to quickly stereotype a person people assimilate as much as possible into the same category. Allport’s concept of categorisation is widely accepted by the academic community (Dovidio et al., 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

As the result of categorising and stereotyping people create in-groups and out-groups. An ‘in-group’ is in existence when people use “the term we with the same essential significance” (italics in the original, Allport, 1954, p. 31). Negative prejudices towards a particular group lead individuals to think in fixed categories about that group and they separate themselves from this group and consider them an out-group. In- and out-groups are not formed in a rational manner. They are merely formed in the most convenient and simplest manner.

According to Allport (1954) everybody forms in- and out-groups in some way but people vary in the ways they act towards the out-group. Their actions might not always be directly related to what they think or feel about the out-group. Allport (1954) argues that negative attitudes are somehow, somewhere, expressed in some form of action as few people keep their antipathies fully to themselves. The more intense the negative attitude, the more likely it is to result in vigorously hostile actions.

**Mitigating segregation through contact**

**Basic concept**
Contact theory views stereotyping, prejudice, and the formation of in- and outgroups as common forms of discrimination between two groups. Under appropriate conditions Allport (1954) views interpersonal contact as an effective way of breaking these patterns of labelling people as members of either the in- or the outgroup: If one is able to communicate with a member of the other group, one is able to understand and appreciate the perceived differences between the groups. This new appreciation and understanding results in reduced prejudices and stereotypes held towards the other group.
The reduction of prejudice through intergroup contact is best explained as the *reconceptualisation of group categories*. As discussed earlier, Allport (1954) claims prejudices result from generalisations made about an entire group of people. The basic rationale is that prejudices are reduced as one learns more about a category of people. Rothbart and John (1985, p. 82) view inter-group contact resulting in a changed perception of the other group as "an example of the general cognitive process by which attributes of category members modify category attributes". Social psychologists agree that an individual's beliefs can be modified by coming into contact with an out-group member and that this subsequently modifies the individual’s beliefs about the entire out-group (compare Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

**Meaningful contact**

Not all forms of contact between groups results in an improved understanding and deeper appreciation of the other. Casual or superfluous contact is not enough to mitigate prejudices between groups. Rather, superficial contact increases stereotypes than dispelling them (Allport, 1954). This understanding is also well established in the geographic literature. Amin (2002, 2006) shows that co-presence is not enough to create relationships or sustained interactions across difference. Instead, Amin (2002, 2006) argues that purposeful gatherings in specific types of public spaces create the myriad “micro-publics” of the city. Valentine (2008, pp. 324–326) presents similar arguments, though her research is specifically concerned that the “low-level sociability” that characterises acts like commenting to strangers in everyday encounters are not be overrated and viewed as examples of meaningful urban encounter.

Despite being optimistic about the potential benefits of contact, Allport (1954) warns that these superficial kinds of contact between members of different groups will actually reinforce stereotypes, rather than mitigating them, because they are failing to provide new information about the other group. In the context of local and international students in Melbourne that means only seeing the other group or engaging in casual contact with the other group might actually strengthen prejudices instead of reducing them. In a review of Allport’s (1954) work these findings are said to have stood the test of time as none of the major findings were overturned (Kenworthy et al., 2005).

Positive effects of intergroup contact occur when the contact is of meaningful nature. For the contact to be meaningful, four key conditions have to apply: equal group status within the situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; and the support of authorities, law, or custom (Allport, 1954).

First, Allport stresses the importance of groups being of equal status within the situation. Most research supports this contention, although equal status is difficult to define and is used in
different ways (Pettigrew, 1998). It is important that both groups expect and perceive equal status in the situation. In the context of international students, equality of status is achieved when local and international students are interacting without a significant power or knowledge gap.

Second, members of both groups work together on a problem or task and share a common goal. Athletic teams and military units are used by Allport as prime examples of inter-group contact based around a common goal, i.e. winning a match or succeeding in battle. In the context of international students common goals can be anything from receiving good marks on a group project to organising basic housing related tasks for example, paying bills, purchasing shared equipment or organising a dinner party together.

Third, members of both groups must be mutually dependent on each other which will force them to cooperate to achieve the best outcome. Housemates depend on each other for many household related tasks and emotional support.

Fourth, an authority that both groups acknowledge defines social norms that support the interactions between group members. In the context of international students the most important institution is the university. Interactions between local and international students facilitated or enabled by the university would need to be freed from the ‘local’ and ‘international’ labels and all students should be referred to simply as ‘students’ in order to improve opportunities for meaningful contact between the groups. Landlords and housing managements can also have such an authoritative role.

Pettigrew adds that the contact between two groups also needs to happen over a prolonged period of time to have ‘friendship potential’ (1998, p. 76):

“The power of cross-group friendship to reduce prejudice and generalize to other out-groups demands a fifth condition for the contact hypothesis: The contact situation must provide the participants with the opportunity to become friends. Such opportunity implies close interaction that would make self-disclosure and other friendship-developing mechanisms possible. It also implies the potential for extensive and repeated contact in a variety of social contexts.”

Whereas Allport discusses whether or not contact could reduce prejudices between groups, more recent research focuses on when and how contact reduces inter-group prejudices. The following paragraphs review research on how contact mitigates prejudices and segregation of local and international students.
**Contact theory in the context of university students**

This section shows that meaningful contact between local and international students can lessen the segregation of the two groups. Firstly research in an on-campus setting where students from different backgrounds engage in a meaningful manner is reviewed before presenting research on international student housing as an enabler for meaningful contact.

**Opportunities for meaningful contact on campus**

Cross-cultural friendships result from meaningful contact. The opportunities for meaningful contact between local and international students on campuses, i.e. visiting the same lectures, dining in the same area, are often not sufficient to reduce prejudices (Summers & Volet, 2008). Summers and Volet (2008) showed that providing additional opportunities for meaningful contact is beneficial in improving quality of intergroup contact. Cross-cultural interaction on- and off-campus provides social forums to enhance students’ intercultural competence, skills and confidence. Yet, despite multiple opportunities for social contact, the most typical pattern is one of minimal interaction between students from different cultural backgrounds. Summers and Volet (2008) investigate the attitudes towards culturally mixed group-work held by students in different years of undergraduate study, the relationship of attitudes to working with multiple languages and cultures, whether attitudes are related to observed behaviour, and how attitudes change over the course of participation in diverse or non-diverse groups. Their results show that meaningful cross-cultural contact reduces prejudice. Because the intervention (group work) was only short term, long term results like friendships are not analysed by the research team.

Another study shows that students with high levels of individual cultural openness report significantly higher levels of interaction with outgroup members than students with a low level of cultural openness (Groeppel-Klein et al., 2010). The authors of the study urge universities to invest in measures improving intercultural interaction. Their findings indicate that interaction is positively related to student loyalty, meaning strategic efforts by universities to increase local and international students’ propensity to interact with each other provide a competitive advantage in the educational market place. Mere exposure to each other does not lead students from different nations to have fewer differences in mutual perception (Groeppel-Klein et al., 2010). Mere exposure to out-group members is insufficient to cause interaction between students on culturally diverse campuses.

Sakurai et al. (2010) show that international students in Australia who participate in a cultural programme with local peers build stronger social and cultural ties to Australians and the local culture than those who do not join such a program. Students who participate in the programme tend to have a greater number of friends overall and particularly local friends.
They also maintain their interests and involvement in the local culture while the nonparticipant group commonly weakens their local cultural orientation and strengthens the home cultural orientation. The findings presented above suggest that universities often do not offer enough opportunities to enable sufficient cross-cultural contact.

**Opportunities for meaningful contact in housing**

Research on international student housing suggests that housing can successfully enable such contact.

Van Laar et al. (2005) examine the effect on American university students of sharing a dormitory room with students from other races or nationalities on affective, cognitive, and behavioural indicators of prejudice. Van Laar et al. (2005) examine over 2000 students in two ways. Firstly, they examine prejudice as a function of living with randomly assigned roommates during the first year of university. Secondly, the researchers examine the effects of voluntary roommate contact during the second and third year of university on fourth year prejudice (net of pre-existing attitudes). Consistent with contact theory, both randomly assigned and voluntary contact with out-group members decrease prejudice.

In Australia, intervention programmes at residential colleges create opportunities for meaningful contact between local and international students and mitigate the effects of segregation (Nesdale & Todd, 1993, 2000; Todd & Nesdale, 1997). Referring to Allport’s (1954) contact theory including the additions by Pettigrew (1998) the authors conclude: “the residential hall environment meets the [...] criteria for favourable intergroup contact” (Nesdale & Todd, 2000, p. 345). While in residential halls international students are still the minority group their status as students within the residential colleges is equivalent to that of Australian students as they share the same entrance criteria, obligations and responsibilities, social standing, fees, and involvement in student administration. Additionally, students in a residential hall come from a middle class background and are similarly well-off financially (see Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1971). More importantly, residential halls provide a daily 24 hour opportunity for members of the two groups to interact and get to know each other and disconfirm existing stereotypes. Nesdale and Todd (2000, p. 346) conclude that residential halls and colleges “emphasize collegiality and equalitarian social norms and encourage cooperation and collaboration in both academic and recreational activities”.

Writing on social connectedness of international students in America, Hendrickson et al. (2010, p. 11) emphasise the important role of housing directors at universities and urge them to “make an effort to house international students with local students as it increases the opportunity for communication and provides an immediate weak tie relationship”. Following
contact theory, the authors conclude that integrated, non-segregated, housing creates a condition where meaningful contact between local and international students can occur and should be highly encouraged.

**Summary of social psychology literature**
Contact theory explains mechanisms of categorization and the formation of in- and out-groups. Casual contact between groups is not enough to mitigate segregation and sometimes even strengthens existing stereotypes. Rather, members of different groups have to engage in meaningful contact to achieve positive results. Four conditions need to be present for meaningful contact to occur: equal group status within the situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; and the support of authorities, law, or custom. Housing is an effective enabler for meaningful cross-cultural contact because these four conditions are often present in the housing context. Furthermore, cross-cultural contact is positively correlated with international student wellbeing. Based on the reviewed literature housing is viewed as an effective tool in mitigating segregation as long as the four conditions for meaningful contact are in place.

**Conclusion and gaps in the literature**
Reviewing urban geography literature showed that institutional practices divide students into ‘local’ and ‘international’ categories, which unintentionally supports the physical segregation of the student body. Because in Australia the majority of local and international students are physically segregated through housing and socialising patterns, many students experience few or no opportunities for cross-cultural contact.

The academic literature widely views living in cross-cultural housing as desirable. Educational sociology demonstrates that international students’ wellbeing is influenced by their perceived safety, their physical and mental health, their financial situation, their social connectedness, and their housing arrangements. Student housing strongly impacts wellbeing. For a majority of international students housing is a hub for social activities and enables the establishment of a social network. Social psychology, including contact theory, further strengthens the point that housing is a strong intervention when aiming to mitigate segregation. Housing offers an excellent setting for successfully enabling such meaningful contact. Cross-cultural housing decreases inter-group prejudices and enables intergroup friendships. In a context of local and international students, cross-cultural housing results in friendships across group boundaries. Wellbeing is not impossible when living in segregated housing. However, engaging in meaningful cross-cultural exchange only has positive impacts on international student wellbeing.
Chapter 2 has highlighted that current urban geography literature does not focus on international students’ housing decision making. This is arguably because British and American universities routinely require their first year undergraduate students to live on-campus. In such cases, students do not make their own housing decisions. This explains the lack of focus on international students’ housing decisions in the international academic literature. In Australia however, students can choose freely between many housing options. Creating knowledge regarding international students’ housing decisions in Australia benefits the urban geography literature in four ways.

Firstly, current urban geography literature does not examine the possibility of intentional self-segregation by international students. When only institutional and market based mechanisms are examined, international students’ tendencies for self-segregation, should they be present, cannot be detected. Looking at international students’ decision making processes uncover such preferences in case they are present.

Secondly, by looking at the segregated student housing landscape which occurs when individuals place themselves into housing, opportunities for interventions countering such segregation might be more easily detectable. Creating new knowledge regarding when housing decisions were made and when different external influences impacted on housing outcomes is therefore important.

Thirdly, by looking at different external factors that influence housing decisions it also becomes apparent if, and under which circumstances, international students make housing decisions solely based on their own preferences and previous experiences.

Finally, outlining housing decision making processes explains why international students find themselves in segregated housing even though they express a preference for more cross-cultural contact.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter 2 showed a gap of knowledge in the literature regarding the ways international students make their housing decisions. This thesis aims to create such new knowledge.

This chapter first presents the general aim of this thesis and the three research questions. Secondly, the data collection processes are described. Thirdly, the processes of data analysis are described.

General aim
The general aim of this thesis is to add to the urban geography literature and increase the knowledge about the role of housing in the segregation of the student body at Australian universities.

Chapter 2 showed that student housing in Australia was mostly segregated and that students’ housing situation impacts on their wellbeing. This housing segregation is partly due to the segregated social networks that international students frequent. Consequently, examining the housing segregation of international students also provides knowledge about the social segregation of international students. The academic literature presented in Chapter 2 largely examines international student housing at a point in time when local and international students were already living segregated from each other.

This thesis examines the decision making processes that led international students to move into their largely segregated housing.

Examining international students’ housing decisions is important for several reasons. Firstly, in order to allow for the possibility that international students intentionally segregate themselves urban geography literature needs to look at how international students make their housing decisions that lead them to be segregated. Secondly, knowing when housing decisions are influenced externally highlights when efforts mitigating housing segregation are most effective. Thirdly, it shows if some international students choose their housing independently and without being influenced externally. Fourthly, examining international students’ housing decisions explains why international students live in segregated housing despite voicing preferences for more cross-cultural contact.

Specific research questions
Like former urban geography research, this thesis acknowledges the importance of external factors in shaping the largely segregated housing landscape at Australian universities. The three research questions (see Table 7) are structured around institutional and systemic factors that were found to impact on the segregated housing landscape in Chapter 2. However, by
focussing on the decision making processes of students the thesis allows for the opportunity that students acted without being influenced externally.

The questions are answered chronologically according to the international student housing timeline, which is introduced later in this chapter (see p.69). This approach will show when international students (and under which circumstances) make independent housing decisions free from external influences. Q1 asks about institutional influences, while Q2 focuses on public policies that lead international students into certain housing options. Acknowledging the importance of interpersonal relationships, Q3 asks how and when friends and families impacted on international students’ housing decisions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision-Making of International Students Regarding Housing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Research Questions

**Qualitative research approach**
This section describes how data was collected in order to answer the three research questions. The reasoning behind applying a qualitative methodology (case study approach) based on in-depth interviews with international students and its implementation is explained.

**Reasoning for qualitative data collection**
Many researchers criticise the fact that until the 1990s and early 2000s research on international students was mostly quantitative (Feijten & Mulder, 2005; Lister, 2004; Rugg, Ford, & Burrows, 2004; Thomsen, 2007; Montgomery and McDowell, 2009).

For this thesis a qualitative case study approach with a sample size of 30 participants was utilized. This is in line with current practices in urban geography where much housing research has moved away from quantitative approaches and started employing qualitative methods. Current studies use qualitative approaches and refer back to Ford et al. (2002) as introducing qualitative methods, mostly in the form of interviews, into the mainstream of housing research (Christie, 2007; Hubbard, 2008, 2009; Rugg et al., 2004). Sibley (1995, p. 186) wrote about the importance of qualitative approaches in examining geographies of exclusion:

“Understanding the experience of others and their relationship to place involves positioning ourselves [the geographic researchers] in the world. Listening to and talking with people is one necessary part of this endeavour. Reflecting on the experience in such a way that we recognize our own part in the dialogue is another.”
The methodology of this thesis differs from those social psychologists like Allport (1954) use. While working with qualitative data and smaller sample sizes is favoured in much of contemporary urban geography and educational sociology, social psychology mostly employs quantitative approaches to data collection (Allport, 1954; Dovidio et al., 2005; Kenworthy et al., 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and larger sample sizes and data collection through questionnaires are preferred over a small and in-depth collection of interview material.

The general arguments for employing a qualitative research methodology are put forward by Merriam (2009) and Stake (2010) who state that qualitative approaches need to be used when attempting to gain an in-depth insight into matters of human behaviour. Qualitative approaches, they argue, are the best choice when asking about the why and how of decision making, when studying people’s culture, value system, attitude, behaviour, concern, motivation, or aspiration. Somerville and Bengtsson (2002, p. 135) reinforce these arguments in their writing on housing theory as they have the ambition to “take real actors and contexts seriously” and therefore making historical and ethnographic approaches more useful than statistical and quantitative ones.

Using the same line of thought, Clapham (2002, 2005) places the ‘knowledgeable individual’, who makes both informed and uninformed housing decisions, at the heart of housing research. Clapham stresses the importance of analysing how stakeholders in the housing field interact over time and space. Using a qualitative and biographical approach to housing research allows for that deep understanding of how individuals navigate the housing field in the context of their personal preferences, opportunities, and constraints. Clapham (2002, 2005) argues that using a biographical approach to data collection through qualitative interviews is best suited to gain an understanding of housing decisions.

Clapham’s (2002, 2005) approach needs to be seen in context of the general discussion regarding agency and structure.

Structure refers to the social, economic and political contexts in which an action takes place (Barker, 2005). Structuralists do not see the individual as the ultimate social reality but focus on the structures in which the individual is situated. The term ‘situated’ refers to the emplacement and embodiment of the individual. Individuals are embodied physically and emplaced in terms of lifestyle conditions. Structuralist approaches recognise that specific conditions produce specific actions or behaviours. Essentially, the actions of individuals are the result of the structures in which they live. Behaviour does not result from free will but from structural circumstances. The actions of individuals are therefore responses to the structures in which the individual is situated. Agency is the capacity of individuals to act independently
and to make their own free choices (Hewson, 2010). Therefore, Hewson (2010) argues, the preferred way of analysing behaviour is examining how the individual made their decision. Agency puts an onus on reflexivity; on the ability of the individual to account for and be aware of the reasons and implications of their actions. Individualists argue that human beings are richer and more complex in their behaviour than structuralist approaches would predict.

Clapham (2002, 2005) argues that informants in housing studies should be understood as knowledgeable agents who make choices based on their interaction with structures. A qualitative research methodology gives recognition to the individual whose individual circumstances would be ignored or assumed in a quantitative approach.

In line with contemporary social scientists and the common praxis of research on international student housing, individuals in this thesis are assumed to always have some level of agency, while being embedded in various structures influencing their behaviour.

While the research questions examine structural influences on housing decisions (institutions, policy, social networks), the qualitative methodology also allows for insights into the agency of international students.

**Case study approach**

After the literature review it was proposed that the research questions were best answered using a qualitative approach. This paragraph will explain the reasoning behind using a case study approach.

A case study is an intensive and in-depth study of a specific individual, event, group, or institution in a specific context (compare Stake, 2010; Yin, 2008). There is no fixed criterion and way of conducting case studies. This approach results in a clear perception and understanding of why and how things happen in the manner they do. Yin (2008) and Stake (2010) nominate case studies as an ideal way of collecting data on how or why questions. As this thesis aims to answer such questions (see Figure 1) it was decided to collect data via case studies. By closely examining a relatively small number of cases, and comparing and contrasting them, the thesis distilled significant features of international students’ housing decisions in Melbourne.

The data for these case studies was collected through in-depth interviews, which is common practice in research on housing decisions (compare Deumert et al., 2005; Christie et al., 2002; Christie, 2007; Clapham, 2002; Fincher et al., 2009; Ford et al., 2002; Marginson et al., 2010; Valentine, 2008; Waters, 2005). A semi-structured interviewing approach was used as it is informal and allows more exploration and deviation in its approach, which is useful for
exploring interesting aspects of an individual’s housing decision making process more broadly (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2008). This way of interviewing encouraged responses from the interviewee’s point of view (Yin, 2008).

In line with Clapham’s (2002, 2005) view it was decided to collect data by interviewing international students themselves, rather than parents or university staff who also might have valuable insights into the housing decision making process. Throughout the research process for this thesis international students were viewed as the most knowledgeable and reliable source of information regarding their housing decisions. This does not mean that this way of data collection was free of limitations as all interviews were potentially subject to poor recall and inaccurate articulation, the latter especially when working with interviewees who spoke English as a second language (Yin, 2008). All interviews were conducted by the researcher, an international student himself, in a casual setting to relax the interviewee and gain their trust. This casual approach to interviewing allowed the interviewee to feel like an ‘informant’ rather than a ‘respondent’ (Yin, 2008, p. 90). Furthermore, this method allowed the interviewer to adjust questions to the individual’s life story while following the interview guideline.

Short case summaries were written about each student. The interview data from all interviewees taken together formed the bases of the case study that informed this thesis about decision making of international students regarding housing in Melbourne.

Sample size
Having decided on collecting data through semi structured interviews the sample size needed to be determined. The question of how many interviews were needed to achieve saturation and collect a reliable amount of information was answered by looking at a meta analysis of studies using qualitative research (Mason, 2010). This study showed that 28 was the median number of participants needed to achieve saturation of information in qualitative research. Another study (Thomson, 2011) analysing the ideal sample size for qualitative research projects suggested that usually saturation was achieved between N=10 and N=30. Considering the findings of Mason (2010) and Thomson (2011) it was decided to collect data from a total of 30 participants (N=30). All participants were international students.

Selecting interviewees
It was decided that because of the relatively small sample size of N=30 it was best to only interview international students rather than a combination of local and international students. While the lack of local students in the sample excludes the perspective of an important stakeholder in cross-cultural communication, interviewing 30 international students allowed
for meaningful insights from their specific perspective (compare Mason, 2010 and Thomson, 2011).

In order to see how different institutional practices influenced international students’ housing decisions it was decided to interview students from two universities. Both universities were to be located in Melbourne. The city was an excellent study location as it offered a large number of universities to choose from. The universities in Melbourne all had a similar percentage of international students and where in that respect representative of the overall population of Australian universities. The sample was split evenly into n=15 at Victoria University and n=15 at The University of Melbourne. Both universities are located in highly urbanised areas, like most other large Australian universities. This way, the relevance of the research findings of this thesis to other Australian universities was tried to be ensured. Analysing more than two universities would have been desirable but would have added unjustifiable additional logistical and organisational efforts in recruiting interviewees.

The University of Melbourne was chosen for ease of use, as the study was conducted through this institution which was expected to be of help in recruiting interviewees. Furthermore, the researcher already possessed knowledge about some processes and practises at The University of Melbourne. As the second educational institution Victoria University was chosen because it differed from The University of Melbourne in its geographical location within Melbourne (western suburbs, rather than city centre), tuition cost (lower international student fees), the kind of student housing available close to campus (fewer large purpose built student accommodations; no residential colleges but residential halls) and it was ranked significantly lower than The University of Melbourne in international university ratings (compare Table 8). Collecting 15 interviews from each university allowed for a comparison of institutional practices regarding international student housing.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The University of Melbourne</th>
<th>Victoria University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degrees offered</td>
<td>University level degrees; caters to high income professions (medicine, law, science)</td>
<td>University level and vocational degrees; caters to lower income professions with strong links to local industry partners (vocational qualifications, accounting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical location and housing costs</td>
<td>Central Melbourne; gentrified since 1990s, now among the most expensive real-estate locations in Melbourne.</td>
<td>Footscray, Western Melbourne; gentrified since 2000s with housing costs having risen significantly over the last 20 years (now considered to be between average and high).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Wide University Rankings</td>
<td>Among TOP 25-50</td>
<td>Not among TOP 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolments 2012</td>
<td>49,521</td>
<td>25,657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Enrolments 2012</td>
<td>12,829</td>
<td>7,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion International Enrolments 2012</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Options affiliated with institution; housing environment</td>
<td>11 Residential Colleges; Parkville campus surrounded by many purpose-built student high-rises</td>
<td>2 Residential Halls; limited number of smaller purpose-built student accommodations available around Footscray campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yearly tuition fees for undergraduate engineering degree in 2013</td>
<td>$34,816</td>
<td>$21,610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income total in 2011</td>
<td>$1,687,831,000</td>
<td>$455,064,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income from international student fees in 2011</td>
<td>$307,845,000</td>
<td>$54,531,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total income created through international student fees in 2011</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Statistics regarding The University of Melbourne and Victoria University

4 http://futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/admissions/entry-requirements/undergraduate-domestic
5 http://www.vu.edu.au/courses/how-to-apply/international-applications/entry-requirements
6 http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2012-13/world-ranking
9 http://futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/admissions-fees/ug-intl
10 http://www.vu.edu.au/courses/fees-assistance/higher-education-fees
Contacting potential interviewees
Having settled for interviewing international students from two different universities, it was decided to use self-selection sampling to recruit the 30 interviewees.

To do so, the international student organisations at both universities were contacted. Melbourne University Overseas Students’ Service (MUOSS) and International Students Association (ISA) at Victoria University were asked for help in acquiring 15 interviewees at each university. Both ISA and MUOSS are student run organisations that were very generous in supporting the research project and offered their help in recruiting interviewees as well as offering their offices as interview locations.

The two organisations included information about the interviews in their email newsletters, their information boards on campus, the ISA and MUOSS presidents mentioned the research project in their groups’ regular meetings and several social media updates.

The interview request stated clearly that interviewees had to have been in Australia for at least 12 months and were currently on an international student visa. It was clearly stated that participation in the study would not be paid and participants would volunteer their time and information.

No interviewee was a personal friend or was graded or tutored by the researcher.

Preparation of interview guideline
In order to prepare a well informed interview guideline that would do justice to the complex housing experiences of international students, it was necessary to gather a significant amount of background knowledge about international student housing and friendship formation of international students.

A review of the academic literature (Chapter 2) on international student housing was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. Additionally public records were collected and analysed from external sources, such as governmental statistics and newspaper articles. Furthermore, internal documents regarding housing, such as websites, welcome-packages, flyers, internal housing reports, and housing booklets created by the two universities were collected and analysed. Relevant notes and summaries were created by the researcher in a field diary and in digital form. A list of sources providing information regarding housing to international students in Australia was produced – sources included tenant organisations, city councils, international student organisations, not for profit organisations, legal and real-estate websites.
For additional background knowledge two housing and international student support staff members at each university were formally interviewed. Interview notes were recorded in a field diary. The four interviews provided valuable insights into the operations of each university and the scope of housing and student support services available to international students. As the particular interest of this thesis was the perspective of international students themselves the presidents and vice presidents of the two international student organisations (ISA - International Students Association at Victoria University; MUOSS - Melbourne University Overseas Students group) were interviewed. General information about the housing market was collected by interviewing real estate agents in inner (University of Melbourne) and western (Victoria University) Melbourne via telephone. The real estate agents described the situation at both local housing markets as increasingly pressurised and pointed to the practise of overcrowding among international students as well as to purpose-built student accommodation – a housing type they were not involved in professionally. The researcher volunteered (as a participant observer) at welcome programmes for international students that took place a week before O-week (orientation week) at both universities. One programme was organised by MUOSS and the other one was organised by ISA. The researcher also attended meetings of various international students clubs at both universities as a general participant. The active participation in these events enabled the researcher to redefine the stages of international students’ housing decision making processes and provided valuable insights in the role of student clubs in providing international students with a social support network. During and after these meetings notes and observations were recorded in a field diary.

The knowledge gained through these processes was used to inform the interview guideline and the background information given in Chapter 2 – it was not used to answer the research questions in Chapter 4. Improving the understanding of international student housing through the literature review, several interviews, and participant observation enabled the researcher to write a well informed interview guideline.

The interview guideline, the researcher’s interviewing skills and the audio-recording device were tested and improved during and between three test interviews with personal friends. These test-interviews were not included in the final sample of N=30.

During these test interviews and later during the 30 interviews with international students the researcher engaged in critical and conscious introspection and analytical scrutiny of himself as an interviewer. The researcher examined his own practice to gain new insights into research through the concept of reflexivity, which tries to solve a major problem threatening the
accuracy of qualitative research outcome. The interpersonal component of the interviewer-interviewee relationship was described by Kvale (2002) as an asymmetrical power relation between the interviewer and the interviewee. By using reflection, the interviewer thoughtfully considered this asymmetrical power relationship and speculated on the ways the interviewer-interviewee interaction might have been impacted reciprocally by presumptions arising from age, gender, race, cultural background, socio-economic status and political orientation.

Finlay (2002) describes five techniques researchers use to gain reflexivity: Introspection, intersubjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and discursive deconstruction. Finlay (2002) argues that utilizing these techniques enable the researcher to understand their own role as interviewer and use this knowledge to enhance the trustworthiness, transparency, and accountability of their research.

The researcher tried to gain awareness of his own misperceptions through reflexivity and tried to adjust the interview questions to be as free as possible of these misperceptions. In the three test interviews it was realised that short and very open questions ("Tell me about...") allowed for the greatest complexity in interviewees responses. Other questions simply did not extract complex answers and were deleted from the interview guideline, which became shorter and more open over time. The researcher learned which questions were not understood or only resulted in short replies. In the context of housing influences it was sometimes revealing what was not mentioned by the interviewees when asked about their housing history. The researcher revised interview questions in an ongoing manner, resulting in an ever-changing interview guideline.

**Interviewing process**

International students read about this housing research project in email newsletters, social media or heard about it through their international student organisation. Those interested in participating contacted the researcher via social media, phone, or email to arrange an interview. Because international students had to be pro-active in order to be interviewed the results might not fairly represent the broader international student community as very passive individuals might have been frightened or intimidated to proactively contact the interviewer. In other cases the barrier to participation was arguably lower as the researcher attended events organised by the universities’ international student organizations and participants could address the researcher personally.

Most interviews were conducted in public spaces (cafes, cafeterias, parks; n=18) or at the offices of the international student organisations (n=10) who kindly offered quiet rooms for interviews. Two students invited the researcher into their apartments for the interviews.
All interviewees agreed to the interviews being recorded and signed a consent form. They were handed a plain language statement describing the research project and the treatment of their data.

The lengths of the interviews varied from 25-90 minutes, depending on how many housing experiences the students had to share. The interviews lasting 25 and 90 minutes respectively were the positive and negative outliers in the sample. The average interview time was 36 minutes. The 30 student interviews resulted in over 18 hours of audio recordings.

All interviews were conducted face-to-face, in a relaxed environment without unwanted listeners which allowed the interviewees to answer in an unbiased manner. The interview guideline was used to make sure every topic of interest was discussed in every interview. Due to the casual manner of the interview students often answered several questions at once, leading the interviewer to stop strictly following the interview guideline when students volunteered enough information for later sections of the interview guideline without being prompted to do so.

During the interviews students’ understanding and definitions of key terms were examined. Students used the word ‘friend’ in a variety of ways, ranging from general acquaintances to intimate relationships. Consequently students were asked to explain how they understood that particular term. Marginson et al (2010, p. 412) also note that the understanding of this term differs from student to student:

“The many different forms and qualities of intimacy do not always lend themselves to linear scaling and in qualitative research students have varied expectations about relationships and terminology for describing them. Some want close cross-cultural relations, some useful networks, some friendly acquaintances to brush up their English language skills with. All might be described as friends.”

It was important to differentiate between having close local friends and having local acquaintances or ‘facebook-friends’ in regards to contact theory. Virtually all international students had at least some local acquaintances; people they met through university, potentially added as a ‘friend’ on social networking websites, but never interacted with outside a strictly academic context. These ‘acquaintances’ are not considered ‘friends’ in this thesis.

After each interview the researcher noted impressions, ideas for improvement of future interviews, ideas for coding and generally everything that was considered noteworthy.
Shortly after each interview the audio recordings were transcribed and references to names and addresses removed. Each interviewee was assigned a simple code depending on which university they attended. Based on the individual transcripts a mini case summary was prepared for each interviewee. These included information relevant for the research questions.

**Data analysis**
The following paragraphs describe how the interview data was used to answer the research questions. A framework (international student housing timeline) is presented that was utilised to show at what point in time housing decisions were influenced by institutions (Q1), policies (Q2) and social networks (Q3). A description of how housing data was treated and general information about the sample follows. A detailed explanation of how research questions Q1-3 were answered concludes the chapter.

**International student housing timeline**
Before elaborating ‘how’ institutions (Q1), policies (Q2) and social networks (Q3) influenced housing decisions of international students it was important to establish a framework around ‘when’ these influences occurred. The student interview data and the researcher’s field notes revealed a pattern of milestones alongside which interviewees made their housing decisions. These milestones were formed into the international student housing timeline presented in Figure 2 and Table 9. The six stages of the international student housing timeline represent particularly important milestones in international students’ journey. Students intuitively, without being prompted, spoke of the same milestones when reflecting on their housing history. Because the housing timeline is based on the students’ own experiences and perceptions it is a helpful tool to locate students’ housing decisions in time. By utilising the language of the interviewees themselves the timeline honours them as the most valuable informants about their own student housing journey.
As Figure 2 shows, international students started their journey by deciding to study abroad (Stage 1) before deciding on a specific study location (Stage 2). Almost all students only concerned themselves with housing as an issue after having been accepted into their university of choice (Stage 3). Students then followed one of two ways of looking for housing, as they either arranged housing from overseas prior to arrival at their study location (Stage 4a) or decided to sort out their housing situation after arriving at their study location (Stage 4b). If students were forced to or felt the need to change housing during their course of study they moved into one or more additional housings (Stage 5) before graduating (Stage 6).
### Table 9: International Student Housing Timeline - Stages of Decision Making regarding Housing

At each of the six stages institutions (Q1), policies (Q2) and social networks (Q3) influenced the decision making process of the international students. The housing timeline outlined in Table 9 was used to locate the answers to research questions Q1-3 in time. The housing timeline provided the structure for Chapter 4 and Q1-3 were answered with the help of the international student housing timeline.

#### Treatment of interview data

The interview data was treated in two different ways according to the nature of information that was desired. Firstly, the 74 housing options all individual interviewees occupied combined were analysed (compare Column B in Table 10). Secondly, the housing patterns of each individual student were looked at. The corresponding case histories of the 30 interviewees were analysed to see how many international students established cross-cultural friendships with local students (compare Column A in Table 10).

#### Qualitative data analysis software

The 30 interview transcripts and the corresponding 30 case histories were imported into the qualitative data analysis software NVIVO8. The software was used to analyse the collected data. NVIVO8 was used to code and categorise the data, before using the software’s query tools to analyse the data. The codes were chosen with the research questions in mind but had...
to be adapted frequently. The coding process was refined with each new data entry. During the initial coding process 36 free nodes and 15 tree nodes were used. The majority of nodes were determined based on an analysis of the three test interviews and the literature review. The remaining nodes were decided on after the interviews occurred and when the data was analysed. During further work with the interview data the number of free nodes and tree were reduced as several nodes were merged.\(^9\)

The coded interview data was used to create an overview about the sample in regards to basic demographic, social, and housing related information that could later assist in answering the research questions (see Table 11).

**Basic statistics about the sample**

This section presents information about the sample that is relevant for general understanding of the data but not crucial for answering the research questions (see Table 11).

In Chapter 4 interviewees from The University of Melbourne are cited more frequently than their counterparts at Victoria University. This was due to the difference in English language proficiency. While the interviewees at The University of Melbourne never struggled to understand interview questions or to find the right expression, four students at Victoria University were very hard to understand and struggled understanding the questions. While these four students are underrepresented in the quotes in Chapter 4, they all provided valuable data that influenced the answers to the research questions.

\(^9\) A list of the original 36 free nodes and 15 tree nodes can be found in Appendix B
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The University of Melbourne</th>
<th>Victoria University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>4 male</td>
<td>9 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 female</td>
<td>6 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age (years)</td>
<td>24.47</td>
<td>22.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind of degree</td>
<td>8 postgraduates</td>
<td>13 undergraduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 undergraduates</td>
<td>2 postgraduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial problems(^{10})</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship recipient?</td>
<td>5 yes</td>
<td>0 yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 no</td>
<td>15 no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of houses occupied</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average numerical size of social network(^{11})</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of origin</td>
<td>7 Malaysia</td>
<td>6 China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Singapore</td>
<td>2 Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Brazil</td>
<td>2 Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Hong Kong</td>
<td>2 Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Taiwan</td>
<td>1 Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Bangladesh</td>
<td>1 South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process of choosing study location</td>
<td>8 only considered Australia</td>
<td>7 only considered Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 considered different countries</td>
<td>8 considered different countries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Demographic composition of interviewees separated according to university

While the gender composition overall was well balanced (13 male and 17 female), female interviewees at The University of Melbourne were overrepresented. Due to the higher level of undergraduates, the average age of interviewees at Victoria University was significantly lower compared to interviewees from the University of Melbourne (see Table 11). Interviewees from Victoria University reported more financial difficulties when asked about their financial situation. This might be related to the high percentage of scholarship recipients in the University of Melbourne sample (see Chapter 4). The interviewees from the University of Melbourne were also, on average, from wealthier nations which might help explain the lower levels of financial difficulties among these students.

**How the research questions were answered**

The general aim of Q1-3 was to extract different types of influences on international students’ housing decision making and to locate them in time (see Table 7). Because the research questions were similar in nature, identical procedures were used to answer them. All three questions required the same kind of information: Individual students’ recollections and reflections on their housing history and decision making.

---

\(^{10}\) Scale from 1-5: 1 = no financial problems, 2 = more money would be nice, 3 = I am careful about what I buy, 4 = money is a constant worry, 5 = cannot pay rent

\(^{11}\) Scale from 1-4: 1 = very small, 2 = small, 3 = big, 4 = very big
The international student housing timeline (see Figure 2) was used to structure the answers to Q1-3 chronologically. The six stages of the housing timeline are represented in separate sections to show how institutional influences (Q1), policy influences (Q2) and social networks (Q3) affected interviewees’ housing decisions at each stage.

When reflecting on institutional influences on housing decisions the differences at the two universities are discussed. When discussing influences on Stage 5 (Further Housing Outcomes) some of the 30 interviewees contributed more data than others. While some students only lived in one housing option, which was labelled as ‘initial housing option’, and did not move into ‘further housing’, other students lived in up to four ‘further housings’. This led to an overrepresentation of the experience of students having lived in many housing options in the data used for Stage 5.

**Conclusion**

Chapter 3 argued that examining housing decision making processes of international students benefits the urban geography literature. Such an approach allowed for the possibility that international students intentionally segregated themselves. Furthermore, knowing when housing decisions were made shows when interventions aimed at countering housing segregation are likely to be effective. Also, analysing housing decision making processes showed if some international students chose their housing independently from external influences and why international students lived in segregated housing despite voicing preferences for more cross-cultural contact.

Three research questions examining the housing decision making processes of international students in Australia were presented. Chapter 3 explained why a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis was taken in this thesis. Furthermore, basic statistics about the sample were presented and the international student housing timeline was introduced. The methods described in this chapter allowed for a comprehensive collection of data, sufficient for answering research questions Q1-3 in a satisfactory manner. These results are presented in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction to Chapter 4
This chapter presents the results of the research that was undertaken to answer the three research questions.

The chapter first introduces general research findings to show how friendships were formed in the housing context. The language of international students themselves is used throughout this chapter to show when and how their housing decisions were influenced by institutions, policies, and social networks. The international student housing timeline (see Chapter 3 p. 68) is used to chronologically present when and how students’ decision making was shaped by institutions (Q1), policies (Q2), and other social networks (Q3). At the end of this chapter, after having presented the six stages of the housing timeline, research questions Q1-3 are answered specifically and separately. The evaluation of these results follows in Chapter 5.

General findings

Friendships between housemates
The data presented here fully supports the findings of the literature on contact theory (see Chapter 2) and argues that housing was an effective enabler for meaningful contact.

Housing type and relationship between housemates
Table 12 shows the relationships between housing type and relationship to housemates. The most common housing type in this sample was shared accommodation on the free rental market. Most cases where interviewees lived in such housing were characterized by deep friendships between occupants (19/23). The outcomes for interviewees living in purpose built student accommodation were less positive (see Table 12) as only eight of 21 interviewees living in such housing held deep friendships with their housemates. When living in residential colleges / halls or living with their partner, interviewees always reported deep friendships with their housemates. The interviewees living in colleges / halls benefitted from the environment of high pastoral care providing them with many opportunities for interpersonal contact and numerous events. In the nine cases where students stayed at a family member’s house they either reported a deep (4/9) or acceptable (5/9) relationship to their relatives (see Table 12). Houses of family members were usually used as short term transition accommodation while looking for housing. Two underage students were required to move into homestay arrangements and described their housing experiences as unpleasant because they did not establish positive relationships with their host family. In seven cases interviewees moved into studio apartments because they preferred housing options without housemates and wanted to live alone.
Table 12: Relationship between housing type and depth of friendship with housemates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of incidences</th>
<th>Housing type</th>
<th>Deep friendship</th>
<th>OK friendship</th>
<th>NO friendship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Free Rental Market (interviewees lived in shared housing)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Purpose built student accommodation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Living in family member’s accommodation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>College / Hall</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Living alone (interviewees chose to live in a studio apartment by themselves)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Living with partner</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Homestay (underage interviewees were required live in such an arrangement until they came of age)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total = 74</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12 shows that most cases (43/67) where interviewees lived with others were categorized by deep friendships between housemates. This finding was in line with research from Chapter 2 that reported housing allowed for meaningful contact between residents. Only a minority of interviewees (14/67) considered their housemates as friends but did not see them as particularly close friends. They talked to their housemates about everyday topics but did not interact with their friendship groups or used them as sources of emotional support. In an even smaller number of cases (10/67) interviewees did not form any sort of meaningful relationship with their housemates and described their living situation as involuntarily isolated.

Most often interviewees engaged in meaningful contact with their housemates. However, this was not sufficient evidence to suggest these friendships were the result of housing. The question whether housing enabled the meaningful contact was answered by analysing the relationship of the housemates prior to moving in together.

**Relationship between housemates prior to moving in**

The data presented in Table 13 suggests that the relationship to housemates prior to moving in is strongly linked to the resulting friendship outcomes.

As Table 13 shows, four ways of selecting housemates always resulted in excellent housemate relationships: moving in with existing friends, living with friends of friends, living with one’s partner, or moving into a residential college / hall. Students who followed these approaches engaged more often in meaningful interaction with their housemates than students who lived with randomly assigned or actively picked strangers.

The literature review suggested that residential colleges / halls were very supportive in establishing friendships between residents. This was supported by the data in Table 12 Table 13 as all eight interviewees occupying colleges / halls reported deep friendships with their
housemates. Despite all 100+ housemates in colleges / halls technically being random strangers this category is listed separately in Table 13 because of the unique environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of incidences</th>
<th>Relation to housemates prior to moving in together</th>
<th>Deep friendship</th>
<th>OK friendship</th>
<th>No Friendship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Randomly assigned stranger (housemates were assigned by landlord / management without consulting other residents)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friend (housemates were already friends before moving in together)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Friend of a friend (housemates were recommended through interviewees social network)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Relative (housemates were close or distant relatives of interviewees)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>College / hall housemates (technically housemates were randomly assigned strangers but the nature of this housing type guaranteed friendship formation)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Living alone (interviewees chose to live in a studio apartment by themselves)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Actively picked stranger (interviewees chose housemates / were chosen from a range of possible applicants)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Partner (housemate was interviewee’s spouse)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total = 74</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: Relationship to housemates prior to living together and friendship outcome

Looking at the higher number of deep friendships in shared housing on the free rental market (see Table 12) without considering the relationship of housemates prior to moving in (see Table 13) overemphasizes the opportunities for meaningful interaction in this housing type. Table 14 shows that 19 out of 23 cases of housing on the free rental market were characterized by deep friendships between housemates. However, in the vast majority of cases (18 out of 19) interviewees already were friends with their housemates before moving in or where introduced to each other by common friends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deep friendship</th>
<th>Ok friendship</th>
<th>No friendship</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>random stranger</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friend</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friend of friend</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively picked stray</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: Relationship of housemates prior to moving into shared housing on the free rental market (23 cases in total) and resulting friendship levels
In 21 cases interviewees occupied purpose built student accommodations. As Table 15 shows, eight of these cases were characterized by a deep friendship between housemates. These eight cases overestimate the circumstances conducive to meaningful interaction with other residents in this housing type because only in 3 cases housemates were random strangers who held no previous friendship with the interviewee. When international students did not bring their friends or friends of friends into purpose built accommodation all other residents in the building were randomly assigned housemates and strangers to them. In these 16 cases deep friendships only developed three times.

Table 15: Relationship of housemates prior to moving into a purpose built student accommodation (21 cases in total) and resulting friendship levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship of housemates prior to moving into purpose built accommodation</th>
<th>Deep friendship</th>
<th>Ok friendship</th>
<th>No friendship</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>random stranger</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friend</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friend of friend</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively picked stranger</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13 shows that the relationship of housemates before moving was a crucial predictor for the depth of the housemate relationship. Different housing types were linked to certain relationships between housemates prior to moving in (Table 16). Some housing types (living with family, college / hall, living with partner) necessarily led to a way of selecting one’s housemates that is conducive to friendship formation. The most common housing type, shared housing on the free rental market, often resulted in great friendships because housemates were friends of friends or friends. In the second most common type, purpose built student accommodation, housemates were commonly (16/21) randomly assigned strangers, which was not conducive to establishing friendships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of incidences</th>
<th>Housing type</th>
<th>Relations to housemates prior to moving that were present in sample (number of incidences)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Free Rental Market</td>
<td>Friend (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Friend of a friend (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Actively picked stranger (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Purpose built student accommodation</td>
<td>Friend (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Friend of a friend (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Randomly assigned stranger (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Living in family member’s accommodation</td>
<td>Relative (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>College / Hall</td>
<td>College / hall housemates (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Living alone</td>
<td>N/A (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Living with partner</td>
<td>Partner / Spouse (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Homestay</td>
<td>Randomly selected family (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: Relations to housemates prior to moving that were present in the sample according to housing type (74 cases in total)
The next paragraphs explore how depth of friendships with housemates correlated with the presence of the four conditions for meaningful contact. It is shown that, in accordance with contact theory, students established strong friendships with their housemates when all four conditions for meaningful contact were in place and failed to do so when these conditions were absent.

**Cross-cultural formation through housing**

Only nine of the 30 interviewees claimed they had local friends. Most of these interviewees found their local friends through housing. Their interview transcripts and case histories were analysed to explore the origins of these cross-cultural friendships. Of these nine international students, eight befriended locals because they shared housing with locals. Only one student befriended locals through her university degree and participation in student clubs. To understand the role of housing in cross-cultural friendship formation interviewees were asked if they had been friends with their local housemates before living with them. None of the eight students living with locals was friends with them prior to sharing housing. Six of the eight international students living with locals lived in colleges / halls. The unique college / hall environment allowed them to engage meaningfully with many locals on a regular basis. Two international students shared housing with locals on the free rental market. Their local housemates helped them to establish additional friendships with locals as they often interacted with their housemates’ friends in a meaningful manner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deep Relationship</th>
<th>OK Relationship</th>
<th>No Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only international housemates: Number of cases / Total cases of interviewees sharing housing with internationals</td>
<td>32/56</td>
<td>14/56</td>
<td>10/56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local housemates: Number of cases / Total cases of interviewees sharing housing with locals</td>
<td>11/11</td>
<td>0/11</td>
<td>0/11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17: Relationship between interviewees and their housemates (excludes students living by themselves)

Cross-cultural housing in all cases successfully enabled deep friendships between housemates (see Table 17). While all interviewees living with locals established deep friendships, segregated housing was less successful in establishing deep friendships – this was largely because locals occupied different housing types.

---

12 The table reports on cases not individual interviewees. The 9 interviewees who lived with locals are recorded as 11 cases of living with locals as some individuals shared with locals in several housings.
Table 18 shows which housing types allowed for meaningful contact with locals. Only colleges / halls and shared housing on the free rental market allowed for meaningful cross-cultural contact. In all other housing options interviewees always lived segregated from locals. When interviewees were living alone, living with their partner, or living with family members in Melbourne, they did not engage in meaningful contact with locals in their housings. Colleges / halls however always enabled contact with locals, while housing on the free rental market only did so in three out of 23 cases. This was the case because most students recruited their housemates for living on the free rental market from friends and friends of friends (all of which were co-national). Looking at all 74 housing options occupied by the 30 interviewees only 11 allowed for cross-cultural contact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Type</th>
<th>Meaningful contact with local</th>
<th>No meaningful contact with locals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College / Hall</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Rental Market (Shared Housing)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose Built Student Housing</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with Partner</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with Family Member</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homestay</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>63</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18: Housing type and relation to contact opportunities with locals

An exemption in this sample were homestay arrangements, a form of housing that interviewees did not choose proactively but were required to live in when moving to Australia as underage students. Despite living with local host families, the interviewees claimed the housing setup lacked opportunities for meaningful interaction (see Table 19). Such arrangements did not enable friendships with family members because the host parents did not create an environment that provided at least some of the four conditions for meaningful contact. Furthermore, both sets of host parents and host siblings differed significantly in age to the two interviewees. Consequently, no cross-cultural friendships were formed.
Male, Undergraduate, 18, Hong Kong, Victoria University

“My host family was terrible. They had a bunch of rules. I was not allowed to walk fast because it would make noises, but they were allowed to walk fast because they lived there. Also they always had a tuna sandwich for lunch every day. I did not eat it because it made me sick. They also had the same dinner every day. And after two months I just skipped it. I was only allowed to shower for four minutes and I was not allowed to open the window. The host mom was a psycho, she was a really clean freak and she did not want the dust to come inside the house.”

Male, Undergraduate, 18, Indonesia, Victoria University

“I was mentally prepared but when you’re only 17 in Australia they have the rule that international students have to stay in a homestay. Even though I had a brother who was 19 years old at the time living in Australia I could move in with him because he was not 21 yet. So I had a guardian and he was very money minded. He just received the money and put me through homestay. Normally people have a guardian who was also their homestay host. But with me, I had a guardian and a homestay host. [My host family] had three exchange students. I am from Indonesia, one was from Thailand, and one was from Sri Lanka, they also have their own children and they treat us very different. That is when I realized the racism in Australia is really high.”

Table 19: Quotes from international students living in homestay arrangements

While most housing options segregated the interviewees from locals, housing was still the most important enabler for cross-cultural contact as eight out of nine students who befriended locals met them through their housing. Living in a college / hall always led to the establishment of cross-cultural friendships. In a minority of cases shared housing on the free rental market led to the same outcome, whereas none of the other housing options allowed for meaningful contact with locals at all. Especially purpose built student housing, which many international students choose for their initial housing in Melbourne, was never occupied by locals.

When sharing with locals, interviewees possessed larger social networks which made them more likely to be happy (see Table 20). Because sharing housing with locals often happened in the context of expensive colleges / halls, it is no surprise that those students experienced lower levels of financial difficulties.
Interviewees with an exclusively international social network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion of students</th>
<th>Social network(^{13})</th>
<th>Financial difficulties(^{14})</th>
<th>Sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21/30</td>
<td>4x Very big 6x Big 6x Small 5x Very small Ø 2.43</td>
<td>Ø 2</td>
<td>11x female 10x male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviewees with local friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion of students</th>
<th>Social network(^{13})</th>
<th>Financial difficulties(^{14})</th>
<th>Sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/30</td>
<td>6x Very big 3x Big Ø 3.67</td>
<td>Ø 1.56</td>
<td>6x female 3x male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20: Differences between interviewees without and with local friends

It was found that housing impacted the wellbeing of international students in Melbourne. While only a minority of interviewees held cross-cultural friendships with local students, housing was found to be the most important enabler of such meaningful contact with local students. In all but one case, cross-cultural friendships emerged as a result of cross-cultural housing. In these eight cases housing provided all four conditions for meaningful social interaction (compare Chapter 2). Furthermore, all eight international students that shared housing with local students, established meaningful friendships with locals through their housemates’ social networks. In this sample, contact theory was applicable in the context of international students sharing housing with local students.

These findings emphasise the importance of housing outcomes in international students’ lives and underline the importance of creating knowledge regarding the decision making processes that lead international students into their housing circumstance.

**Findings: international student housing timeline**

The remainder of Chapter 4 presents the results of the research directly relevant to answering the three research questions Q1-3 and is structured according to the international student housing timeline (see Chapter 3, p. 68). All research questions explore the decision making processes of international students regarding their housing. The language of international students themselves is used to show when and how their housing decisions were influenced by institutions, policies, and other factors. The international student housing timeline is used to chronologically present when and how students’ decision making was shaped by institutions (Q1), policies (Q2), and social networks (Q3). At the end of this chapter, after the six stages of

\(^{13}\) Average based on numerical values 1 (very small) to 4 (very big) assigned to the size of interviewees’ social networks in Melbourne. These values were assigned by the researcher based on the interview data.

\(^{14}\) Average based on numerical values 1 (no problems) to 5 (cannot pay rent) assigned to interviewees’ financial situation. These values were assigned by the researcher based on the interview data.
the housing timeline have been examined, research questions Q1-3 are answered specifically and separately. The evaluation of the results follows in Chapter 5.

Stage 1: Decision to Study Abroad
The first stage relates to the reasoning behind choosing an international education over a local one. Australian institutions, Australian policies and considerations regarding housing did not influence students’ decision to study abroad. Students and their families were instead driven by long term beliefs that tertiary education aided socio-economic status and personal development (compare Table 21).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main reason to study abroad and not in country of origin</th>
<th>Number of interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accumulating social, educational and economic capital</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship opportunities</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of desired University degree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal issues</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21: Main reasoning behind becoming an international student

Influence of Australian institutions
The decision to acquire an international education instead of a local one was not directly influenced by Australian educational institutions. Students and their families decided to acquire an international education before looking at potential study locations. During Stage 1 students had not made a final decision about their study location. Only when students were sure they wanted an international education did they contact agents and universities about information regarding their potential study location. The institution students attended later did not influence the decision to study abroad.

Influence of Australian policies
As most interviewees (26/30) only planned to acquire an international university education and were not considering permanent residency, Australian immigration policy was not a major pull factor. Only three students considered applying for permanent residency in the future. One student had already acquired a professional degree that guaranteed permanent residency through the skilled occupation list (see Chapter 2, p. 21) and was likely to stay in the country after graduation. Three other students expressed having had a serious interest in staying in Australia after graduation when first deciding to study abroad. Since only a minority of interviewees (4/30) considered permanent residency during Stage 1 (or Stage 2), permanent migration cannot be viewed as a main motivation for acquiring an international education in this sample. Overall, Australian policies were of little or no consequence in students’ decision to seek an international education.
Influence of social networks

The decision to acquire an international education was commonly made by the whole family, not the student alone. In the case of all undergraduate students in the sample (20/30), the long term educational strategy that included international tertiary education, was thought up and implemented mostly by parents.

The decision to study abroad was not always made spontaneously either. At least six students (four at The University of Melbourne and two at Victoria University) were enrolled in high school classes and educational programmes specifically tailored to gaining internationally accredited qualifications to increase their chances of being accepted into international universities.

With the exception of one student, who was driven to leave his home country by pressing personal issues as he had to follow his mother who took on a job in Australia, all other 29 interviewees and their families made a conscious choice to study abroad.

Students and parents planned well ahead – in one case the father started saving money on the day his son was born in order to allow him the same privilege of an international education that he enjoyed in the 1970s. Long term planning was driven by parents to create socio-economic advantages for their children through international education (see Table 22).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female, 22, China, just finished undergraduate degree, Victoria University</th>
<th>Her family established an educational strategy for her early on which she still follows exactly. She went to a prestigious Chinese boarding school, got her undergraduate degree at a cheap international university, and recently received a letter of offer for a master degree at a prestigious international university. The specific university and study location were of little concern. The family’s sole focus was on her acquiring a qualification that would provide her with benefits on the Chinese job market. Study locations were chosen according to international University rankings. ¹⁵</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, 21, Bangladesh, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>“Both of my parents know that I could never reach the heights back in my country. So I have to go to Uni here.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22: Quotes and case summaries from international students whose parents followed a long term educational strategy

The majority of interviewees (24/30, see Table 21) became international students because they and their parents, expected social and professional advantages from an international education. Students wanted to increase their employability by acquiring international degrees

¹⁵ A short case summary is given to provide additional critical information or when no direct student quote was available to adequately present the students’ situation.
and hoped to increase their general knowledge by emerging themselves into western education.

“You need a degree from a university with a good name. The university degree only helps you to get the job interview [in Malaysia and Singapore]. [...] In the end it doesn’t matter that the degree isn’t that good because all you want is the good name on your resume. That will open up doors and give you job interviews. If you can’t perform there you won’t get a job, but at least a degree from Melbourne Uni gives you the opportunities to get many job interviews.”

(Male, 21, Malaysia, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne)

Graduate students (10/30) had greater individual control over their educational career and did not mention their parents as often as undergraduates when talking about their decision to study abroad.

For three out of 30, all postgraduate students, scholarship opportunities were the main driver. They only chose to leave their home country because an academic opportunity was presented to them. These three interviewees did not necessarily want to study abroad but when they were presented with an opportunity to study in Australia they happily took it. Two students opted for an international education because their desired degree was not available in their home country. These students were willing to study abroad for their preferred course.

**Conclusion of Stage 1**

In conclusion, the first stage of the housing timeline shows that international students and their families chose an international education over a local one for socio-economic reasons. Undergraduates were heavily influenced by their families in their decision to study abroad. Some postgraduates made their decisions more independently from their parents as they had scholarship opportunities presented to them. At this stage of the international student housing timeline Australian institutions had no influence on the decision making process. Australian policies did not influence students in their decision to become an international student either. The only policy related reasoning for becoming an international student was dissatisfaction with local educational systems. Their parents’ attitude towards international education heavily influenced international students in their decision to study abroad.
Table 23: Influences on international students decision making in Stage 1 of Housing Timeline

All findings of Stage 1 were in line with the academic literature (compare Waters 2006) that highlighted the heavy involvement of parents in international students' tertiary education and strongly suggested the dominant drivers for choosing an international education were of socio-economic nature. In regards to answering research questions Q1-3, Stage 1 did not provide relevant information as housing was not considered in decision making processes to acquire an education abroad.

Stage 2: Decision to Study in Melbourne

After students knew they would be moving abroad for their tertiary education they chose a study destination. Table 24 summarizes why interviewees chose Melbourne over alternative study destinations.

Table 24: Reasons international students chose Australia as their study destination
All interviewees (30/30) only considered English speaking study destinations. Interviewees frequently mentioned the United Kingdom, the United States and New Zealand as alternative study locations they seriously contemplated (see Table 25).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male, 21, Undergraduate, Malaysia, The University of Melbourne</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“For a typical Asian family we consider the United States, the UK or Australia as options for study. With Australia being the closest, if anything happens, you can just fly back home straight. The UK would be too far and too cold and if you don’t get into Oxford or Cambridge there is no point in going to the UK at all. Not to say there are no good unis, but you either go to the top ones or you don’t go at all. I never really liked the US, to me it is more of a touristic and entertainment place, unless of course you can get into the Ivy League universities. Because of these considerations my view zoomed back to Australia. And within Australia I was only considering ANU and Melbourne because they are the two top ranked universities. Based on my personality - I’m totally not the study type and would have died in Canberra - I chose Melbourne. Seriously, I visited my friend there and he lives in a prison cell. He is just there to study. There is nothing in Canberra, whereas Melbourne is one of the best cities to live in. So there were lots of reasons why I went to Melbourne.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male, 18, Undergraduate, Victoria University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I really wanted to go to the US but my mom did not allow me because it was too far. She said that New Zealand is the furthest away I am allowed to go. […] I was like ‘mum we are going to Skype anyways, it doesn’t matter where I am’ but she did not listen.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male, 18, Indonesia, Undergraduate, Victoria University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>His mother allowed him to pick any university in Australia or New Zealand. She did not approve of any other study location as she considered them to be too far away from Indonesia: “Actually I did not plan to go to Australia; I was planning to go to New Zealand. New Zealand is really nice. I was planning to go to Auckland and I was accepted at their University but because I was only 17 they wanted me to wait for one year before starting. I did not want to waste my time and an agent suggested to go to Australia. I applied to RMIT, Melbourne University, Monash, and VU. All universities approve me but I went to VU because no Indonesians apply to go here. No one knows about this University in Indonesia so no one goes here. That’s why I took it. I’m going to Australia to improve my English, I want to speak fluently and I want to socialize in English over time.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female, 25, Postgraduate, Malaysia, The University of Melbourne</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Initially I wanted to go to the UK. But then something happened - I did not get in - and [my parents and I] decided to go to Australia because the unis here are good.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25: Quotes and case summaries from international students about other study destinations they considered

Ultimately, all students and their families chose the ‘best’ university available to them. The process of deciding what they considered to be the ‘best’ university was based on a few main criteria. All but one student (29/30) mentioned more than one reason for having chosen Melbourne (compare Table 24). These reasons, as shown in Table 24, fell into four broad categories: advantages of specific university, broader systemic advantages, family and social
network, and geographical advantages. As the next paragraphs show, these four categories corresponded with the research questions.

**Influence of Australian institutions**

Most frequently (21/30) interviewees mentioned advantages of their chosen university, such as scholarship opportunities, university partnerships and favourable rankings. Students at The University of Melbourne were aware of their university’s favourable position in global education rankings and some students even made their decision regarding a study location solely based on these rankings (see Table 26).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender, Age, Nationality, Year and University</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, 18, Hong Kong, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>“Melbourne University is the best [university] in Australia, so I picked Melbourne University.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, 23, Hong Kong, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>“To be honest, once I knew that I was going away from home I immediately looked at the ranking websites. They are really good, you know. Uni Melbourne and ANU are the best in Australia. I only applied there.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, 20, Malaysia, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>“My parents wanted me to go to a good university. Melbourne is the best in Australia. They win a lot of prizes.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 26: Quotes from international students at The University of Melbourne praising its excellent ranking

The students’ quotes correlated with international university rankings in which The University of Melbourne ranks among the best in Australia, even worldwide, while the position of Victoria University is less impressive (compare Table 8). Students at Victoria University on the other hand nominated systemic reasons and family ties as the reasons for choosing Melbourne over other study locations.

All five scholarship recipients within this sample were postgraduates at The University of Melbourne. None of the five would have chosen Melbourne were it not for their scholarships. The availability of scholarships also explains why eight of the ten postgraduates in the sample were enrolled at The University of Melbourne whereas only two interviewees at Victoria University were postgraduates (see Table 27).
I was offered a scholarship by the Malaysian government to come to Melbourne. I finished high school in Malaysia and then I did this preparatory program, the international bachelorette. And after that I came here.

“[H]ere I received financial support, that was really important. I got the scholarship. Also the University since I first got in contact seemed to be very competent and the library of architecture was really good but without the scholarship I would still be in Brazil.”

“I got financial support from the University of Melbourne; it is guaranteed for three years. It’s the standard postgraduate international student scholarship. It includes the fee remission and some living allowance and a top-up from the institute that I am at. Financially I’m comfortable. Without that money I would have stayed in Canada [the location of her undergraduate degree].”

“I am actually a scholarship student from Malaysia, from the public services Department. Under this particular scholarship you do not get to choose where you study, you do get to choose though what you study. So I was given Australia, I was given Melbourne University.”

Uni Melbourne was the best offer because they were very fast. They replied to my application very quickly."

“The primary reason I came to Melbourne was that it worked out with the timeline; I mean I consider Melbourne of course but I also considered many other cities like Sydney and Canberra. [...] I only went to Melbourne University because it had the latest enrolment date.”

“I applied for five universities. Two in the UK, but the three in Australia had early deadlines: Melbourne, UWA and Queensland. I got offers from UWA and Melbourne. I took Melbourne because they answered only two months after I applied.”

Four students, all enrolled at The University of Melbourne, named the fast processing of their applications as an important reason for choosing their university over alternatives (see Table 28).

To the students quoted above timing was crucial. They disliked the uncertainty of not knowing where they would study and took the first offer made by one of their pre-selected universities. Students at Victoria University did not mention fast processing of their application as a decisive factor.
Four students, all enrolled at Victoria University, chose Melbourne as a study location because arrangements between their local universities and Victoria University allowed them to gain two Bachelor degrees in four to five years.

| Male, 21, China, Undergraduate, Victoria University | “I had no choice [in my study location]; VU is the partner of my university in China. If I wanted to go away from China, I could only go to VU. So I came here to get two degrees.” |
| Male, 22, Taiwan, Undergraduate, Victoria University | “Our university in China had a relationship with VU. I am doing two years of my degree here and two years in China. I get one degree in China and one degree here. [...] Our university only has a relationship with VU, we can’t go to other places.” |

Table 29: Quotes from international students enrolled in double degrees at Victoria University and Chinese institutions

Arrangements with universities in China allowed for constant enrolment of Chinese students at Victoria University. These students had to come to Victoria University to receive their desired double degree and did not face the problem of choosing a suitable study location. Students enrolled at the University of Melbourne did not have similar arrangements.

Two students had their mind set on specific academic degrees that were not available in their home countries. Consequently they looked for opportunities to study their desired degree elsewhere and quickly found Melbourne to be the most convenient or only possible location.

| Male, 22, Singapore, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne | “I wanted to do veterinary science and we do not have that course [...] in Singapore. So I just have to do it here.” |
| Female, 31, Iran, Postgraduate, Victoria University | “I wanted to study tourism [...] I’m interested in understanding how to develop tourism in my country. I worked as a tour guide in Iran for six years and during that time I developed an interest in tourism but no university in Iran offered a major in tourism. This is why I decided to come to Australia.” |

Table 30: Quotes from international students whose desired degree was not available in their home country

In conclusion, students at The University of Melbourne mentioned the ranking of their university, and scholarship opportunities for postgraduates as reasons for coming to Melbourne. Students enrolled at Victoria University mentioned university partnerships as reasons. Postgraduate students at both universities mentioned academic opportunities, academic reputation rather than university rankings. Only postgraduates at The University of Melbourne named scholarships as a reason for choosing Melbourne.
**Influence of Australian policies**

Many students referred to broader systemic advantages (13/30) of studying in Australia as a main reason for choosing their university. Students who arrived prior to the rise of the Australian dollar in 2009 mentioned the favourable exchange rate as a factor for choosing to study in Australia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male, 23, Hong Kong, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</th>
<th>“One of the main reasons [for choosing Australia as a study location] was the currency at that time. It was relatively low and therefore the Uni fees were relatively low compared to the UK or America.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, 22, Undergraduate, China, Victoria University</td>
<td>“My cousin did his PhD at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Therefore I decided to do my studies in the USA, but at this time the Australian dollar was cheaper than the American dollar.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 31: Quotes from international students mentioning favourable currency exchange rates

Since 2009 the Australian dollar has risen significantly, minimising the relative advantage to competing study locations like the US and the UK. The fact that two students mentioned the favourable exchange rate shows that international students consider broader systemic issues, like currency exchange rates, when deciding on their study destination.

Five interviewees mentioned how easy the process of acquiring an Australian student visa was compared to competing study locations like the US and the UK.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female, 21, Bangladesh, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</th>
<th>“I wanted to study in the United States or in the UK. But if you are from Bangladesh it takes 1.5 years to get in. You need to apply one year before and then to go there and do the stuff. It was pretty hard - I already sat around for six month [after high school] and was doing nothing. I was kinda getting pissed off. Australia was the closest one, the one where I could start in February.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, 31, Iran, Postgraduate, Victoria University</td>
<td>“It would’ve been very difficult to get a visa to [the US] because we are from Iran and they don’t give us these very easily. […] The only option really for us was Melbourne. So I went to Victoria University.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 32: Quotes from international students commenting on Australia’s favourable student visas

As in Stage 1 (see p. 82), applying for permanent residency was not a main motivator for interviewees in choosing their specific study destination. Only one student actively took steps towards acquiring permanent residency (in Stage 5) and three other students said they considered the idea of doing so when first deciding to come to Melbourne.

**Influence of social networks**

The third category of reasons to study in Melbourne was mentioned by a large minority of students (10/30) who emphasized the important role of existing family ties and other pre-
existing social networks in Melbourne in their decision making. When family ties to Melbourne existed the city was immediately preferred over other study locations. In these cases Melbourne was chosen as study location because the relatives were believed to aid the transition into tertiary education (see Table 33).

| Male, 22, South Africa, Undergraduate, Victoria University | “I came to Australia because my mom was working here for four years and I was a bit of a misbehaved kid back in South Africa so I came to Australia to find my way. I am much better now, I don't do stupid shit anymore.” |
| Male, 22, Singapore, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne | “I chose Australia because it is really close to Singapore and I also have a couple of friends who are studying here.” |
| Male, 21, Undergraduate, Malaysia, The University of Melbourne | “I applied for universities in the UK and in Australia. When I told my mom I was going to go to the UK she was a bit angry with me because it was against her plans to send me here to Melbourne. My sister is here, I have family here, if I went all the way to the UK I would've been alone and all that. And visiting my sister in Australia and myself in the UK would've been so much harder for my mom. She would first go to Australia then go to the UK, it is really out of the way for. So we had a bit of an argument and all that. And since I don't have any financial power she had the final say and I came over here.” |

Table 33: Quotes from international students with family ties in Melbourne

Some students (8/30) also mentioned geographical advantages as a motivator for choosing Australia (see Table 34). Compared to other study locations Melbourne is relatively close to Asia which allowed for cheaper, faster and more frequent trips back home to their parents. While students generally spoke highly about the lifestyle options Melbourne has to offer, the city itself was not mentioned as a pull factor for choosing this particular study location.

| Female, 26, Malaysia, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne | The student previously completed her undergraduate studies in Canada: “It was an easy decision to go to Melbourne because my parents are not on the other side of the world anymore and the uni was okay. Being here makes it much easier to visit my parents. It’s way better than a 36 hour flight from Canada to Malaysia, which I was getting really tired of.” |
| Male, 21, Undergraduate, Sri Lanka, Victoria University | “I only applied for VU because I think the Australian education system is really good and also I can meet different people from different countries. I also like the weather, it is better than the weather in Sri Lanka.” |

Table 34: Quotes and case summaries from international students praising the geographical advantages of Melbourne

**Conclusion of Stage 2**

The results of Stage 2 were not surprising and were in line with former research on the topic (compare Waters, 2009). At this stage students considered mostly the advantaged of their
specific university but were also influenced by broader policy related issues (visa regulations and handling, currency exchange rates) and personal factors (friends and family already living in Melbourne).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 2: Decision to Study in Melbourne / Australia</th>
<th>Institutional Influences (Q1) 21 mentions</th>
<th>Australian Policy Influences (Q2) 13 mentions</th>
<th>Social Networks Influences (Q3) 18 mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The university’s ranking was frequently looked at to guide students’ decision making. Availability of scholarships and desired degree at the university influenced students’ decision. A university that processed applications in a timely manner was more likely to be chosen. The establishment of double degrees with foreign universities increased students’ likelihood of going abroad to that specific university (Victoria University).</td>
<td>Visa speeds and visa regulations were viewed highly positive in comparison to competing study locations. In a broader sense the currency exchange rate influenced some students’ decisions.</td>
<td>Most importantly family members and friends situated in Melbourne gave the city a competitive edge over alternative study locations considered by the students. The geographical location relatively close to Asia aided students’ decision in favour of Melbourne. Additionally, the weather was mentioned once as a decisive factor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 35: Influences on international students decision making in Stage 2 of the Housing Timeline

Table 35 shows that housing concerns did not influence students in their reasoning to come to Melbourne. As the next paragraphs show, it was only after students chose their study location and got accepted into their university that they started thinking about housing. The only insight into international students’ housing decisions in Stage 2 is that students did not concern themselves with housing matters at this point in time. Stage 3 shows that only once students were accepted into their chosen university housing matters became of interest.

**Stage 3: First thoughts about housing**

At this stage in the housing timeline students had not left their country of origin yet and just finalised their decision to study at a specific university. The vast majority of international students (29/30) concerned themselves for the first time with housing at this stage and immediately made it their main priority. Only one student already knew at this stage that he would be living with his mother, who worked temporarily in Australia.
When starting to think about housing, international students and their parents had almost unlimited resources available to inform themselves about the housing market in Melbourne (consumer rights groups, housing professionals, student groups, discussion forums on the internet, social media). The following paragraphs show that students only made use of a small number of sources regarding housing: their university’s housing website, educational agents, legal requirements for underage students, and their social networks. These sources of influences correlated closely with the three research questions.

**Influence of Australian institutions**
At Stage 3 international students were also significantly influenced by institutions in two ways. Firstly, if applying to university through agencies, educational agents had a strong impact on international students’ initial housing decisions. Secondly, international students were heavily influenced in their housing decision making by their future university and especially the university’s housing website.

**Educational agents**
More than half of the interviewees (17/30) used educational agents to apply for university admission. As mentioned in Chapter 2, educational agents were eager to advise international students on housing as they hoped to earn a commission. Eight of the 17 students applying to university through agents had pre-existing social networks in Melbourne and did not require assistance regarding housing from agents as they followed their friends’ or relatives’ advice. Only interviewees without local knowledge through friend or relatives listened to their educational agents for housing advice (9/17). These nine students all followed their agent’s advice. Three students who went through educational agents were underage at the time of application. The agents correctly informed the underage students that they had to obey with rules and regulations and move into university approved accommodation. The remaining six students followed their educational agents’ advice in choosing their first housing option and moved into purpose built student accommodations (see Table 36).
| Male, 22, Singapore, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne | Under time pressure [he only had six days between leaving his military service and the start of university] he followed the advice of his educational agent and booked an accommodation from overseas. Out of the limited options the agent gave him, all purpose built student accommodations, he chose the student apartment closest to his university to save on commuting time and transportation costs: “I talked to the agent of the University of Melbourne. He suggested a few housing options to me. And I started e-mailing and I pretty much did not know what the quality of the accommodation would be like. It was all online. Because of the pictures you can't really tell how good houses are. It always looks nice but once you look at it you realize it's shit. [...] The things I considered were the distance from the school, and the utility fees, because if I stay near the school it is usually much more expensive. But I save on transport and I save on time. There is a balance. My place is convenient. Because of the convenient bills, that are included. So during winter I can just turn on the heater and don't worry about the cost.” |
| Female, 29, Brazil, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne | “I told the agent that I did not want to live in anybody's house, cause I hate living in anybody's house, you know I lived with my mom. So the agent said okay you don't want to go to a homestay, what you want is house share. I did not know what that was and I said okay. The day before I left she gave me the paper with all those rules, and I realized that I was going to live in someone's house after all. So I told the agent I did not want to live there, but it was too late so I went. So when I came there I was living with this woman, she was not bad or anything but I don't feel at home when I live in someone else's house. Also the house was very far away from school and I had to get the bus and the train. The main problem was that I was in someone's house, and she wanted to talk and I wanted to go home and have my personal space. It was dumb to listen to the agent. You have to look at the house yourself.” |
| Female, 25, Malaysia, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne | The holder of a scholarship by the Malaysian government was channelled into her first accommodation, a purpose built student apartment complex, by her educational agent: “At this time there was a friend of mine who wanted to look for housing for me and my friends. But then something happened and we went through an education agency. They arranged the visa and everything for us. They suggested us to live in [purpose built student apartment]. So why not, it is paid by the government.” |

Table 36: Quotes and case summaries from international students who followed their educational agents’ housing advice

Educational agents always suggested purpose built student accommodations as housing options to their clients. Some educational agents did not even acknowledge the existence of other housing options and claimed purpose built student apartments were the only housing option available. Interviewees viewed their educational agents critically and questioned their knowledge of Melbourne’s housing market and Australia in general.
Female, 29, Brazil, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne

“Sometimes I’m not sure whether the agent knew anything about Australia. [...] He said that Melbourne won’t get cold, so don’t bother taking coats. So I did not bring anything, I only brought tops and shorts. As soon as I came here I was shivering, and I was cold. I immediately had to buy clothes, jumpers, jackets and stuff.”

Female, 31, Iran, Postgraduate, Victoria University

“I thought it was smart to apply through an agent. [...] The agent promised to find housing for us [she came to Australia with her husband] but that was a big lie. [...] The agent told us that it was possible to get a place for me and my husband together for $200 per week. That is of course a big lie. He also said you will have to pay a maximum of $300 per week but when we came over here we realized that what he told us was not based on reality. It was really shocking. The agent told us finding housing was really easy and every part of Melbourne was really nice, because we did not know from overseas we believe him.” She paid the agent after he arranged her visa and enrolment but before he organised her housing. She never heard back from the agent despite calling the agency and writing several emails complaining about the poor treatment she received.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 37: Quotes and case summaries from international students criticising their educational agents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The praxis of educational agents channelling all clients into one particular housing option either hinted to a lack of knowledge about the variety of housing options in Melbourne or suggested agents had a financial interest in earning commissions from purpose built student accommodation providers (compare Collins, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Students’ initial housing decisions were made relatively quickly, as all students (30/30) claimed to have made up their mind about their initial housing option before their university’s physical welcome package arrived at their home via postal mail. Hence, students did not consume the housing information provided in their welcome packages. While the welcome packages did not shape students opinion, the universities’ housing websites were visited by all students looking for housing. Even students who were advised by friends or family on their initial housing and took their advice visited the housing website and were to some degree influenced in their perception of student housing in Melbourne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I had a quick look at the University housing website. I did not read any information and only had a very quick look. Then I talked to my primary school friend who had a cousin in Melbourne and she set me up with her friend who was looking for a roommate in Melbourne.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Female, 26, Malaysia, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The general university websites directed future students to different sources of information depending on their status as ‘local’ or ‘international’. This was likely the case because newly arrived international students had a need for additional information (i.e. visa matters, opening of bank accounts, what to pack when travelling to Melbourne) compared to local students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While this kind of targeted information is helpful to international students it also established the category of being an international student early on.

Housing websites at The University of Melbourne and Victoria University both presented all housing types in an unbiased and neutral manner. The listing of housing types did not inform the readers about the occupants of the different housing options (compare Figure 3 and Figure 4). This incorrectly implied purpose built student accommodations were occupied by both local and international students, when in fact only international students chose this type of accommodation. Consequently international students were unaware that they moved into a housing option that was exclusively occupied by other foreigners. International students desiring contact with local students might have chosen different housing options had the housing websites portrayed more accurate information. Additionally housing websites unintentionally pressured international students and their parents into housing options bookable from overseas (purpose built student accommodation and residential colleges / halls) by drawing a daunting picture of house hunting on Melbourne’s housing market (compare Figure 3 and Table 38).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The University of Melbourne, housing website, accessed 13 August 2013(^\text{16})</th>
<th>“Consider a number of different housing options and then ensure you have a back-up plan in the event that you are unsuccessful in securing your first housing preference. Don’t leave this to the last minute as there is a great demand for affordable housing in Melbourne, especially before each semester.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victoria University, housing website, accessed 13 August 2013(^\text{17})</td>
<td>“Country and interstate students looking for private housing are advised to make a plan to come to Melbourne a month before university commences. Once in Melbourne inspect the offers you have downloaded from the student housing database or apply for rental properties. International students looking for private share accommodation or private rental properties are advised to budget and plan to take temporary accommodation on arrival for a minimum of one to two weeks to give you time to inspect the offers you have downloaded from the student housing database or apply for rental properties.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 38: Quotes taken from university housing websites describing Melbourne’s housing market to international students

The quotes in Table 38 show that the university housing websites presented the act of house hunting in Melbourne as difficult which pressured international students to look for housing in a timely manner. The websites implied international students were better off booking from overseas, which only left purpose-built student accommodation and residential colleges / halls as housing options.

\(^{16}\) [http://services.unimelb.edu.au/housing/moving-to-melbourne](http://services.unimelb.edu.au/housing/moving-to-melbourne)

Types of accommodation
Consider a number of different housing options and then ensure you have a back-up plan in the event that you are unsuccessful in securing your first housing preference. Don’t leave this to the last minute as there is a great demand for affordable housing in Melbourne, especially before each semester:

- Temporary accommodation
- Student hostels
- Student apartments
- Share housing
- Vacant properties
- Homestay
- Residential Colleges
- Student Housing Access Program (SHAP)

Figure 3: Screenshot from The University of Melbourne’s Housing Website

There are several types of housing that you can choose from:

- **VU residences.** For singles. You will have a furnished room, use of facilities, pastoral care and academic support.

- **Share house.** Singles and couples. You have a room with use of household facilities in an established household. The room may be furnished or unfurnished and cost of gas, electricity & water may or may not be included in the rent.

- **Rooming houses and serviced hostels.** For singles or couples. You have your own room and share the house common facilities with four or more other individuals paying separate rent.

- **Vacant properties to rent** - houses, flats, units, self-contained bungalows and apartments. Most properties to rent are unfurnished. Cost of gas, electricity and water is not included in rent.

- **Commercially operated student apartments** - furnished apartment or studio apartment, many with common facilities and recreation services. Cost of gas, electricity and water may not be included in the rent.

- **Homestay** - your own room in a host’s home. Meals and other support may be provided.

Figure 4: Screenshot from Victoria University’s Housing Website
Having been exposed to this somewhat negative narrative about the housing market students and their parents were likely to book housing from overseas to avoid house hunting in Melbourne close to the start of semester as it was apparently doomed-to-fail.

As Stage 2 showed, many students also considered study locations in the UK and the US before deciding to come to Melbourne. Chapter 2 showed that university students in these countries commonly live in university managed housing on campus. Countless Hollywood movies and TV shows strengthened this perception of student housing. The housing websites of the two universities did not make the point that on-campus housing, which in Australia takes the form of residential colleges or halls, is only available to very few students. The housing websites did give accurate information about the high cost of living in colleges and halls though, making them appeal only to affluent students. Additionally university housing websites left international students and their parents to wrongly assume that purpose built student accommodation was the Australian equivalent to the British colleges and American dormitories where local and international students live together and have access to a wide number of socialising opportunities. The websites of the purpose built student accommodations happily allowed potential future occupants the same misassumption by not mentioning that all residents are internationals. Consequently interviewees without friends or family advising them on the housing situation in Melbourne were likely to wrongly assume university students of all backgrounds routinely occupied purpose built student housing.

Another factor that shaped students’ perception of a suitable initial housing option was their degree’s commencement date. Eight students mentioned that their university sent out letters of offer very close to the start of the semester. This gave students a very short timeframe in which to organise tuition payments, flights, class selection, student visas, and think in detail about housing for the first time. Consequently interviewees felt rushed to making a housing decision. Being under stress, wanting to resolve the housing question quickly, they booked housing from overseas to eliminate this stress factors as the quote below and Stage 4a show.

“I came in a hurry. I really wanted to come here in the beginning of the semester. I didn't know that as a PhD student you didn't need to come at the beginning of the semester, so I was in a big hurry. I was late at night really needed to come over. I was afraid to come to Melbourne and not finding a place. So I made an arrangement using the internet. And since it was the beginning of semester I only found something affordable that was far away, really far away. So that wasn't really convenient but I think it was all right for the first semester.”

(Female, Postgraduate, 28, Brazil, The University of Melbourne)
The decision to book from overseas was de facto a decision in favour of certain housing types, as only purpose built student apartments, residential colleges / halls and homestays could be booked from overseas. Because student chose such housing options they were segregated from local students even before deciding upon an individual housing option.

As Stage 5 shows, many students were highly disappointed by the purpose built student accommodation they booked from overseas and moved into a different housing type as soon as possible.

**Influence of Australian policies**

In Stage 3 only interviewees who were underage at commencement of their university studies were directly influenced by policy issues (compare Table 39). Three students within this sample (3/30) were underage when commencing their degree and had to agree to live in certain types of housing as part of their letter of offer. None of the three students enjoyed the housing they were put into as the quotes below demonstrate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male, 18, Undergraduate, Indonesia, Victoria University</th>
<th>Being underage at commencement of his university degree the only housing option available to him was a homestay with a local family. He desired a different, more independent housing setup, but had to remain in this homestay, which he considered as highly uncomfortable, for 12 months. His brother, who studied at a different local university, was too young at the time to act as a legal guardian for him. He strongly criticised that particular policy as forcing him into a lifestyle he did not want but knew he had to follow regulations.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, 20, Undergraduate, Malaysia, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>“Because I was under 18 at the time I had to go to some sort of approved housing - meaning the housing had to be approved by the University. They just had a website with all the accommodation that was approved. That was university policy.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 39: Quotes and case summaries from international students who were underage when commencing their studies

Interviewees who were of legal age at commencement of their studies were influenced indirectly and to a small degree by policy issues, such as public transport regulations, since the information they consumed through the universities’ housing websites, educational agents and their social network was, at least to some degree, informed by knowledge of policy issues. Since international students generally followed the housing advice of their friends and relatives, their reflections upon policy issues regarding housing were mirrored in the interviewees’ housing decisions.

**Influence of social networks**

If possible, interviewees gathered housing information through word of mouth (20/30). They asked friends and relatives who live or lived in Melbourne about the local housing market.
Usually students trusted and valued this advice and did not further investigate the housing market themselves. Friends and family exposed interviewees to narratives regarding housing, which justified their advice. The 20 interviewees who had access to word of mouth information took on their friends’ and family’s views about the ideal initial housing type and only investigated this particular type closer (see Table 40).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female, 18, Hong Kong, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</strong></td>
<td>“I lived with my twin sister. I came together with her to Melbourne [...]. She likes [purpose built student housing building] along Swanston Street, because many of her friends lived there. Her boyfriend said ‘You want to live in [purpose built student housing building], because it is fun and close to the university.’ – this is why we moved there. [...] We made no more research after this.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female, 21, Bangladesh, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</strong></td>
<td>“[My relatives] were really helpful; I can never forget what they did for me and they still do a lot for me. I would say if they were not here maybe I wouldn’t have survived so far. They did a lot for me. They looked with me for housing and every other thing. When looking for housing they dropped me off and looked with me. They told me what sort of house I want to live in. I always ask them what to do because they lived in Australia for 26 years, so they know a lot about this place.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male, 21, Sri Lanka, Undergraduate, Victoria University</strong></td>
<td>“My auntie said living in Footscray [close to campus] is scary. [...] She said I live with her for six months. When I find friends living in Footscray is not scary anymore. Then I can find a safe share house my auntie said. This is why I moved in with my auntie.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female, 24, Malaysia, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne</strong></td>
<td>“During the first year I stayed at [student apartment close to campus]. [...] I had some friends in Melbourne and they told me about it. My dad was not keen for me to rent outside. He preferred for me to stay somewhere close to Uni, a place that is also affiliated with Uni. My friends gave me good advice.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 40: Quotes from international students following their relatives’ housing advice

The quotes above show that interviewees were heavily influenced in their initial housing decision by friends and family. Interviewees trusted them more than any other source of information. Additionally, some interviewees attended pre-departure programmes in their home country before moving to Melbourne. These events, while not mentioned explicitly in interviews, theoretically provided international students with the opportunity to acquire information about the housing market through other participants’ social networks.

In conclusion, at Stage 3 of the housing timeline friends and family had a very strong impact on interviewees’ housing decisions by providing them with advice and housing opportunities.

**Conclusion of Stage 3**

Before making their initial housing decision (Stages 4a and 4b), international students already consumed housing information through agents, university websites and their social networks. This information formed a narrative about student housing on which interviewees based their initial housing decision. International students then formed a preference in favour of a certain
housing type during Stage 3 which narrowed the choice of housing options in Stage 4. The information international students consumed about house hunting on the free rental market, where they could potentially share housing with locals, is overwhelmingly stressful in nature. Interviewees lacking a social network in Melbourne consulted information provided by educational agents or their university for housing advice. Agents were biased in the way they provided information about housing as they only suggested purpose built students apartments. Similarly the university housing websites portrayed residential colleges as very expensive and shared properties on the free rental market as undesirable, leaving purpose built student housing as the most desirable initial housing option in Melbourne. Consequently many international students were influenced strongly by external factors before making their initial housing choices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Institutional Influences (Q1)</th>
<th>Australian Policy Influences (Q2)</th>
<th>Social Network Influences (Q3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 3:</strong></td>
<td>Educational agents portray the local housing market as very difficult to manage</td>
<td>Underage students are required to live in certain housing types and are therefore only exposed to limited choice when first thinking about housing</td>
<td>Many international students are exposed to narratives about housing by their friends and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Thoughts</td>
<td>University housing websites discourage international students from house hunting locally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about Housing</td>
<td>University website portray all housing types as equal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University commencement date</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 41: Influences on international students decision making in Stage 3 of the Housing Timeline

After having been exposed to this first wave of housing information, international students had to choose one of two approaches regarding housing in Melbourne. They could either book housing from overseas or fly to Melbourne and house hunt while being physically present in the city. These two approaches to securing initial housing were profoundly different and are presented separately as Stage 4a (booking initial housing from abroad) and Stage 4b (hunting for initial housing while being in Melbourne).

**Stage 4a: Booking Initial Housing from Overseas**

Stage 3 showed that international students were exposed to strong narratives portraying Melbourne’s housing market as stressful before they came to Melbourne. Consequently most interviewees (26/30) avoided house hunting in Melbourne and booked their initial housing from overseas.

This practice of house hunting was shown in Chapter 2 to be very uncommon amongst local students who generally visit a property before signing a lease. Table 42 shows that the 26
students who booked their housing from overseas unintentionally limited themselves to housing types that were occupied almost exclusively by internationals. In Stage 4a interviewees only chose from different colleges, different purpose built student accommodations or different homestay providers rather than considering other housing types, like the free rental market, as well. The students who initially stayed with relatives had no further housing decisions to make at that stage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Type</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Shared housing with local</th>
<th>Meaningful contact to local housemates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose built student accommodation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0/10</td>
<td>0/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared housing arranged through their friends</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0/7</td>
<td>0/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential colleges / halls</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with relatives</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0/4</td>
<td>0/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homestays</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>0/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>=26</strong></td>
<td><strong>=6/26</strong></td>
<td><strong>=4/26</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 42: Initial housing types occupied by students who researched and booked from overseas

While Stage 3 discussed narratives about the housing market, the following paragraphs show how institutions (Q1), public policy (Q2) and social networks (Q3), influenced international students’ initial housing decisions. Students were routinely influenced by more than one factor in their initial housing decisions. The paragraphs presented below are divided into subsections to single out influences relevant to the research questions.

**Influence of Australian institutions**

International students without pre-existing social networks or family in Melbourne were heavily influenced by institutions (educational agents and universities) in their initial housing decisions. Stage 3 showed how educational agents and universities encouraged interviewees to book housing from overseas. Many international students acted accordingly and secured housing prior to arriving in Melbourne. As the following paragraphs show, students’ initial housing decisions were heavily influenced by institutions (Q1) and often resulted in unsatisfactory housing outcomes.

**Educational Agents**

Table 43 shows that international students who followed their educational agent’s advice on housing always moved into purpose built student accommodation (or homestay options when underage) and routinely failed to establish deep friendships with their housemates. As Table 43 shows, in all nine relevant cases interviewees were channelled into segregated housing. Looking back on their initial housing decision, these students were unsatisfied with the
accommodation their agents suggested. At the time of this decision these students did not have friends or family members in Melbourne who could advise them on housing and left educational agents as the only available housing experts. It was mentioned that students at Stage 3 (p. 93), in hindsight, questioned their agents’ trustworthiness and competency in housing matters. The following quote is yet another example of a student who did not perceive their educational agent to be a trustworthy source of information.

“There was this overseas student agency. [...] [The agent] suggested a few housing options to me. I listened to him and I started e-mailing and I pretty much did not know what the quality of the accommodation would be like. It was all online. Because of the pictures you can’t really tell how good houses are. It always looks nice but once you look at it you realize it’s shit.”

(Male, 22, Singapore, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Code</th>
<th>Type of initial housing</th>
<th>Relationship to housemates prior to moving in</th>
<th>Level of friendship between housemates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UM 01</td>
<td>Purpose Built Student Accommodation</td>
<td>Random international students</td>
<td>Getting along</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UM 02</td>
<td>Purpose Built Student Accommodation</td>
<td>She lived with a co-national friend from high school</td>
<td>Deep Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UM 10</td>
<td>Purpose Built Student Accommodation</td>
<td>Random international students</td>
<td>No Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UM 11</td>
<td>Purpose Built Student Accommodation</td>
<td>Random international students</td>
<td>No Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UM 13</td>
<td>Purpose Built Student Accommodation</td>
<td>Random international students</td>
<td>Getting along</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VU 05</td>
<td>Purpose Built Student Accommodation</td>
<td>Random international students</td>
<td>Getting along</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VU 08</td>
<td>Homestay</td>
<td>Randomly assigned host family</td>
<td>No Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VU 11</td>
<td>Purpose Built Student Accommodation</td>
<td>Random international students</td>
<td>Getting along</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VU 14</td>
<td>Homestay</td>
<td>Randomly assigned host family</td>
<td>No Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7x Purpose Built Student Accommodation (one student was underage)</td>
<td>8x Randomly assigned 1x Friend</td>
<td>4x No Friendship 4x Getting along 1x Deep Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2x Homestay (both students were underage)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 43: Initial type of housing and relationship with housemate of international students who followed their educational agents’ advice

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18 The student code is given here instead of basic student information to maintain readability of the table.
Agents had a strong influence on students’ initial housing decision, demonstrated by the fact that all students followed their agents’ advice. Agents always suggested one specific type of housing, purpose built student accommodation, unless students were underage and legally obliged to move into a homestay.

As Table 43 and the quote above show, these students did not establish deep friendships with their housemates and did not enjoy their initial housing. The only student who took her agent’s advice and held a deep friendship with her housemate knew the individual from high school.

A scholarship from the Malaysian government covered her housing costs for the first year regardless of cost. She followed her educational agent’s housing advice and spent one year living at a purpose built student apartment with her best friend from high school: “We [she and her friend] went through an education agency. [...] They suggested us to live in [purpose built student apartment]. [...] So why not, it is paid by the government. Plus it is easier in the first year. Because I guess you had to learn how to start living in Melbourne alone, without your parents.”

(Female, 25, postgraduate, Malaysia, The University of Melbourne)

In the other eight cases (see Table 43) interviewees lived with randomly assigned housemates and no deep friendships emerged. Chapter 2 and the interview data from this thesis show that living with randomly assigned housemates was highly likely to result in poor friendship outcomes. As educational agents always channelled international students into housing where housemates are assigned randomly (unless they bring their own housemates along like the student quoted above) these poor results were no surprise. All housing options suggested by agents resulted in segregation from the local student population. Furthermore, some students suggested that agents rushed them through the process of choosing accommodation, pressuring them to agree to the agent’s suggestion (compare quote on p. 94).

**University**

None of the interviewees contacted university housing service staff prior to arriving in Melbourne but almost all (29/30) visited their university’s housing website at least briefly (compare Stage 3). It was discussed above that universities presented housing information on their websites in a manner that narrowed students’ perspective of the housing market in Melbourne, subtly and unintentionally influencing students to book housing from overseas. While the reasoning for booking housing from overseas was driven, at least partially, by the way university housing services presented housing information the reasoning for choosing their specific initial housing was not influenced in the same way. Instead students followed advice from their agents or friends and family.
Influence of Australian policies
Unlike Stage 5 (further housing decisions), Stage 4a was not influenced directly by Australian policy issues. Underage students were the exception (see Stage 3) and had to move into homestay arrangements. Policies of foreign governments however had a larger influence on the housing outcomes of international students in Australia as the following paragraphs show.

Foreign governmental scholarships
Initial housing decisions were influenced, in the case of two students, by the nature of Malaysian governmental scholarships that covered housing expenses for the first year regardless of cost. These two students chose expensive purpose built student accommodations as their initial housing because cost did not matter and these housing option could be arranged by and paid by the Malaysian government directly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female, 24, Malaysian, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne</th>
<th>“It is basically a government scholarship from Malaysia. They give me a certain amount every month. I meant to manage all my expenses using only this money. And all the tuition fees are covered by them too. They even pay for housing in the first year. Since I do a medical degree I am bound to the Malaysian government for 10 years.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, 25, Malaysian, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>The student left her expensive apartment in a large purpose built student accommodation after she spent the first year there with co-national friends: “I moved a year afterwards because the Malaysian government doesn’t pay for the accommodation after the first year anymore. They only give you a lump sum after the first year. Therefore it was lots of us to move out and get cheaper place. So we moved out. Me and three other friends stayed in a apartment. We shared two bedrooms.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 44: Quotes and case summaries from international students whose initial housing expenses were covered by the Malaysian government

The two students quoted above booked purpose built accommodations because they were relatively expensive in order to get the best ‘financial value’ out of their time-restricted scholarship. The two students spent 12 months in segregated housing where they socialised with co-nationals. When their housing funding ran out they recruited their future housemates from current co-national housemates and continued living segregated from the local student population.

Pre-departure events
Sometimes foreign scholarship providers or educational agencies ran pre-departure events attended by dozens of co-nationals about to move to Australia for study. These events provided opportunities to befriend co-nationals prior to arriving at their overseas study location. These co-nationals were potential future housemates, which lowered the likelihood of having local housemates and increased the chance of opting for segregated initial housing (which in turn made further housing options more likely to be segregated).
The pre-departure programme she attended provided her with a number of friends she ended up moving in with. She stayed at [purpose built student accommodation] for 12 months despite disliking the service, level of cleanliness and overpriced internet and electricity fees. She disliked the long lease time but enjoyed living with her co-national friends: “Because the way the scholarship works they will normally fly you over with some of your friends, people who are also on your scholarship program. And there was a pre-departure programme in Malaysia where I met some friends.”

(Female, 24, Malaysian, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne)

In this sample three students, all Malaysians enrolled at The University of Melbourne, attended such events. All three found their initial housemates through pre-departure events. The quote above shows how important these events were as housing related networking events. While these pre-departure events allowed students to network and find housemates, they also channelled students into segregated housing. All three students continued to live segregated in their further housing.

**Influence of social networks**

As Stage 3 showed, the most important (and for some interviewees the only) source of information was friends and family. Therefore personal recommendations had a profound impact on students’ initial housing when booked from overseas.

Twelve students asked only their friends or family for housing advice. They all followed their friends’ and family’s advice. When making housing decisions from overseas students first turned to their social network for advice. By receiving housing advice from trusted friends who were international students themselves, interviewees were prone to repeat existing housing patterns. As Chapter 2 and Q1 showed, these existing patterns are characterised by segregation from the local student population. As Table 45 shows, students who were advised by their friends or family (who themselves went to a college / hall) to move into colleges / halls are an exception as these housing types always allowed for meaningful contact with locals and resulted in cross-cultural friendships.
Female, 22, China, Undergraduate, Victoria University

She moved into a residential hall on campus that was managed by her university because friends, all former residents of that accommodation, suggested it to her. She enjoyed the close-knit community and even worked for the accommodation as Resident Assistant which was remunerated with a 50 percent reduction in rent. Furthermore she established many friendships with locals and internationals in this environment that she managed to maintain even after moving out of the hall.

Female, 25, Malaysia, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne

“I was influenced by my auntie actually. She lived [at the same college] 20 or 30 years ago. My auntie, who also did [the same degree as I], lived there. She said many good things about the place.” The student made many local and international friends at the college and only speaks positively about her experiences there. She still socializes with local and international college friends three years after having left the college.

Table 45: Quotes and case summaries from international students whose friends advised them to move into a residential college/hall

Most students who were advised by friends and family on their initial housing moved into segregated housing, arguably because their trusted sources only had lived experiences of particular housing types. This circle of equipping new international students with limited information about housing through word of mouth is portrayed in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Circular effects of international students advising their peers on housing

As Chapter 2 suggested and the interview data from this thesis affirmed, the depth of friendship between housemates was linked to the relationship of housemates prior to moving in together. When advised on housing by friends the housing outcomes varied (see Table 46).
Male, 21, China,
Undergraduate,
Victoria University

The student’s friend told him about a spare room in an existing co-national share house close to campus: “My friend […] just happened to know that there was a house close to uni and told me. I facebooked and called them and I got the house. But [my friend] was asked by more people where they should live, but she only knew about that house. So I was very lucky that she talked to me first. One factor is about luck and one factor is about people.”

Male, 22, Taiwan,
Undergraduate,
Victoria University

“One of my friends in China knew a [co-national] guy who stayed in Melbourne and he told me where to move to. I moved into a house [with two other co-nationals].”

Table 46: Quotes and case summaries from internationals students who followed their friends’ advice regarding initial housing

No correlation between the type of person who advised the individual international student on housing and resulting friendship between housemates could be found as the quotes in Table 46 illustrate.

Family members influenced students’ housing outcomes at Stage 4a by introducing distant relatives who provided temporary housing while the interviewees settled into the new environment before actively looking for housing in Melbourne. Living with (distant) relatives was not always perceived positively as the following quote shows.

The educational agent provided her with a lot of wrong and outdated information about housing in Melbourne. She realized that the agent would not deliver on his promise to provide her with a cheap and convenient housing option. Her mother organized temporary accommodation in Melbourne with very distant family. She felt guilty for staying with them and considered herself to be a burden and quickly signed a lease at a purpose built student accommodation to relieve the pressing feeling of guilt.

(Female, 31, Iran, Postgraduate, Victoria University)

Two interviewees were influenced in their housing choice by more distant family friends and family members. Both students later on successfully created large social networks in Melbourne (see Table 47).
The student describes how he ended up in a shared house with co-nationals after having spent one week in temporary accommodation with co-nationals: “There are many ways you can look for housing but the house that I live in I just heard about from my friends. I had the opportunity to get housing before I came to Australia, the University of Victoria offered some housing to me but I did not take it. My father's best friend allowed me to stay in the house for one week. The first week after I arrived in Melbourne I stayed in this house and looked for other housing. A friend of another Chinese student recommended me a good share house. They liked me and I got in.”

Through her large social network she secured a room in a two bedroom apartment in a central location (Southbank) prior to arrival. “[T]here are quite a few ties between Melbourne and Malaysia because there are quite a few Malaysians in Melbourne. So I was actually able to find my first apartment through a family friend who was also my primary school classmate's cousin. So it was all about Facebook as well, because this is how we got in touch. I got in touch with my primary school classmate and she gave me the Facebook and e-mail contacts of her cousin. And I contacted the cousin directly.”

Table 47: Quotes and case summaries from international students who utilised their broader social network to secure initial housing in Melbourne

As mentioned before, one student moved into housing with his mother who had a temporary working visa in Australia and consequently had no active say in his initial housing choice. Also, in all cases financial restrictions dictated an upper limit of housing costs.

Conclusion of Stage 4a

Booking housing from overseas meant that students had to move into certain types of accommodation because only some housing options (purpose built accommodation, colleges / halls, homestays) could be arranged without being physically present at the accommodation. These housing options mostly resulted in students living segregated from local students. Friends and family (who were always co-nationals) advised the interviewees on housing matters based on their own experiences on the housing market, which reinforced existing housing patterns.
Institutional Influences (Q1) | Australian Policy Influences (Q2) | Social Network Influences (Q3)
---|---|---
**Stage 4a: Securing Initial Housing from Overseas**
Agents channelled international students into segregated purpose built student accommodation.  
Universities initiated contact between co-national/international future housemates through welcome and orientation programmes.  
Scholarship providers covered initial housing regardless of price which led international students to choose the most expensive housing options, which were likely to be segregated.  
Regulations required underage students to live in homestays which meant they lived segregated from local students.  
Family situation forced one student to live in certain housing.  
Families preferred certain housing options – students follow suit and consequently moved into segregated housing.  
Financial situation ruled out more expensive housing options.

Table 48: Influences on international students decision making in Stage 4a of the housing timeline

International students who used educational agents during this stage always lived segregated from local students, were often unable to establish friendships with their housemates and generally spoke negatively about their accommodation. As seen in Stage 3, agents channelled students into purpose built accommodation (which always resulted in being segregated from local students), sometimes even pressuring students into that type of housing – allegedly because they received commissions (Collins, 2012).

Universities were found not to have influenced students’ housing decisions directly at this stage. Indirectly, universities’ housing websites portrayed house hunting in Melbourne as worth avoiding (compare Stage 3) which convinced many students to book their initial accommodation online. While the universities’ housing websites were not very influential in international students’ initial housing decisions, they played a big role in students’ further housing decisions at Stage 5.

Interviewees followed their friends’ advice and effectively copied current housing patterns of international students in Melbourne. As the Literature Review suggested and the data for this thesis confirmed, international students commonly lived segregated from local students. This pattern of segregated international students advising co-national newcomers on housing matters contributed to the creation of a circle of permanent housing segregation between
local and international students in Melbourne. This circle allowed for few opportunities to
insert new housing knowledge into the ‘intergenerational’ international student community.

International students’ desire to book their initial housing from overseas contributed strongly
to the consequent segregation of local and international students in the housing sector. As
discussed during Stage 3 this desire to avoid local house hunting was to a large extent shaped
and created by institutions. Few housing types were bookable from overseas. Purpose built
student accommodation providers were aware of this and locked students into long term
leases. This practice freed housing managers from the need to provide excellent service to
residents as they could not move out without losing money. Furthermore, new students from
overseas were likely to arrive regardless of housing managers’ practices.

According to the interview data, international students did not present clear personal housing
preferences that were free of external influences. Housing decisions at Stage 4a appeared to
always have been influenced in some form by institutions, policy or friends and family.

**Stage 4b: Initial House Hunting in Melbourne**

Only four of 30 interviewees decided to book their initial housing after having arrived in
Melbourne. They all utilised family members to secure suitable temporary accommodation.
Two students flew over with a parent who assisted them in their house hunting endeavours
(compare Table 50). These parents spoke little or no English and had no prior knowledge of
Melbourne’s housing market. The reasons the students did not book housing from overseas
varied, as Table 49 shows. The three interviewees who reported the biggest and most
persistent financial difficulties in the whole sample all booked their initial housing while being
in Melbourne. All four students arrived in Melbourne shortly before the start of semester, the
time of year in which housing around universities is traditionally in short supply and high
demand – a very stressful and rather unsuccessful approach to house hunting as the following
paragraphs show. The four students moved into segregated purpose built accommodation as
this was the only available housing type close to campus. All four students continued living in
segregated housing during their time in Melbourne (compare Stage 5). Three of the students
were socially isolated which negatively affected their wellbeing.

Interviewees’ decisions to look for initial housing after arriving in Melbourne varied as Table 49
shows and included fear of scams, bad prior experiences with agents and financial difficulties
that rendered housing bookable from overseas as too expensive. The decision to not book
housing from overseas, like the majority of interviewees, was dictated by external
circumstances (lack of financial resources, mistrusting housing agents and online
advertisements) rather than based on students’ clear personal preference for a type of housing that is only bookable locally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Reason for local house hunting</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, 31, Iran, Postgraduate, Victoria University</td>
<td>She was forced to hunt for housing locally against her wish after her agent failed to deliver on his promise to arrange housing from overseas. She had distant family she and her husband could stay with.</td>
<td>“[I]t was sheer torture. I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t concentrate, and I had a guilty conscious for coming here without preparation. My husband and I actually waited eight months for our Visa, but we did not look for housing [before we came to Melbourne], because the agent misled us.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, 20, Malaysia, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>His family’s finances were very limited and he had a housing budget of only $500 per month. He knew he would not be able to find housing in this price range from overseas.</td>
<td>“Typically what happens with new international students is they would settle their accommodation in Melbourne from their home country before they arrive. The advantage I had was that I had a relative who lives in [wealthy suburb], a really rich relative. […] So I was one of the very privileged ones that did not have to worry about [purpose built student accommodation] or the residential colleges. The residential colleges were out of the question because, seriously, they were too expensive. I had a fixed budget so I really needed to come here first and then start looking.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, 21, Bangladesh, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>She mistrusted educational agents and was afraid of falling victim to online housing scams without being able to inspect the property herself.</td>
<td>“I think a lot of fraud is involved in [booking housing online]. You can’t be sure about them saying the right things. And since you’re not even in Melbourne you can’t just have a look. I had to face this: you really like a place because you saw a photo. And I got his e-mail and everything, the rent was really good. But the photos did not look real - a house can’t be like that. So that was a trick. That is common. People do fraud. In different websites they put up the ad, they want the money in advance, and you have to pay it right away if you want the house. So that’s a pretty tight situation because students are really desperate to get a house and at the same time and they can’t even come down and have a look at it.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 49: Reasoning behind choosing to book initial housing after arriving in Melbourne
After having decided against booking housing from overseas or having been forced to do so, the four students flew to Melbourne and stayed with relatives during their first week(s). Table 50 shows that some students were accompanied by a parent to help them find suitable housing. Spending time with one’s parents and relatives in these first weeks increased the likelihood of social segregation, as students did not actively seek socialising opportunities outside their family.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Interviewee’s house hunting approach in Melbourne</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, 31, Iran, Postgraduate, Victoria University</td>
<td>Her husband and her mother, who flew over for a week, assisted house hunting while they stayed at with very distant family in Melbourne. She was highly afraid of overextending her welcome but also felt obliged to socialize with her family to show gratitude for the help they offered her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, 28, Pakistan, Postgraduate, Victoria University</td>
<td>Her mother came to Melbourne with her and assisted house hunting despite speaking almost no English and possessing no knowledge of the housing market. They spent the initial days with elderly relatives who only knew their way around their outer suburbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, 20, Malaysia, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>He stayed at his uncle’s house in Melbourne for two months until he was able to arrange for housing within his tight budget.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, 21, Bangladesh, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>Her father assisted house hunting. In that time they stayed with family whom she grew really close to over her time in Melbourne. Being socially isolated in her housing and university the family members are an important part of her life now.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 50: How interviewees went about house hunting after arriving in Melbourne

International student events were run at The University of Melbourne and Victoria University in the weeks before the official semester start. The four students were preoccupied with house hunting and socialising duties with their families. Consequently they did not attend these socialising opportunities at their universities. This choice contributed to students’ later social isolation.

When students looked for initial housing in Melbourne they did so under immense time pressure as they all arrived shortly before the semester started. At this point interviewees’ priority was finding housing as fast as possible, not finding the best available housing options. These findings were in line with former research stating that many international students in Australia had not secured housing at the start of the academic semester (Obeng-Odoom, 2012;
The University of Sydney, 2009). As the quote below shows, parents reinforced the preference for quickly securing housing.

“My father got too desperate because he came to Melbourne with me, to drop me here. So he was desperate to find me a house. So since I couldn’t get anything I thought it would be okay to live in that house.”

(Female, Undergraduate, 21, Bangladesh, The University of Melbourne)

Immediately after arriving in Melbourne students realised how expensive public transport was and wanted to avoid these fees by looking for housing very close to their campus. Housing was very competitive in these areas, especially right before the start of the semester. Consequently students’ housing related stress grew even bigger and their list of selection criteria for housing shrank rapidly (compare Table 51).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Important selection criteria.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, 31, Iran, Postgraduate, Victoria University</td>
<td>She wanted to be close to university and was reluctant to purchasing furniture. The only housing type matching these criteria was purpose built accommodation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, 28, Pakistan, Postgraduate, Victoria University</td>
<td>She wanted to secure housing before the semester started. She felt she had no time to make an informed decision. She only considered housing in walking distance to campus. She did not contact her university’s housing service or looked at their online housing forums. She only inspected properties from the list of purpose built student accommodation providers given on her university’s housing website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, 20, Malaysia, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>He was the only one of the four interviewees who managed to minimize the house hunting stress by first establishing a large social network in Melbourne, while he stayed with his relatives. He experienced high levels of stress regarding his unclear living situation though. His only criteria for housing was price and he used his extensive social network to arrange a unique housing setup (he was solely responsible for all cooking and cleaning) with a friend of a friend at a purpose built student accommodation. He paid well below half of the rental costs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, 21, Bangladesh, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>She, and her dad, felt pressured to secure housing in the short time that her father was travelling with her. For religious reasons she wanted to live in an all female accommodation. She only considered purpose built student accommodation close to campus to avoid long commuting time and wanted a furnished room.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 51: Important selection criteria when hunting for initial housing in Melbourne

Students focused on finding housing and did not attend socialising opportunities organised by their universities. Purpose built student accommodations around both campuses competed heavily for the attention of new international students during the time period before the start
of the semester. Consequently, they were a very visible and therefore obvious choice for stressed international students.

Because they were preoccupied trying to secure housing, three of four students did not participate in any socializing events during their first crucial weeks in Melbourne (o-week, international o-week, student club presentations). These missed opportunities for social interaction made permanent social isolation during their stay in Melbourne more likely. As Chapter 2 showed, social isolation had stronger negative effects on international student wellbeing than segregation. One student attended these socialising events and used them to establish a large social network. He was the only student of the four who did not feel socially isolated. Living in purpose built accommodation and having missed their university’s international student welcome week or similar opportunities to befriend fellow (international) students hindered the other three students to establish social networks in Melbourne.

The time pressure grew daily and made students’ focus on housing options that were advertised broadly. Unintentionally interviewees limited themselves this way to housing options that specifically targeted international students. That reinforced existing housing patterns and all four students ended up in segregated purpose built student accommodation.

When their degrees commenced and they still had not sorted their housing arrangements the students reported strong symptoms of stress as the case below shows.

_His academic performance suffered significantly under the financial pressure and his changing accommodation. Despite financial hardships, temporary homelessness, and a suffering academic performance he enjoys his time in Melbourne – his opinion of The University of Melbourne is harsh and cynical, describing the institution as a money making machine not taking interest in its students’ wellbeing._

(Male, 20, Malaysia, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne)

By now students were willing to pay higher rent than planned just to relieve their housing stress (see quote below).

_As mentioned in Table 37, the student blamed her educational agents for forcing her to look for initial housing locally instead of conveniently booking housing from overseas. As the semester started the student and her husband were still looking for suitable housing and the housing stress manifested itself physically. “My husband also was really unhappy and he lost 15 kg because he was so shocked of what was going on. […] I couldn’t sleep. […] I cried a lot.” Eventually the couple found housing: “We found a place that was $400 per week including bills and it was in walking distance to uni. It was expensive but I did not care about the money. I just wanted to stop worrying.”_

(Female, 31, Iran, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne)
Now willing to pay higher rents than planned, students were drawn to expensive purpose built student accommodation close to campus where they signed relatively long leases (the shortest lease option being 6 months). These unexpected additional housing costs added to the financial stress of the students.

Now settled in purpose built student accommodation close to campus, interviewees found themselves segregated and they all disliked their accommodations and desired to move. Since they had signed long leases they were required to stay which negatively impacted their wellbeing. In inner Melbourne, around The University of Melbourne, this clustering of large purpose built student accommodation was more intense than in the Western suburbs around Victoria University where smaller purpose built student accommodations dominated the market.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Initial permanent housing outcome.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, 31, Iran, Postgraduate, Victoria University</td>
<td>She rated her housing as overpriced, underserviced and very unsociable. She was pleased with the central location though.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, 28, Pakistan, Postgraduate, Victoria University</td>
<td>Initially she happily paid the high rental costs to relieve the stress of house hunting; after a couple of months the higher than expected rental and utility costs caused serious financial stress. She was socially isolated and disliked every aspect of the accommodation. She moved straight after her lease ended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, 20, Malaysia, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>He was pleased with the unique rental agreement (paying a small share of the costs but doing all the cooking and cleaning) as housing was now surprisingly affordable and he established a deep friendship with his co-national housemate. While he commented on the uncompassionate and rude management of the purpose built student apartment he enjoyed living close to campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, 21, Bangladesh, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>She liked the price (even though her housing was still expensive compared to shared housing on the free rental market) of her purpose built student accommodation. The fact that her housing was all female meant she did not need to cover her head. She disliked her neighborhood (near pubs and drunken people) and did not connect with her housemates due to a lack of contact opportunities within the house.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table S2: Initial housing outcomes of local house hunters

Only one of the four students established a sizeable social network while three students lacked any kind of meaningful social network in Melbourne at all and reported social isolation, which was upsetting to them.
**Conclusion of Stage 4b**

All students who did not arrange their initial housing from overseas arrived in Melbourne shortly before commencing their degree. They experienced significant levels of stress as the housing market is particularly difficult at this time, especially since these students did not possess in-depth knowledge about the housing market. In three out of four cases this initial housing stress contributed to the small size of students’ social network in Melbourne as they missed important initial socialising opportunities in the early stages of their degrees.

Various institutional influences impacted on students’ decision making during Stage 4b (compare Table 53). The only policy issue that influenced interviewees during Stage 4 was the cost of public transport. As soon as they learned about the high pricing for public transport they limited their house hunting to properties close to campus. Several additional factors influenced students’ decision making during Stage 4b as Table 53 shows.

External factors, mostly a lack of financial resources, led four students to choose Stage 4b over Stage 4a. It seemed that having access to free temporary housing, in the form of family members living in Melbourne, aided the decision in favour of local house-hunting.

Due to limited knowledge of the housing market and time pressure they did not make free and fully self directed housing decisions once they arrived in Melbourne. They made hectic housing decisions influenced by external factors rather than driven by their own preferences. This led them into purpose built student accommodation and resulted in an unintended self segregation.

In conclusion, in this sample, interviewees who organized their housing from overseas had a better initial housing experience compared to those hunting for initial housing while being in Australia in person.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Stage 4b:</strong> Securing Initial Housing while being in Melbourne</th>
<th><strong>Institutional Influences (Q1)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Australian Policy Influences (Q2)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Social Network Influences (Q3)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational agents failed to deliver on promise to arrange housing.</td>
<td>High cost of public transport make students favour housing close to campus.</td>
<td>Family members in Melbourne provided temporary accommodation. Housing bookable from overseas was expected to be too expensive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 53: Influences on international students decision making in Stage 4b of the housing timeline
Stage 5: Further Housing Outcomes
Firstly, this section presents general patterns in international students’ further housing outcomes. Secondly, the influences of institutions, policies and other factors on these patterns are discussed in three separate subsections. Finally, it is discussed which factors were most influential and under what circumstances international students made housing choices based on their own preferences.

**General trends**
The last sections showed that interviewees took one of two pathways (Stages 4a and 4b) to secure initial housing. At Stage 5 of the international student housing timeline interviewees had already spent some time in Melbourne, transitioned into university life and spent some time at their initial housing option. Interviewees had engaged in their degree, improved their understanding of the university environment, often established sizable social networks, improved their understanding of the local housing market and explored the city.

The majority of interviewees (27/30) moved housing, often several times, during Stage 5, either because desirable housing opportunities emerged, they desired to or were forced to move.

Three interviewees however reported only to have lived in one accommodation. Two of them were determined to stay in their housing until returning home after graduation, while the other already decided to look for new housing once her lease at a large purpose built student accommodation ended (see Table 54).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male, Undergraduate, 21, Singapore, The University of Melbourne</th>
<th>“(I)It is my second year here. I did not move at all. The house is five minutes from school so that’s really good. And I did not want to move, because they lowered the rent this year. [...] I don’t think I am going to move before I finish [my degree]. It’s really good here.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male, Undergraduate, 23, Hong Kong, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>“I’m still living there. I have been living there for three years now. But my roommates keep changing. [...] It’s only one more year, so I am not going to live somewhere else.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, 18, Hong Kong, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>“The uni degree gets really busy in second and third year, so I have to move out to somewhere quiet so I can study. I think I’ll have to move up here to the university. Probably into [purpose built accommodation], if they have rooms available.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 54: Quotes from international students who did not move during their time in Melbourne

The majority of international students who looked for other housing during Stage 5 were better equipped for consecutive house hunts than they were for their initial attempts.
Interviewees built on their experiences in earlier housing options, possessed a larger network of people providing them with word of mouth information, and consumed more information about the housing market – especially through their universities’ housing websites.

The following paragraphs show the reasoning behind moving into new accommodation. These reasons were divided into four different categories, as interviewees either wanted to improve the social setup, the cost, the location of their old housing or had to move against their will when the accommodation was sold or their lease ran out (see Table 55).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for changing accommodation</th>
<th>Mentioned as main reason in X/44 cases</th>
<th>Mentioned as secondary reason in X/44 cases</th>
<th>Total mentions as reason to move housing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve social setup of current housing</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimise rental expenses</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were forced to move (lease ran out; building got sold)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve location of housing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 55: Why international students moved accommodation

In most cases, international students moved primarily to improve social aspects of their housing (compare Table 55). Since arriving in Australia, they established friendships, usually with other internationals and now wanted to improve their social housing environment by sharing housing with close friends (see Table 56).

“I wanted someone as my housemate to get along with – a real friend, you know. Because [in my initial housing at Stage 4a] my housemate relationship, well, was a bit like ships in the night, we did not really communicate. [...] We still got along, but we just did not have any interaction, but I wanted a home rather than an apartment to stay at.”

“So we tried [living together] a bit, for less than one month and me and one guy we were really okay, but it was just the other guy, because of him it did not work out.”

Table 56: Quotes from international students desiring to share further housing with close friends

In general, the longer international students stayed in Melbourne the less rent they paid. Often international students moved housing primarily to minimise rental expenses (compare Table 55 and Table 57).
Female, 25, 
Malaysia, 
Postgraduate, 
The University of Melbourne 

“I moved [after one year in a large purpose built student accommodation] because the Malaysian government doesn’t pay for the accommodation after the first year anymore. They only give you a lump sum after the first year. Therefore it was lots cheaper for us to move out and get cheaper place.” The student later moved again to save on rental expenses “I moved out after staying at the apartment for four years, almost 5 years. The rent kept increasing every year so I wanted something cheaper.”

Female, 25, 
Malaysia, 
Postgraduate, 
The University of Melbourne 

“I moved to [large purpose built student accommodation]. Staying in college for more than one year would have been too expensive. [My new place] was cheaper than the residential college. The residential college is about $450 per week, at least five years ago that was the price and then I only paid $275 per week.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 57: Quotes from international students who moved housing to lower their rental expenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some interviewees (6/44) tried to improve the location of their accommodation, especially when their initial housing option was not in walking distance to campus (see Table 58).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Female, 26, 
Malaysia, 
Postgraduate, 
The University of Melbourne 

“I did not quite take to [location in central Melbourne]. Before that I was living in Ontario in a countryside town, lovely green lush, fresh produce all that sort of stuff. And from [location in central Melbourne] to university it was quite a commute, you had to wait for trams to get to university. I wanted to live in a green street.”

Female, 20, 
Malaysia, 
Undergraduate, 
The University of Melbourne 

“[Location in outer suburbs] was way too far from [the university]. Really, and to pay $3.80 for public transport was ridiculous. I wouldn’t pay that much, so I walked which annoyed me because it took half an hour to get to uni. So where I live now is way more convenient and cheaper as well because I can just walk to uni.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 58: Quotes from international students who moved housing to live closer to campus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In ten cases, students were forced to move because their building was sold or they were kicked out by the landlord. When forced to move, students always chose cheaper housing options, unless they lived rent-free with relatives. More often than not (6/10), students were happy with the new housing arrangements they made after being forced to move and established deep friendships with their housemates. All other housing outcomes varied widely and did not follow a simple pattern (compare Table 59).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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19 The quotes in this table are from two different students who happen to have the same sex, age and nationality.
Female, 32, Singapore, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne
“I just lived in [my auntie’s] place, but this June I [had to move] because she sold the apartment.”

Female, 33, Taiwan, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne
“After half a year the landlord had an emergency and needed a huge amount of cash and sold the studio to pay for his parents’ Medicare.”

Female, 29, Brazil, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne
“Then the owner of the place moved into the apartment because the rents were too high and he started to rent out his own house. So I had to leave and I found another place.”

Female, 23, China, Undergraduate, Victoria University
“The first house was perfect because was so cheap but it was very old so the owner decided to sell it, to demolish it and put another one, that is why we had to get another house.”

Male, 21, Sri Lanka, Undergraduate, Victoria University
“I came to the house of my auntie. She lives here. I stayed with her for one year. My auntie moved further away, it was too far away from uni.”

Male, 22, China, Undergraduate, Victoria University
“It was a cheap house, but I did not live there long. It was sold and I looked for a new house.”

(Male, 21, Taiwan, Undergraduate, Victoria University)
“They said ‘You have no contract. You have to move.’ I did not get back my bond. It was illegal, I think.”

Table 59: Quotes from international students who were forced to move

In summary, the different reasons behind moving housing correlated with the changing circumstances in students’ lives. Students who established large social networks in Melbourne often moved because they wanted to share housing with their new friends. As all interviewees improved their understanding of the local housing market in Stage 5, they realised that moving could reduce rental expenses or improve housing location without increasing rental expenses. Some students however did not proactively choose to move, but were forced to do so when their leases ran out or their properties were sold.

Influence of Australian institutions
At Stage 5, universities influenced international students’ housing choices in numerous ways. However, the strong influence which educational agents had at Stage 4a vanished. As agents ceased to influence international students’ decision making regarding housing, the universities, namely the housing offices, scholarship and financial aid regulations and the housing websites, remained the only institutional influences on interviewees’ housing decisions. Interviewees approached their university for housing related information and advice more frequently than at earlier stages.

Universities directly influenced international students’ further housing outcomes through financial regulations. While the majority of international students (26/30) did not experience
significant financial problems, a minority (4/30; compare Stage 4b) did. In one case, these financial problems led to temporary homelessness and the student had to sleep on a friend’s couch for an extended period. The student applied for housing support, which his university denied based on his status as an international student.

“I applied for the housing aid and I got rejected. [...] Without the university’s housing grant all the options on the universities housing website are over my budget. The housing website is only useful for the rich students. When you are poor and you need help the university doesn’t care about you. [...] I totally gave up after they did not give me the housing grant. Wait, I actually applied for financial aid and the housing grant. I got rejected for both so I did not bother trying again. There’s no point trying anyway. You would just get more disappointed.”

(Male, 20, Malaysia, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne)

The student had a large co-national social network in Melbourne which enabled him to arrange temporary housing with a close friend while he was homeless.

Another student failed to get her scholarship renewed because she changed degrees, forcing her parents to re-mortgage their house. This caused permanent feelings of guilt and stress. She did not allow herself any time for socialising and moved into shared accommodation to save money. This was against her preference of living by herself but turned out well as she ended up sharing an apartment with locals who introduced her to their social networks and enabled her to establish local friendships. This improved her stress levels and quality of life significantly.

“[Losing the scholarship] was not an easy time. I felt very bad because my parents had to re-mortgage their home. I am going to pay them back later, I just used their name to borrow money from the bank, but it makes me feel guilty because this is very stressful for my mother. [...] But I work hard for [my degree] and will be able to pay back all the money. It’s not easy though.”

(Female, 33, Taiwan, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne)

Interviewees focused on cutting costs when experiencing financial hardships because their universities did not provide financial aid to them. Besides tuition, housing was the largest expense. Considering former research, students experiencing financial hardship were expected to be in this sample. Obeng-Odoom (2012) describe how the lack of financial aid, rent assistance, emergency housing, and scholarships affected international students negatively in terms of wellbeing and academic performance. The same was the case for students in financial difficulties in this sample.
University housing offices
The universities’ housing offices influenced international students’ housing decisions in Stage 5 through two channels. Firstly, they provided individualised support through drop-in sessions and via telephone. Secondly, their housing websites provided a wide range of housing information and housing boards. Students using these services were usually satisfied, but some students did not consult these services in the first place because they expected them to be a waste of their time.

Drop-in services
Few students used the drop-in service of their university’s housing office. But most service users spoke highly of the staff and rated the service as valuable.

“I learned [many facts on the management of one’s tenancy] at the one hour lecture that the Uni Melbourne housing officer gave me. This was so valuable.”

(Female, 33, Taiwan, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne)

The majority of students did not use that service however. Two students volunteered their reasoning for not making use of these services (see Table 60).

| Female, 21, Bangladesh, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne | “Oh, that doesn’t work. You are so pissed and frustrated when you look for housing or have housing problems and then you do not feel like going to someone and hear their blubbering. They will go on and tell you the general rules. I’m sorry, but I’m really not into that.” |
| Female, 23, China, Undergraduate, Victoria University | “The uni should provide the housing service more openly, more easy to access, they should be visible. At the moment their [office] is almost invisible.” |

Table 60: Quotes from international students who objected to seeking help from university housing services

Only one student (see quote below) asked for help at their university’s housing service but was not satisfied with the service. After her bad initial experience with the service the student did not approach her university for any kind of assistance again.

“I was totally disappointed of them. They were really insensitive to students’ situations. They kind of did not care. They said if I was a single person they could put me into one of their uni houses or apartments but because I had my husband with me these houses were not an option. They offered no other help.”

(Female, 31, Iran, Postgraduate, Victoria University)
**University housing website**

The strongest institutional influence on international students’ further housing decisions was the university housing websites, which were praised by students (see Table 61). Students actively engaged with the housing boards on the websites of both universities. Students used these boards to look for available properties, empty rooms in share houses, housemates, or simply to gain an understanding of the housing prices in different suburbs. These housing boards were not used to make a decision about housing type or housing location though. These kinds of decision were influenced by other factors (see p. 127 onwards).

Students who had recruited housemates through their social network before actively looking for housing consulted general real-estate websites (realestate.com.au or gumtree.com.au) as well as their university’s housing website. Groups of housemates who looked for unfurnished housing on the free rental market preferred these website to the universities’ ones as they provided a larger number of relevant properties. Students looking for available rooms in shared housing on the free rental market preferred their university’s website to gumtree.com.au.

The university’s housing website was often the only source of information for international students when looking for initial housing (see Stage 4a) but at Stage 5 students had established enough connections with fellow students to additionally gather information through word of mouth (see p. 127 onwards). This is an approach that was not available to some students when looking for their initial housing (compare Stage 4b).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female, 21, Bangladesh, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</th>
<th>“I would always recommend to everyone to not look at any of the housing website because you never know whether it’s fraud or not. But the university’s housing website is fine. It is much more reliable. And you can always e-mail them and tell them that this particular ad doesn’t look good.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male, 20, China, Undergraduate, Victoria University</td>
<td>“I think the university’s housing thing is like awesome. The best thing about it is that you do not need to doubt it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, 21, Sri Lanka, Undergraduate, Victoria University</td>
<td>“I looked at the VU database. I only looked at the VU website actually. They put only good things up. No bullshit, you know. It’s not like gumtree where you find a lot of bullshit.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 61: Quotes from international students who praise their universities' housing websites

While institutions heavily influenced initial housing outcomes in regards to housing type (Stage 4a), institutions did not influence further housing decisions equally strongly. The universities’
housing websites however provided an important platform and starting point for almost all further house hunting endeavours and were universally praised (see Table 61).

**Indirect institutional influences**

Universities also influenced housing outcomes indirectly by providing (or failing to provide) opportunities for international students to socialise with local and other international students meaningfully. Interviewees with larger social networks had access to more word of mouth information regarding housing and had a larger pool of friends to draw from as potential housemates. Students who actively engaged in university clubs, or enrolled in courses that allowed for meaningful and reoccurring interaction between classmates, had access to large social networks.

**Influence of Australian policies**

Policy issues, namely public transportation and visa regulations, also influenced interviewees’ further housing decisions.

**Public transport**

International students’ further housing decisions at Stage 5 were heavily influenced by considerations regarding public transport. Many interviewees did not consider housing that was not in walking distance to university in order to avoid public transport which they considered to be unsafe and too expensive. International students, unlike local students, did not receive a concession card and had to travel at higher costs. This made them feel unwanted in Melbourne. During the interviews the topic of public transport never failed to evoke passionate responses. After arriving in Melbourne, as an earlier quote already suggested (compare second quote in Table 58), international students perceived public transport as an unforeseen and avoidable cost (see Table 62).

| Female, 31, Singapore, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne | “I think one of the most important factors for choosing to live in the CBD is that [international students] do not get concession fees for transportation. So we just pay more for our apartments and do not travel as much.” |
| Female, 33, Taiwan, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne | “I calculated it before. [...] For the monthly ticket you pay $140. It is similar expensive when you live in the city and do not commute than when you live further away [...] and have to commute to the city. But time is money, so the time that you save by not commuting saves you money.” |
| Female, 31, Iran, Postgraduate, Victoria University | “If you buy a one month ticket for public transport it is at least $140 or more. I am saving that money by living in the city. My husband and I discussed living in [the outer suburbs] but commuting a lot just eats up time. Also, the commuting system here isn’t always on time and then we would be stressed out.” |

Table 62: Quotes from international students who perceived public transport as an unforeseen and avoidable cost
Furthermore, interviewees found commuting to university via public transport to take up too much time. Students cut their commuting time by moving closer to campus (see Table 63).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male, 20, Malaysia, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</th>
<th>“Every time I travel anywhere I need to allocate one hour of travelling time to get to uni, including all the walking times. So today I had a 12 o’clock class and the very latest I can leave my room is 11 AM, otherwise I won’t make it to the class on time. It is quite a hassle, every time I want to do something, every time I have a meeting coming up, I will need to immediately leave and allocate one hour. I need to plan my days in advance. [...] For the next house I learned and I moved very close to campus.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, 21, Bangladesh, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>“I hate travelling. If I travel too much I get tired and I can’t study. It is all about preference if someone wants cheaper rent they would look at suburbs far away but then they do have to travel a lot. But as of me, I really don’t like travelling that much, so I want to live nearby.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, 29, Brazil, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>“I don’t like living far away, because even if you save on rent and the house is cheaper, you end up paying the same with public transport. And in public transport you waste so much time, and it is a lot of time! No one can tell me that you can still read on the train, it’s not the same. And then sometimes there is no train or the train is really full. So I like living close to the city.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 63: Quotes from international students considering public transport an avoidable hassle

Three students chose to live close to campus because they perceived public transport as dangerous and were determined to avoid using it (see Table 64).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female, 24, Malaysia, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne</th>
<th>“Driving the car is much better than using public transport it is more convenient, and I think it is more safe.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, 23, China, Undergraduate, Victoria University</td>
<td>Student reflecting on what she focused on when deciding on further housing: “Location is important because you don’t want to live next to a scary train station or anything. Close to uni is good because you don’t want to take a creepy bus at night or be around drunk people in the train.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, 21, China, Undergraduate, Victoria University</td>
<td>Before he arrived his friends advised him to avoid train stations as they were dangerous places and public transport an avoidable expense.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 64: Quotes and case summaries from international students who perceived public transport as dangerous

Only one student spoke highly of the local public transport system when explaining how his housing preferences changed since he arrived in Australia.

“It needs to be conveniently located for public transport. That’s the only thing you really need to care about if you do not have a car. Then I look whether the house is comfortable. I look for all the factors but the most important one is public transport.”

(Male, 18, Indonesia, Undergraduate, Victoria University)
Because the vast majority of international students perceived public transport as too expensive, unsafe, and taking up too much time they only considered housing in walking distance to campus. This reinforced the clustering of international students around their respective universities and contributed to the segregation of the student body (compare Chapter 2).

**Visa regulations**

International student visas limited the hours that visa holders were allowed to work to 20 per week. While interviewees were not specifically asked about their rental expenses the picture emerged that many students spent more on housing than their original budget allowed for. Those in need of more money worked part time to make up for their financial discrepancies. This was usually enough to improve their financial situation. Consequently, this did not influence students’ housing decisions dramatically.

However, two interviewees experienced financial problems of such severity that they were not able to earn enough money through part time work, because visa regulations forbade them to work for more than 20 hours per week. As a result, they had to cut back on costs drastically. As housing was the biggest expense after tuition fees, students looked for cheaper housing. This decreased their comfort levels and overall student experience as the quote below indicates.

> "I work as much as I'm allowed to. During the semester I work 20 hours a week and in the semester break I tried to work as much as possible. In order to get by I have to work as much as I am allowed to - otherwise I couldn't get by. [...] This is why we decided to search for a different place, to save money."

(Female, 31, Iran, Postgraduate, Victoria University)

Furthermore visa regulations provided the basis for universities to exclude international students from financial aid by having parents guarantee their ability to financially support their children financially (compare Chapter 2).

**Social networks and other influences**

International students’ further housing decisions (Stage 5) were not only influenced by institutions and policies but also by a range of other factors, especially their social networks (compare Table 71). These other factors were: improved local knowledge, improved knowledge of personal housing preferences, larger social networks, and decreased family influence on housing decisions.

**Local knowledge**

At Stage 4 many housing decisions were made with little or no knowledge of the local housing market, with interviewees trusting their agents’, families’ or friends’ advice. This changed as
interviewees spent more time in Melbourne. The interview data showed that international students were exposed to various types of housing information, all of which they included to some degree in their decision making regarding further housing. All 27 interviewees who occupied further housing showed improved understanding of the different housing types available. When describing their decision making in regards to further housing they mentioned a wider range of housing types and suburbs (see Table 65).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, 26, Malaysia, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>While the student’s initial housing option was a flat she arranged in the CBD without knowing anything about Melbourne she described a number of suburbs she considered for further housing: “Parkville, because it is really close. Carlton, because it is really close and close enough to the city as well. You can go to the markets, and to all the events. Brunswick, the whole Sydney Road area. I even looked up East Brunswick all the way up to Fitzroy.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, 24, Malaysia, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>The student was looking for a share house for her and her four friends: “The number of rooms the house had was important, and most importantly rent of course. It also needed to be really close to Uni. We basically only looked in Parkville, Carlton, North Carlton, Brunswick - that was it.” For her initial housing, she booked a room in purpose built student housing from overseas as her agent suggested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, 23, China, Undergraduate, Victoria University</td>
<td>“When I arrived I did not know anything about the market. When we were looking for the second house it was better. We contacted the agents, we compared prices, we compared locations. We checked everything. This is why we found a good one. We talked a lot about housing, me and my friends. So we knew all the prices. Now I always try to advise the new students on how much to pay!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, 25, Malaysia, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>“I guess my knowledge has improved in a way that you know where you have to go to find the cheap place and how to deal with the agents, and how to apply and that I know what the nice suburb are. Because some suburbs are a bit dangerous and you only learn that from experience and from listening to others.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 65: Quotes and case summaries from international students reflecting on how they gained local knowledge over time

Not all interviewees offered such specific indications of having improved their knowledge about available housing types.

In most cases (26/44) students chose a different housing type than they occupied previously, which indicates the students knew of more housing types during their further house hunting than they did during their initial efforts. From the 27 students who moved into further housing, 18 moved into a different housing type. Furthermore, students improved their knowledge of local suburbs. While students were reluctant to move into suburbs that required them to commute to campus via public transport and wanted to stay in walking or cycling distance in Stage 4, they considered slightly more suburbs for their further housing in Stage 5.
While it is likely that all interviewees grew more knowledgeable about their housing rights through conversations with their peers and their own lived experience, the interview data only reveal such improvements for students who experienced problems with their landlords and housing managers. The quotes in Table 66 are all taken from students who felt their housing providers mistreated them. While none of them was able to fix the issue with their provider they all were careful to avoid these particular situations in their further accommodations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male, 22, South Africa, Undergraduate, Victoria University</th>
<th>“Lots of my friends had problems. They did not get their bonds back and then couldn’t pay the bonds for the new houses. I hear lots of bad stories. Because my friends told me about it I am very careful now.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, 31, Iran, Postgraduate, Victoria University</td>
<td>“I was shocked. When I started paying rent they were so mean to the international students. They gave us so much hardship. There were so many issues; the manager for example came to our room without us having given him permission. How dare she do such things! It was unbelievable! I looked at a leaflet I found in our room and it had some sort of customer service number of the flyer said you could call them to complain about [the provider of her purpose built student accommodation] and have them fined. They charged us $200 for electricity every month, which was a lot of money. I was so annoyed and I felt I couldn’t do anything because we signed that contract. [...] I did not want to live there anymore and I wanted to have my rights respected. So we started looking for housing [...].”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, 21, Sri Lanka, Undergraduate, Victoria University</td>
<td>“[The staff at my university’s housing office] said if I gave [my housing provider] one month notice before moving out I would get my security bond back. But they did not do that. They said I broke the contract. I’ve no chance to get my money back.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, 22, Taiwan, Undergraduate, Victoria University</td>
<td>“When the new students arrive they need to make sure that they have a contract with their landlord. In my first house the guy was okay for three months, but then he changed and I did not have a contract with him because I believe him. This is why I lost my bond. I moved out of the house the lost a bond of $700. It was very annoying and distressing.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 66: Quotes from international students reflecting on their housing providers

Most initial housing decisions were made from overseas (compare Stage 4a), whereas in Stage 5 all house hunters inspected potential properties in person. This physical inspection of future properties provided international students with important information they could not have gathered online (see quote below). It also allowed students’ to analyse if the housing option matched their personal housing preferences.

_Student reflecting on what she learnt from her initial housing:_ “Booking online is dangerous. Always, always, always have look at the house. Before moving in always point out the things that you think are not all right. Always let the landlord know. Always keep a very good record. So they cannot charge you for anything out of work and say you did it. So you have to be very careful when you move in.”
While it was impossible to measure exactly how much local knowledge international students gained since arriving in Australia, the data that could be extracted from the interviews suggested that most, if not all, interviewees gained at least some additional local knowledge. This knowledge influenced interviewees’ further housing decisions, as they had to decide between a wider range of housing types, suburbs and consequently more potential housing options.

Housing preferences
The wider knowledge of housing options to choose from made further housing decisions easier for students because lived experiences of initial housing shaped their understanding of their own preferences. Simultaneously the influence agents and parents had on housing decisions declined in Stage 5, which gave students more room to make housing decisions with fewer external factors influencing their decision making.

When asked about their decision making in regards to further housing international students were always able to provide a more detailed and complex set of considerations and painted a clearer picture of their individual preferences than at Stage 4 (see Table 67).

| Male, 18, Indonesia, Undergraduate, Victoria University | “I want to live with other people - because you have not studied overseas if you haven’t had a roommate. When I go home people ask me ‘how is your roommate’. And I’m like ‘I do not have roommates’. That sounds weird to them. So I really want to experience having a roommate.” |
| Female, 26, Malaysia, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne | “My knowledge about the city definitely changed over time because moving to Southbank I had no idea what the city was like. I just thought Southbank sounds nice and it looked nice on Google maps, it definitely looked decent enough. But I did not like the whole commercial feel, and there were highways nearby, it was just a bit too noisy and too loud for my taste. And then I realized that I did not get the cycling feel that you get in the northern suburbs, it is much more conducive to my style of living, so that’s what I like about it. And that was why I want to be on this side of the river. While I was looking for housing I did not want to be south of the river anymore.” |
| Female, 25, Malaysia, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne | “When you come here and your courses already started life is a mess. It is easier when you go to Australia and already have somewhere to stay. But then after a while, why not look for a house, so you see more, and then you already know where to live, you know where to choose the suburb, and you will be able to find the right people you want to live with. Only when you have been here for a semester or two you know how you want to live.” |

Table 67: Quotes from international students regarding further housing decisions

Students gained knowledge about their own housing preferences over time, making each consecutive housing decision a more informed one. Over time students moved housing not only when they were forced to but also to achieve their ideal housing setup. Simultaneously,
students were exposed to fewer suggestions regarding housing from their parents. However, messages regarding housing from friends and institutions were still received.

During Stage 4a, where only furnished housing options could be booked from overseas, a clear preference for furnished housing options was visible. This changed at Stage 5, which showed the opposite pattern. While interviewees volunteered no specific preferences for furnished or unfurnished housing in Stage 5, Table 68 shows that international students were more likely to choose unfurnished housing options when they had spent more time in Australia. In that respect more international students started opting for housing setups similar to their local counterparts. While no student commented on it, the data showed that once a student opted for an unfurnished housing option they never chose a furnished one again. This sample did not suggest any correlation between students’ intention of staying in Australia as permanent residents and their housing decisions in Stages 1-5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First housing option in Australia</th>
<th>Total number of unfurnished housing options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second housing option in Australia</td>
<td>10/27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third housing option in Australia</td>
<td>5/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth housing option in Australia</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth housing option in Australia</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 68: Unfurnished housing options occupied by international students

Furnished housing options (staying with family members, homestays, colleges / halls, purpose built students accommodations) were only chosen in half of all further housing options, while most initial housing options were furnished. The interview data suggested that this trend towards more autonomous living arrangements was linked to students’ increasing desire to live according to their own set of rules, rather than following the policies of their housing provider or housemates (see Table 69). These results were in line with research on housing pathways (compare Clapham, 2005).
Table 69: Quotes from international students wanting more personal freedom in their further housing

The data also suggested that further house hunting was less stressful than initial house hunting. Students started looking for further housing while still holding a lease to another housing option. This reduced the perceived risk of temporary homelessness and students consequently were not rushed into making a quick housing decision (see quote below).

“I also think that when students first arrange their accommodation from overseas they do not receive accurate information. They do not have the chance to inspect their apartments, which disappointed many students. The apartments did not match their expectations. That is causing a problem. There is a big rushing time when the students come to Melbourne and then they find out their option is actually not good. When the students move later they have more time and they can inspect their apartments.”

(Male, 23, Hong Kong, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne)

None of the 27 students who moved into further housing options mentioned to have experienced time pressure of any sort when hunting for further housing.

Social networks

While the influences of parents and family members on international students’ housing decisions were significant in Stage 4, they lost importance in Stage 5. All interviewees living with relatives for their initial housing (9/30) moved into different housing types (9/9) for their further housing. Meaning, no interviewees at Stage 5 lived with relatives at any time.

While parents were still paying for housing, their influence on housing decisions lessened in Stage 5. When talking about further housing, students did not volunteer preferences or influences their parents had voiced. As several students mentioned they were in regular contact with their parents it can be assumed that parents had at least some indirect influence on further housing decisions. This data however could not provide that information.
Further housemates were more often recruited through students’ social networks than initial housemates were. Nine of 30 interviewees moved in with friends or friends of friends in their initial housing. In further housing options this practice became more common. That finding did not come as a surprise, considering international students were likely to grow their social network during their time in Melbourne (compare Marginson et al., 2010). Because students’ social networks grew over time, they were more likely to have access to other students who were looking for housing at the same time. Consequently, they were more likely to move in with friends or friends of friends when they desired a housing type that required housemates. Earlier it was shown that, moving in with friends or friends of friends was an effective strategy to guarantee deep levels of friendship between housemates. At Stage 5 more students had access to the housing strategy of moving in with friends or friends of friends. As Table 70 shows, when they had access to a social network, students decided first who to live with before setting their heart on a location and housing type.

| Students who recruited further housemates from their social network before deciding on housing location or housing type | Students who made friends during their first semester in Melbourne had more future housemates to choose from, whereas international students who did not establish many friendships had no housemates to choose from and were therefore more likely to choose housing options that did not require bringing friends along as housemates (usually purpose built student accommodation). |

Table 70: Case histories from international students who recruited further housemates from their social network before deciding on housing location or housing type

Students who made friends during their first semester in Melbourne had more future housemates to choose from, whereas international students who did not establish many friendships had no housemates to choose from and were therefore more likely to choose housing options that did not require bringing friends along as housemates (usually purpose built student accommodation).

While most students described their initial house hunting as very stressful, their reports of further house hunting did not include equally strong descriptions of distress or time pressure. Students did not compare the burdens of hunting for initial housing alone with burdens of further house hunting with friends and consequently no quotes can be provided. Arguably,
house hunting under less stressful circumstances contributed to fewer students making rushed housing decisions at Stage 5.

**Family influence**
The interview data allowed limited insight into the family dynamics behind further housing decisions. As mentioned above, parents were only mentioned in the context of initial housing decisions. No interviewee mentioned their parents in regards to further housing decisions. Interviewees who initially lived with relatives did not mention their help or advice on further housing decisions. The fact that no interviewee stayed with family members beyond their initial housing option correlates with an increased preference for more autonomous / less supervised further housing options. As the majority of interviewees (25/30) depended on their parents to pay for tuition and rent, a total emancipation from their influences appears unlikely. However the data of this study does not provide evidence for this assumption.

**Conclusion of Stage 5**
Similarly to Stage 4, a variety of external factors influenced students’ housing decisions at Stage 5 (see Table 71). However, a few students made housing decisions at Stage 5 without external influences.
### Stage 5: Further Housing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional Influences (Q1)</th>
<th>Australian Policy Influences (Q2)</th>
<th>Social Network Influences (Q3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational agents had no influence on further housing decisions. Housing website was visited by all international students looking for further housing at some point (27/27 students). University housing staff was occasionally approached (more frequently than at Stage 4a/b) and their service was perceived staff as very helpful. International student were excluded from housing grants and many scholarships resulting in financial difficulties for some students.</td>
<td>Visa regulations limited right to work and provide the basis for universities to exclude international students from financial aid. Students in severe financial difficulties were impacted in their housing decisions by this lack of support. Public transport was perceived as negative by most students who looked for further housing (21/27 students). This increased the likelihood of choosing further housing close to campus.</td>
<td>Most students who looked for further housing (25/27 students) grew the size of their social networks which improved access to word of mouth information regarding housing. Two students were socially isolated and could not access such information. Initial housing improved awareness of personal housing preferences and all students were physically present, often with their friends and future housemates, at inspections for further housing. Families’ influences arguably diminished compared to Stage 4. Interviewees did not stay with family at this stage any longer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 71: Influences on international students decision making in Stage 5 of the housing timeline

Students frequently approached their university regarding advice on further housing. The universities’ housing websites were visited by all students and were generally well received. Students recruited housemates from their friends (or friends of friends). When looking for further housing, interviewees also consulted general real estate websites\(^{20}\). Students who used the drop in service of their university’s housing office spoke highly of the staff and rated their advice as helpful. When experiencing severe financial problems interviewees spoke less favourably of their university and criticised practices of denying housing grants and financial aid to international students. This criticism was not only directed at universities but at the

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\(^{20}\) realestate.com.au and gumtree.com.au were regularly mentioned in interviews
broader system of international education in Australia. For example, when experiencing financial problems students were limited in their ability to work by visa regulations. Expensive public transport also influenced international students’ housing decisions. Rather than investing time and money in commuting to university interviewees chose to invest in housing close to campus to spare themselves the inconveniences and costs of commuting.

At Stage 5, international students were strongly influenced by their social networks when making housing decisions. They focused more on who to live with than on where to live. Students accumulated more knowledge about different suburbs and housing types before making housing decisions. Students were more proactive compared to Stage 4, with more students actively looking for housing options themselves, rather than following someone else’s advice.

More interviewees had access to sizable social networks for recruiting housemates, which improved the chance of establishing deep friendships in the housing context. The increased size of students’ social network resulted in more students being able to hear about relevant housing information rather than actively looking for it. Furthermore, students improved their knowledge of the local housing market and were able to better articulate what type of housing they would prefer.

Only three international students made truly independent housing decisions free from external influences at Stage 5 though. These three students were all postgraduates who did not depend on their parents for financial assistance, but financed themselves through scholarships. The three students were impacted by their former housing experiences and not by institutions, policies, friends or family. Overall the number of housing decisions made in such a way was very low (3/74).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, Postgraduate, 26, Malaysia, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>Having found her initial housing through her extensive social network, she did not like her housing setup much. She wanted to live in a less sterile neighbourhood and wanted to be closer to campus. She proactively looked for a new housing option that matched her preferences and quickly found one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, Postgraduate, 33, Taiwan, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>While sharing a flat with a local couple she learned about the option of subletting rooms. When an opportunity arose and her neighbours moved out she proactively called the landlord and took over their flat. She started to sublet the two spare rooms to local students. While a lucky coincidence guided her to her flat, she was not impacted by institutions, policies, friends or family in making this particular housing decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, 29, Brazil, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>After having lived in purpose built student accommodation, shared housing with housemates she did not like through the university housing website, and having moved in with her temporary boyfriend for a short period of time she started making housing choices solely based on her own preferences. She was very clear about needing a quiet place for herself since she wanted her home to be quiet and wanted to live according to her own rules. Having sufficient scholarship money at her disposal, she decided based on her previous housing experiences to move into a one bedroom apartment by herself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 72: Mini case histories of interviewees making independent housing decisions at Stage 5

**Stage 6: Graduation**

Interviewees’ life planning beyond finishing university had little influence on their housing decisions (see Table 73). While all interviewees were still studying at the time of the interviews, the majority presented a plan of what they would do after graduation. Most interviewees (21/30) stated they would immediately leave Australia to continue their education or start working. This was in line with former research (compare Waters, 2009) describing international education as a means to the end of improving students’ socio-economic standing in their home countries.

Some students mentioned vague considerations of staying in Australia but had not taken steps towards acquiring permanent residency (7/30). Their housing patterns, or the factors influencing these patterns, did not differ from the rest of the sample. While friendships with locals were linked to improved wellbeing (see Chapter 2), cross-cultural friendships did not improve students’ desire to stay in Australia in this sample. The seven students contemplating a prolonged stay were all currently very satisfied with their overall university experience. While this explains why they considered prolonging their stay in Australia, it had not influenced their housing choices as their housing patterns did not differ from other interviewees.

Only two students in this sample seriously considered staying permanently in Australia and both had already taken active steps towards securing permanent residency after graduation. Neither of the two was influenced in their housing decisions by their desire to stay in Australia after graduation. One student decided to stay because her husband secured a lucrative job and...
the economic outlook for her industry (tourism) was poor in her country of origin (Iran). The other student jumped on the opportunity when she was offered a position as a pharmacist which guaranteed her permanent residency through the skilled occupation scheme. Neither of the two altered their approach to housing when they decided to stay in Australia.

It could be expected that because strict visa regulations made a permanent stay in Australia unlikely, international students would be drawn to furnished housing options as they view their stay in Australia as temporary and are unwilling to purchase furniture. However, this study could not show adequately that international students’ were influenced in their housing decisions by their plans after graduation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Institutional Influences (Q1)</th>
<th>Australian Policy Influences (Q2)</th>
<th>Social Network Influences (Q3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 6: Post Graduation Plans</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Strict visa regulations made a permanent stay in Australia unlikely but did not influence interviewees’ housing decisions.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 73: Influences on international students’ decision making regarding housing in Stage 6 of the housing timeline

Specific answers to research questions Q1-3
The following three subsections give specific answers to the three research questions. The evaluation of this research, and how it affects the academic literature, is presented later in Chapter 5.

Answering research question Q1
The last section discussed the six stages of the international student housing timeline. The findings regarding institutional influences on international students’ housing decisions are summarised in Table 74 and provide the basis to answer research question Q1, which asked how and when institutions influenced international students’ housing decisions.
| Stage 1: Decision to Study Abroad | The data suggests that at Stage 1 institutional influences did not affect housing decisions. |
| Stage 2: Decision to Study in Melbourne / Australia | The data suggests that at Stage 2 institutional influences did not affect housing decisions. |
| Stage 3: First Thoughts about Housing | Educational agents showcased the local housing market as very difficult to manage. University housing website also discouraged international students from house hunting locally. University website portrayed all housing types equally. Many students had little time between being accepted at university and commencing their degree. Students’ initial housing decisions at Stages 4a and 4b were made immediately after thinking about housing for the first time. Students were heavily influenced by institutions because they had little time to seek out alternative kinds of information. |
| Stage 4a: Initial House Hunting from Overseas | Scholarship providers covered initial housing regardless of price leading international students to choose the most expensive (= segregated) option. In some cases international students attended welcome and orientation programmes in their country of origin where they befriended co-nationals. These friendships were frequently utilised when looking for initial housemates. |
| Stage 4b: Initial house hunting while being in Melbourne | Students were unable to allow for more transition or house hunting time because of their high school or public service commitments. Educational agents failed to deliver on promise to arrange housing. Lack of institutional requirement to arrive in Melbourne early on. |
| Stage 5: Further Housing | Housing website was visited by all international students looking for further housing. University housing staff was seldom approached; those who did perceived staff as helpful. International student were excluded from housing grants, financial aid and many scholarships. |
| Stage 6: Post Graduation Plans | The data suggests that at Stage 6 institutional influences did not affect housing decisions. |

Table 74: Influences of institutions on international students’ housing decisions – Summary of Stages 1-6 of the international student housing timeline
Considerations regarding housing did not influence international students in their decision to study abroad and choosing to come to Melbourne. Institutions (universities and agents) started to influence interviewees’ decision making regarding housing from Stage 3 onwards.

As soon as students decided on a study location and were accepted into their university of choice (compare Stage 3 in Table 74) they concerned themselves with the issue of housing. International students were heavily influenced by institutions in their initial housing decisions as educational agents and the universities’ housing websites offered a coherent narrative of the local housing market. Both sources of information portrayed the act of initial house hunting as stressful, time consuming and difficult to navigate. International students were affected by this narrative and avoided the initial house hunt by organising accommodation from abroad. The housing type most frequently occupied by local students, shared accommodation on the free rental market, could not be organised from overseas. Consequently, the majority of international students who booked housing from overseas chose segregated housing options (purpose built student accommodation, living with relatives, homestay). Arguably, many international students were not aware that their housing choices alienated them from local students because the university housing websites, which all students visited at least briefly, presented all types of housing in an equal manner without mentioning that certain housing was only occupied by internationals. Consequently, some international students might have assumed that purpose built student accommodation was, like on-campus living arrangements in the US and the UK, occupied by local and international students alike.

For many international students university commenced very shortly after prior commitments (high school, internships, military service). This minimised the time available for house hunting, acting as a further motivation to organise housing from overseas based on the information provided by institutions (agents and universities), which resulted in an unintended self-segregation as only certain housing types were bookable in that manner.

Many international students used educational agents to apply for university and organise initial housing (compare Stage 4a in Table 74). These agents always encouraged international students to choose purpose built student accommodations, a housing type only occupied by international students. In hindsight students rated their agents as biased and highly incompetent in housing matters. Arguably, students were channelled into purpose built student apartments because their agents received commissions. Some international students received scholarships from their governments to study abroad. Because these governmental scholarships covered all housing expenses during the first year of study, recipients were incentivised to occupy expensive housing types. This made purpose built accommodation an even more attractive housing option to these students. Universities provided welcome and
orientation programmes for international students. While these programmes were aimed at providing international students with important information and easing their transition into Australia they also had the unintended consequence of socially segregating them from local students. The minority of international students who were house hunting locally (compare Stage 4b in Table 74) were surrounded by other internationals, making it likely they consumed an international narrative about the housing market, finding international friends who later became international housemates. In any case, hunting for initial housing locally was a very stressful experience for the minority of students having chosen to do so. In that aspect the narrative agents and university websites provided were right, but they also caused this fact to be true. Some agents failed to deliver on their promise to arrange for housing and forced students into local house hunting. Universities did not require international students to be present in Melbourne until commencement of their degrees, further increasing the number of students looking for housing in the week before semester started and resulting in an even more competitive and stressful housing market.

After some time, most international students either chose to or were forced to move housing. At this point (compare Stage 5 in Table 74) they continued to be influenced in their decision making by institutions. While agents no longer affected their housing outcomes, university housing websites and housing staff were highly influential. All international students visited their university’s housing website at that point and trusted the provided information. Especially the digital housing boards influenced international house hunters’ decisions as it was the only source of information for many. When experiencing housing problems international students valued the advice of their university’s housing staff highly and always acted as told. Only international students experiencing serious financial problems spoke despairingly about their university. They were not eligible for rent assistance, housing grants and many scholarships. Students felt their university did not care about them. They were forced to move in order to save on rental costs – one student was even forced into temporary homelessness without his university helping him.

Institutional actions did not change international students’ desire to stay in Australia after graduation (compare Stage 6 in Table 74). Also, this thesis did not reveal a connection between students’ life plans after graduation and their housing decisions during Stages 4 and 5.

In summary, agents strongly influenced decision making regarding housing at Stage 3, and The University of Melbourne and Victoria University strongly influenced international students during Stages 3, 4 and 5. However, the housing outcomes did not differ much between the two institutions. The few differences that occurred were most likely due to the higher average age
of students at The University of Melbourne in this sample as the following paragraphs demonstrate.

**Differences between the two universities**
Considering that research question Q1 focussed on institutional influences on interviewees’ housing decisions and that Chapter 2 suggested institutional practices would heavily impact on housing outcomes it was expected that the university would matter strongly. Analysing the results of the two universities separately did not reveal grave differences in institutional influences. The results were almost identical for both universities in most relevant areas. The few differences could largely be explained by the higher proportion of postgraduates among University of Melbourne interviewees.

It was described above how agents influenced international students in their decision making regarding initial housing. This kind of impact was recorded evenly at both institutions. Five students at The University of Melbourne and four students at Victoria University were impacted by their agents. They all moved into segregated student accommodation, usually were not satisfied with their housing, and were eager to move into different housing once their initial lease ran out. Students at both universities rated interaction with their agents regarding housing as very poor. Postgraduates were more likely to use the help of agents regarding housing matters than undergraduates were. Four out of ten postgraduates were influenced in their initial housing decision by educational agents. Amongst undergraduates that proportion was smaller as only five out of 20 were influenced by educational agents initially.

The services offered by the two universities were very similar and showed very similar results. At both universities interviewees consulted the institution’s housing website during initial and further house hunting. Students at both universities overwhelmingly liked the online housing advice and housing boards. Both housing websites presented a narrative of the housing market that encouraged overseas booking of initial housing. Consequently, students at both universities were pushed towards certain segregated housing types. Students at both universities made their housing decisions immediately after receiving confirmation of enrolment. Students at neither university contacted the housing staff directly to consult about initial housing. A minority of interviewees at both universities visited the housing staff in person to gain information regarding further housing. Staff members at both universities were perceived as knowledgeable and very helpful.

Students at The University of Melbourne and Victoria University differed slightly in their patterns of finding initial housemates.
Some interviewees at The University of Melbourne took part in preparatory sessions in their home countries where they met and befriended co-nationals and sometimes decided to share housing with them. This prevented social isolation in Australia but also resulted in housing segregation. Students at Victoria University had different pre-arrival arrangements in place. Nevertheless, they led to the same results. Victoria University offered shared degrees with partner universities in China. Students would visit a Chinese university for two years before coming to Melbourne for two years. This setup allowed Chinese students to access a network of co-nationals who currently are or previously were studying at Victoria University. This network provided students with trustworthy co-nationals to contact regarding their housing needs. Several interviewees set up segregated shared houses with co-nationals through these networks.

Despite differences in basic patterns of finding initial housemates, international students at both universities had the same segregated housing outcomes.

Students at The University of Melbourne, the more expensive university, experienced fewer and less serious cases of financial problems which might be explained by the high number of scholarship holders (5/15) amongst interviewees from this institution. Interviewees from Victoria University received no scholarships. Additionally, interviewees from The University of Melbourne tended to be from richer countries (compare Table 75). This is reflected in the housing choices the students made. In 12 instances students at The University of Melbourne lived in purpose built accommodation and in 5 cases in colleges. The instances of Victoria University students living in these two most expensive housing types were lower (9 and 3 respectively).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries of origin</th>
<th>THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE</th>
<th>VICTORIA UNIVERSITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6 China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average rank in list of richest countries(^{21})</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average gross domestic product of countries of origin (according to list of richest countries)(^{22})</td>
<td>$19581</td>
<td>$7069</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 75: Countries of origin and related data according to university the interviewees attended

The correlation between age and housing related outcomes was higher than the correlation with gender or university. As Table 75 shows, other housing related outcomes differed only slightly and are best explained by the age gap between the groups. Students at The University of Melbourne were older (24.5 years) than their counterparts at Victoria University (22.1 years). This was due to the higher proportion of postgraduates at Melbourne (8 compared to 2 at Victoria University). The two universities were also unbalanced in their gender composition. Only 4 students at The University of Melbourne were male, while 9 students at Victoria University were male. Despite the variation in housing outcomes is best explained by the age gap rather than differences in institutional practices or gender.

Most housing related outcomes did not differ significantly between universities. Students at both universities established equally good relationships with their housemates. The slightly better rating (1.5 compared to 1.37) that The University of Melbourne students received here is explained by the high proportion of postgraduate students who generally received higher scores in that category. Furthermore, students at both universities showed similar patterns of choosing their housemates. They chose to move in with friends (UM 5x, VU 8x), friends of friends (UM 6x, VU 4x), or moved into a college / hall (UM 5x, VU 3x) in approximately equal numbers. These ways of selecting housemates were highly correlated with good housing outcomes as Chapter 4 showed. Students at both universities also expressed the same housing

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\(^{21}\) The average rank of interviewees’ countries of origin implies that students from The University of Melbourne come from richer source countries. Data from 2012 (International Monetary Fund, 2013)

\(^{22}\) Averaging the gross domestic product of interviewees’ countries of origin reveals that students from The University of Melbourne come from richer source countries. The data however does not refer to interviewees’ actual financial background as this was not asked for in the interviews. Data from 2012 (International Monetary Fund, 2013)
preferences and looked for affordable housing in walking distance to campus. This was in both cases due to practical (saving on commuting time) and financial (expensive public transport) reasons.

While both universities heavily influenced international students in their decision making, no significant differences in housing outcomes as a result of these influences were apparent during any stage of the international student housing timeline.

Answering research question Q2
As mentioned previously, the last chapter discussed the six stages of the international student housing timeline and presented findings regarding policy influences on international students’ housing decisions. These findings are summarised in Table 76 and provide the basis to answer research question Q2, which asked how and when public policies influenced international students’ housing decisions.
### Influences of Australian policies on housing decisions of international students (Q2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1: Decision to Study Abroad</th>
<th>The data suggests that at Stage 1 Australian policies did not affect housing decisions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Decision to Study in Melbourne / Australia</td>
<td>The data suggests that at Stage 2 Australian policies did not affect housing decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: First Thoughts about Housing</td>
<td>Underage students were required to live in certain housing types (homestays) and consequently were exposed to very limited housing choices. Indirectly, many interviewees were exposed to the influences of Australian policies when they followed their friends’ advice, which was influenced by Australian policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4a: Initial House Hunting from Overseas</td>
<td>Regulations required underage students to live in certain housing (see Stage 3 above) and limited their housing choices to different homestay providers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4b: Initial house hunting while in Melbourne</td>
<td>High cost of public transport made international students favour housing in walking or cycling distance to campus which increased the chance of them moving into segregated housing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5: Further Housing</td>
<td>Visa regulations limited right to work and provided the basis for universities to exclude international students from financial aid. Student visas also provided the legal basis for universities to exclude international students from housing grants. Expensive public transport made international students favour further housing in walking or cycling distance to campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6: Post Graduation Plans</td>
<td>The data suggests that at Stage 6 Australian policies did not affect housing decisions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 76: Influences of policy on international students’ housing decisions – Summary of Stages 1-6 of the international student housing timeline

Australian policies did not impact international students’ decision to study abroad as various locations would have provided them with their desired advantages (compare Stage 1 in Table 76). Both, the good reputation of its fast visa assessment process and, to a lesser extent, currency exchange rates gave Australia a competitive advantage over competing study destinations. However, neither fact impacted on international students’ housing outcomes.

Australian policy started to influence interviewees’ housing decision making from Stage 3 onwards, whereas Victorian policy (public transport) heavily impacted on housing decisions at Stages 4b and 5. Visa restrictions heavily influenced the housing outcomes of underage students as they were required to live in homestay arrangements (compare Stages 3 and 4a in Table 76). This housing type not only limited students’ choice but also segregated them from
local university students. In this study, homestays were always characterised by very low housing satisfaction and social isolation in the home.

Once students were in Australia (compare Stages 4b and 5 in Table 76) Victorian policies regarding public transport directly influenced their housing decisions. As international students were not eligible for concession fees on Victorian public transportation they perceived public transport as taking up too much time and as an avoidable cost. Consequently, international students only considered housing in walking and cycling distance to their university. The housing market in these areas was dominated by large (inner Melbourne near The University of Melbourne) and small purpose built student accommodations (Western Melbourne around Victoria University) which were almost exclusively occupied by international students. This further strengthened the housing segregation of local and international students.

International students experiencing financial difficulties during their time in Australia (compare Stage 5 in Table 76) were denied financial aid based on being international students. Visa regulations required international students, or their parents respectively, to provide sufficient funding for the duration of study. These regulations provided the legal basis of excluding international students from financial aid and housing assistance that were accessible to local students. On rare occasions interviewees were forced to change housing due to financial constraints.

Recently tightened visa regulations made a permanent stay in Australia unlikely and influenced individual life plans. Arguably, international students were often drawn to furnished housing as they viewed their stay as temporary and wanted to avoid acquiring too many possessions while being in Australia. However, this thesis could not adequately support that hypothesis with the available data.

In summary, federal and state policies influenced international students’ housing decisions at Stages 2 to 5 in the international students housing timeline.

**Answering research question Q3**

Earlier in Chapter 4 it was shown that social networks heavily impacted upon international students’ housing decisions. Table 77 provides an overview of these findings which were used to answer research question Q3, which asked how and when social networks impacted international students in their housing decision making.
### Social network influences on housing decisions of international students (Q3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1: Decision to Study Abroad</th>
<th>The data suggests that at Stage 1 social networks did not affect housing decisions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Decision to Study in Melbourne / Australia</td>
<td>The data suggests that at Stage 2 social networks did not affect housing decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: First Thoughts about Housing</td>
<td>International students were often exposed to narratives about housing by their friends and family which shaped their later housing decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4a: Initial House Hunting from Overseas</td>
<td>Family situation forced one student into certain housing. When families preferred certain housing options, students usually followed suit. The family’s financial situation ruled out more expensive housing options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4b: Initial house hunting while being in Melbourne</td>
<td>Family members in Melbourne provided temporary accommodation (especially when housing bookable from overseas was too expensive). Personal choice to come close to semester start to spend more time with family in home country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5: Further Housing</td>
<td>Social networks increased in size and influence which improved access to word of mouth information regarding housing. Initial housing improved awareness of personal housing preferences and knowledge of the housing market which lessened the impact of friends’ housing advice. General housing websites (such as realestate.com.au) were utilised by some interviewees. This was not the case in Stage 4. Consequently, families’ and friends’ influences on housing decisions diminished over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6: Post Graduation Plans</td>
<td>The data suggests that at Stage 6 other influences did not affect housing decisions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 77: Influences of other factors (friends, family, personal preferences) on international students’ housing decisions – Summary of Stages 1-6 of the international student housing timeline

Besides institutions and policies social networks (i.e. family and friends) and personal experiences, heavily influenced international students’ housing decisions.
At Stage 1 families strongly influenced the decision to acquire international rather than local tertiary qualifications as western academic qualifications were expected to improve socio-economic status. However, at Stage 1 no considerations regarding housing impacted the decision making of international students (compare Table 77).

At Stage 2 the presence of friends and relatives acted as a pull factor for many international students. For many Asian international students the relative short flight to their home country gave Australia a competitive advantage over European and American destinations. Housing however did not impact students’ decision to choose Melbourne over alternative study destinations (compare Table 77).

Once international students decided in favour of Melbourne they started concerning themselves with housing (compare Stage 3 in Table 77). When available, international students placed high value in the description of the local housing market provided by friends or relatives who lived in Melbourne. The narrative they provided heavily influenced international students in their initial housing choices, often to avoid house hunting on Melbourne’s apparently overloaded housing market. Their friends, all co-nationals, had predominantly lived in purpose built accommodation. Consequently their housing advice was often concerned with the question which purpose built student apartment building was the best choice, rather than discussing different housing types.

At Stage 4a the majority of international students had decided to organise their initial housing from overseas. Many students had family members in Melbourne and utilised their relatives’ houses as temporary accommodation while house hunting. This temporary housing was segregated and limited socialising opportunities with locals but provided high levels of comfort and allowed students time to learn about the local housing market. International students not living with their families also made their housing choices under the strong influence of their parents who voiced preferences for certain housing characteristics (close to university, affiliated with university, bookable from overseas) which led many students to move into purpose built student accommodation. One student moved in with his mother who was temporarily working in Australia. Overall, families and their financial situation had a huge impact on international students’ housing decisions at Stage 4a (see Table 77). The minority of international students who did not book their initial housing from overseas were also heavily influenced in their decision making by their families’ preferences and finances. While their reasoning to hunt for initial housing in Melbourne in person rather than booking from overseas varied (house hunting locally was perceived to be cheaper, they wanted to spend more time with their families at home before moving to Australia, they suspected housing fraud), they
too largely ended up moving into purpose built student accommodation. Ultimately they too were largely segregated from local students in their initial housing.

At Stage 5, international students’ social networks had increased in size and improved access to highly valued word of mouth information regarding housing. Students’ social networks affected their opinions about housing types, suburbs and provided them with a better understanding of housing prices. Ultimately, their increased social network improved access to housing information. A larger social network also translated into more international students moving into further housing with friends and friends of friends. While this guaranteed great housemate relationships it also meant that international students were still living segregated from local students as most social networks were made up largely of other international students.

Overall the direct influence of international students’ families on their housing decisions diminished at Stage 5. However, because they were still financially dependent on their parents, indirect influences on housing choices were likely but not evident from the interview data. The argument that students made more independent housing decisions can further be strengthened by the fact that they gained lived experience and improved their personal awareness of their housing preferences. This led many students to move into different housing types than they occupied initially. Furthermore, some international students utilised general housing websites (gumtree.com.au or realestate.com.au) to find housing – an approach not used at Stage 4.

No direct influence of international students’ post graduation plans (Stage 6) on housing decisions (Stages 4 and 5) was found in the data. Therefore the role of social networks at Stage 6 was not further investigated.

**Conclusion of Chapter 4**

Chapter 4 showed that international students were strongly influenced in their decision making regarding housing by external factors (institutions, policy, and social networks) at each stage of the housing timeline. The following chapter shows how urban geography literature can benefit from the findings of this thesis.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction
This last chapter recalls the aims of this thesis, provides an evaluation of the findings and suggests practical implications of the research results. To do so, firstly a summary of the thesis is given. Secondly, the findings of this thesis are evaluated and compared to urban geography research. A reflection on how the results differed from expectations follows, including a reflection on the fact that differences between the two universities were less pronounced than expected. Then the relationship between results and methods as well the impact of the researcher on the results is evaluated. Lastly, a final reflection concludes this thesis.

Summary

Aims of thesis
The Literature Review showed that most local and international students in Australia were segregated in their socialising and housing. However, the decision making processes of international students underlying these segregated housing outcomes were largely unexamined in the academic literature. Therefore the general aim of this thesis was to improve the understanding of international students’ decision making processes regarding their housing. Creating knowledge about the decision making processes was meant to improve the understanding of the origins of the segregated student bodies at Australian universities.

To achieve this general aim, three research questions were established which targeted different influences on the housing decisions of international students. It was asked how and when institutions (Q1), policies (Q2) and social networks (Q3) influenced housing decisions. This new knowledge improves the understanding of why local and international students in Australia live segregated. This was an important finding because Chapter 2 linked segregation with poor international student wellbeing.

Chapter 4 showed when and how institutions, policies and other external influences impacted housing decisions of international students. Institutional practices, public policies, and attitudes within the international student community all unintentionally contributed to the segregation of the student body.

Summary of results regarding Q1
Institutional influences heavily impacted international students’ initial housing decisions and outcomes.

The thesis showed that universities unintentionally channelled international students into segregated initial housing. All interviewees consulted their university’s housing website when
first thinking about accommodation (Stage 3). These websites presented a narrative that unintentionally favoured purpose built student housing over alternative housing choices. Shared housing on the free rental market, residential colleges / halls and purpose built accommodation were given equal space and consideration, falsely suggesting each housing option was equally popular among students. The housing websites failed to mention that purpose built accommodation was exclusively occupied by internationals, leaving interviewees to assume this housing type might be occupied at least in part by locals (as is the case in similar housing setups in the US and the UK). Furthermore the websites discouraged local initial house hunting. Considering the poor outcomes of local initial house hunting (Stage 4b) this was desirable on one hand but undesirable on the other hand as it ruled out housing on the free rental market where most local students were housed. Due to the high costs and limited spaces available at residential colleges / halls and the option to book from overseas, purpose built student accommodation appeared to be the most attractive of the three housing types. Consequently, many international students initially moved into segregated purpose built student accommodations.

Furthermore, international-only networking and orientation programmes prior to university commencement provided interviewees with the opportunity to increase the size of their social networks. These events helped interviewees to make new friends which had positive (minimising social isolation) but also some negative consequences. An exclusively international social network increased the likelihood of recruiting internationals as housemates which led to segregated housing environments, which reinforced segregated social networks.

The data indicated that only students lacking access to housing information by word of mouth (through relatives or friends) asked their agents for advice. These educational agents strongly impacted students’ initial housing outcomes. Agents always suggested purpose built student accommodation, which confirmed earlier research findings (see Chapter 2) that agents did not act in the best interest of their clients but had a self serving interest due probably to commissions from housing providers. Students following their agent’s advice reported low satisfaction and social isolation. Further housing outcomes were not influenced by agents and the impact of universities weakened over time too.

Students looking for further housing always visited, and often utilised, their universities’ housing websites. Information provided on these websites was likely to be consumed by students. Housing staff was seldom approached but highly regarded by the minority of interviewees who did so.
A small number of interviewees experienced financial difficulties and had to work long hours or move housing to offset these effects because their universities excluded international students from housing grants, financial aid and some scholarships.

Furthermore it was found that the two sampled universities did not differ in their impact on international students’ housing outcomes. At the beginning of the project it was suspected that the institution of enrolment would heavily impact on international students’ housing outcomes. No evidence for this assumption was found in this thesis (compare Chapter 4, p. 142). It was argued that the few differences in housing outcomes at the University of Melbourne and Victoria University were to be explained by a difference in age rather than by institutional practices.

Summary of results regarding Q2
This thesis provided new knowledge regarding how and when public policy impacted on housing decisions of international students. Most importantly, it was shown that expensive public transport strongly influenced housing decisions and contributed to housing segregation. Many interviewees actively avoided public transport, primarily to save money, and consequently only considered housing close to campus. Because the housing markets around the two universities were pressurised, competitive and characterised by high numbers of purpose built student accommodations (which are occupied exclusively by international students) the preference for housing in walking distance further strengthened the existing housing segregation.

The effects of visa regulations on international student housing were weaker. Only underage students were directly influenced in their housing decisions as they were required to move into a homestay arrangement. Students in this sample described this housing type as segregated and socially isolating.

More indirect effects of student visas also strengthened the segregation of the student body. The fast processing speeds of Australian student visas not only encouraged students to choose Australia over other study locations but also allowed universities to take in international students who applied very close to the start of semester. These late applicants made their initial housing choice under time pressure and the impression that housing needed to be arranged immediately. Purpose built student accommodations could be booked conveniently and rapidly from overseas. The students who took advantage of that option always moved into segregated housing.

Interviewees who faced unexpected financial difficulties were limited by visa regulations in their attempts to escape that situation. Firstly, student visas provided the basis on which
universities denied the right to apply for housing grants and scholarships by requiring parents or scholarship providers to guarantee sufficient funding for tuition and living expenses. Secondly, international students were limited in their employment rights and could not work more than 20 hours per week without violating visa regulations. Students were therefore unable to outwork temporary financial difficulties. Instead they had to cut expenses. As tuition costs were fixed and unnegotiable, international students were forced to cut their second largest expense and moved into cheaper housing to save on rent.

**Summary of results regarding Q3**

This thesis showed that social networks impacted heavily on international students’ housing decisions, especially in regards to initial housing. Parents’ preferences commonly channelled international students into segregated initial housing by voicing strong preferences for booking housing from overseas. Additionally parents’ preferences for housing that was close to campus, affiliated or endorsed by the university and safe established another housing narrative that made purpose built accommodation the most attractive choice. Arguably, parents’ conception of suitable housing influenced the decision making of most students throughout Stages 3 to 5 (due to financial dependence). Some parents wanted their children to spend time with them before moving to Australia. These students arrived very close to the start of the semester – further increasing the likelihood of choosing segregated housing options. When available, interviewees initially stayed with relatives to avoid housing related stress while transitioning into university life. This type of housing was also segregated, further minimising the opportunities for cross-cultural communication outside the classroom environment.

Friends were the most trusted source of housing information and strongly shaped interviewees’ perception of housing in Melbourne. The housing narrative they provided made interviewees favour purpose built student accommodation. Because most of their friends lived in such housing they could provide information regarding the nuances between different purpose built student accommodation providers but could not provide information regarding other housing types. This sort of information created the perception that purpose built student accommodation was a crucial part of the international student experience in Melbourne – this perception, continuously repeated, turned segregated student housing into a norm. In many cases friends even organised initial housing, usually a room in a trusted purpose built student apartment (and in some cases in co-national-only share houses), for interviewees. Whenever students followed their friends’ advice on initial housing they ended up in segregated housing. Over time students grew their social networks which made housing choices based on word of
mouth more likely. Because the social networks of most students consisted exclusively of other internationals, further housing outcomes were likely to be segregated too (Stage 5).

International students gained housing knowledge and experience during their stay in Melbourne and usually considered more housing types at Stage 5 than at Stage 4. They developed a clearer concept of their ideal housing location (usually close to campus to save time and commuting costs).

**Evaluation**

This section evaluates the research findings of this thesis and shows how urban geography literature benefits from the new knowledge.

**The international student housing timeline**

The international student housing timeline, which was used to locate this research in time, was based on interviewees’ own language regarding their housing decisions. Urban geography could benefit by including the students’ perspective and through use of the timeframe in which housing decisions are made. Former research findings can be clearly located in regards to which stage of the housing timeline they examined. For example, Waters (2006b) concerns herself with Stage 1, while research on the segregation of the student body usually concerns itself only with Stages 4 and 5. This thesis showed how at Stage 3, international students and their parents had already been exposed to a narrative regarding housing, (shaped mostly by institutions, friends and family) which resulted in favouring housing options that could be booked from overseas. The housing timeline also showed at which stages housing concerns did (3, 4 and 5) and did not (1, 2 and 6) occupy students’ minds. Furthermore, the international student housing timeline showed what type of influence impacted international students’ housing decisions at different stages. This allows university housing staff to better serve their constituency and future research to focus on stages of specific interest.^{23}

**Results compared to urban geography literature**

The following paragraphs evaluate how the findings of this thesis compare to existing research in urban geography.

**Reasons for becoming an international student**

This thesis showed that during Stage 1 of the international student housing timeline students and their families were not concerned with the study location – rather they made a conscious decision in favour of international education in order to accumulate financial, social and cultural capital (compare Chapter 4 p. 82 onwards). These findings were in line with Waters

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^{23} See Appendix A for further practical implications of the international student housing timeline
who argued the majority of international students chose to pursue an international education for exactly these reasons.

**Educational agents**
Just as in previous research (Collins, 2012; Fincher and Shaw, 2009), educational agents in this study were found to be very influential in students’ initial housing decision making. This study showed that agents channelled interviewees into segregated purpose built student accommodations. Furthermore, interviewees echoed Marginson et al.’s (2010) findings that educational agents were viewed as an incompetent and biased source of housing information. Overall this thesis added to the perception that educational agents’ housing advice was motivated by financial self-interest rather than the wish to provide international students with the information best suited to their housing needs.

**Student body**
This thesis replicated earlier findings (see Chapter 4, p. 74), stating that local and international students lived segregated lives and rarely formed cross-cultural friendships (among others: Brown, 2009; Smart, Violet, and Ang, 2000; The University of Melbourne, 2005; Ward and Masgoret, 2004). Fincher and Shaw (2009) argued that many institutional practices unintentionally segregated the student body. The findings of Chapter 4 extended this research by showing that the housing websites of the two universities unintentionally helped channelling international students into segregated accommodation.

**Micro-publics and cross-cultural contact through prosaic negotiations**
As Chapter 2 reported, Amin (2002), similarly to Allport (1954), was very critical of the idea that freedom of association in large public spaces necessarily lead to a cosmopolitan urban civic culture. Amin (2002) instead suggested ‘micro-publics’ of daily interaction and conversation as enablers for cross-cultural contact. Such effective micro-public sites helped in overcoming ethnic differences through compulsory ‘prosaic negotiations’ between their users. Consequently, such sites possessed the ability to disrupt social patterns of segregation. Amin (2002) showed that merely occupying the same space was not enabling meaningful cross-cultural contact. According to Amin (2002) ‘prosaic negotiations’ were unlikely when new users (in this case international students) entered an already segregated space or place. Sharing housing and visiting the same university were argued to be such micro-publics. Chapter 4 suggested that the two campuses were already segregated when interviewees arrived at university. As expected based on earlier research (Chapter 2), the interviewees in this thesis established many friendships through participation in student clubs as these micro-publics provided ideal conditions for meaningful contact. Because the student clubs and churches frequented by interviewees were usually segregated, club memberships solved the problem of
social isolation but did not mitigate social segregation (compare Fincher and Shaw, 2009; Rosenthal, Russell, and Thomson, 2006).

Chapter 4 found housing to be significantly more important in enabling cross-cultural contact and friendship formation than micro-publics (workplaces, universities, community facilities). Considering the work of Amin (2002), this was possibly the case because the micro-publics most interviewees engaged in (university campus, student clubs) were already segregated when they entered them. The idea of the university campus as a pre-segregated space was supported by research suggesting that through administrative practices and segregated student clubs the label of being an ‘international student’ was by now a well established part of the university experience in Australia (Fincher and Shaw, 2009). Additionally, many interviewees, as well as local students, already possessed segregated social networks when starting university. This contributed to the pre-segregated nature of the university campus and made cross-cultural communication in campus and classroom settings less likely as individual students stuck to their existing friendship groups.

Consequently, housing was the most important space for meaningful cross-cultural contact. This thesis echoed earlier findings (Collins, 2012; Fincher and Shaw, 2009; Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, and Forbes-Mewett, 2010) that educational agents actively channelled international students into pre-segregated (and often socially isolated) housing environments by only promoting purpose built student accommodations. Some housing however, especially colleges and halls, did not come pre-segregated and was therefore conducive to cross-cultural interaction. Chapter 4 showed that whenever interviewees occupied housing with locals, the space did not come pre-segregated which enabled more ‘prosaic negotiations’ (Amin, 2002) and meaningful contact (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998) and thus more cross-cultural friendships.

Cultural patterns

“It was quite common for the international student interviewees to not much like the places they were going. Very often they were going there because that’s where their friends were going, who were going because their friends were going there, and they were not moved at all by their experience of the city” (Shaw and Fincher, 2010, p. 211).

This thesis found a similar effect in regards to housing. International students routinely chose housing options their friends had chosen because their friends recommended them. Interviewees in this sample thereby reinforced existing housing and segregation patterns.
Similar to the students in Fincher and Shaw’s research (2009), interviewees who occupied purpose built student accommodations disliked their own housing choices in hindsight.

Fincher and Shaw (2009) argued that the administrative categories of ‘local’ and ‘international students’ were so strong that they became part of student culture and part of Australian university students’ identities. Arguably, this kind of categorising was not the only cultural phenomenon reemphasising the segregated student body. Many international students might have considered purpose built student accommodation as part of the ‘international student experience’ in Melbourne because all their friends experienced such housing. In the minds of many prospective international students the experience of living and studying in Australia now seems to be closely linked to purpose built student accommodation. This perception was created through the circle of repeating housing habits of former students, which was evident in this sample by the high number of interviewees who strictly followed the housing advice of other international students. By now, several generations of international students have experienced Australian universities, including housing, in a certain way and their experiences were replicated by the new students they advised on housing and education. This created a set of cultural expectations of what the international student experience in Melbourne is supposed to look like, including purpose built student accommodation as the ‘normal housing option’.

**External influences**

It was argued in Chapter 3 that by framing the three research questions around how and when external influences impacted on international students’ housing decisions it would become clear if some international students chose their housing independently from external influences. As highlighted in Chapter 2, urban geography literature did not consider the active decision making of international students in Australia in regards to their housing. This thesis filled this gap by examining the decision making of international students and has found that housing decisions were in the vast majority of cases heavily influenced by external influences. It is of course philosophically questionable if any student ever made a decision truly free of external influences. Disregarding this general philosophical discussion, the data in this thesis suggested that only a few postgraduate students made housing decisions based on their personal preferences and prior experiences and only did so at Stage 5 (compare Table 72). All undergraduates made their housing choices in Stages 4 and 5 under the strong influences of external factors and never made housing decisions truly independently. Postgraduates and undergraduates alike were strongly influenced externally at Stage 4.
These results are therefore to be seen as supporting the current practice in the urban geography literature to examine mostly external factors leading to the housing segregation of international students.

**Unintentional segregation**

It was argued in Chapters 2 and 3 that looking at the decision making processes of international students regarding their housing would uncover if some international students intentionally segregated themselves. That was not the case. No data in this thesis pointed to international students actively avoiding moving into housing occupied by locals. Rather, most external influences (agents, housing narratives as portraits by universities, advice from friends, institutional practices, policies, etc.) unintentionally channelled international students into segregated housing options.

The powerful impact of external factors on housing outcomes also explains why international students lived in segregated housing despite their voiced preferences for more cross-cultural contact.

**Conclusion and implications for further research in urban geography**

More detailed research into cross-cultural socialising of international students on campus is needed to confirm that the university and campus environments of The University of Melbourne and Victoria University really are lacking opportunities for meaningful contact. A case study approach to such future research might allow for the design of best practice guidelines based on students who established cross-cultural friendships on campus.

Chapter 2 showed that local and international students were segregated in several ways – one of which was housing. It was argued the literature in urban geography was not providing insights into the housing decision making processes of individual international students. This thesis contributed to the urban geography literature by adding this missing knowledge about international students’ decision making. It was shown in Chapter 4 that interviewees were influenced by agents, universities, friends and families and repeated existing housing patterns of international students, which led them into segregated housing.

In summary, the results of this thesis call for stronger focus on housing as an enabler for cross-cultural contact. The results of this study suggest that the literature in urban geography currently underestimates the importance of housing in enabling cross-cultural contact at Australian universities. Should the findings of this thesis be confirmed in their severity, housing would need to be the main focus in efforts to enable cross-cultural contact.
Relationship between methods and results

Impact of sampling method on results
All 30 interviewees contacted the researcher themselves after having heard about the project (see Chapter 3). Because of this self-selection bias the sample did potentially not represent the population of international students at the two universities accurately. Therefore, statistical statements in this thesis were avoided as these would be prone to error. Interviewees were not compensated and volunteered their time and information. Potentially, interviewees participated because they felt especially passionate about housing issues which might have impacted on the results by overemphasising the role of housing in their lives. Also, shy or timid individuals might have been excluded from the sample because they feared contacting the researcher.

Impact of case study and interview approach on results
The data was collected through in-depth interviews which formed the basis for case studies. The time intervals that international students mentioned when reflecting on their housing decisions were utilised to form the international student housing timeline and consequently shaped the framing of this thesis. A quantitative approach would not have allowed for such results to emerge. Here the data collection method strongly impacted on the outcome of the thesis.

Furthermore, interviewees might have had problems in recalling all relevant information, even when being asked specifically about it, which in turn might have jeopardised the quality of the data.

Impact of the researcher on results
Interviewees might have trusted the researcher because he was an international student himself and felt the information they volunteered was used to benefit international students rather than the universities.

The researcher as an international student himself might have subconsciously sympathised with interviewees rather than treating them purely as informants. Additionally it is important to note that it is considered almost impossible for interviewees to be purely informants because of researcher bias (Yin, 2008).

As the thesis was structured around international student housing, the researcher might have unintentionally interpreted the interview data in a way that overemphasised the importance of housing in the lives of international students. However, following the interview guideline and carefully coding the data this error was tried to be avoided.
Conclusion
Self-selection bias, the qualitative approach, lack of sound numerical data in regards to qualitative measures, and unintended researcher bias might have negatively impacted on the results. The status of the researcher as an international student might have helped establishing a trusting relationship with interviewees and positively impacted the quality of interview outcomes.

Final conclusion of the thesis
This thesis contributed to the academic literature by filling a gap of knowledge through examining the decision-making processes of international students in regards to their housing in Australia.

This new knowledge deepened the understanding of international student housing viewed mainly through the lens of urban geography but also drew on social psychology and educational sociology. All three bodies of literature emphasised the important role of housing in international students’ lives. The majority of international students lived segregated from local students. According to the academic literature, this negatively affected their wellbeing. While institutional practices, public policies, and other external influences contributed to the segregation of the student body, the resulting segregation was unintended.

Earlier research looked at international student housing at a point in time when the housing decisions were already made (see Chapter 2) or were not a relevant issue yet (compare Waters, 2006, 2009). This thesis however, presented the history of international students’ housing decision making from start (Stage 1 ‘Decision to study abroad’) to finish (Stage 6 ‘Graduation’) with the help of the international student housing timeline. This timeline allows universities to target housing assistance to international students when it is most effective. Furthermore, this thesis found earlier research to have underestimated the importance of housing in cross-cultural friendship formation. Consequently, it was suggested that universities and policy makers should actively encourage cross-cultural housing to create the multicultural student body and cross-cultural student experience that was promised to international students in the first place (compare Chapter 1).

The research results from this thesis combined with earlier research provide universities and policy makers with valuable information regarding how they can lessen the segregation within the student body by impacting housing choices and ultimately improve the wellbeing of international students. Suggestions of what such improvements could look like can be found in Appendix A.
By focussing on international students’ housing decision making, this thesis added knowledge to urban geography. Examining housing decision making allowed for the possibility that international students intentionally segregated themselves. This however turned out not to be the case as Chapter 4 showed. New knowledge about when housing decisions were made allows policy makers and university staff to better target their efforts in countering housing segregation. The focus on decision making processes uncovered that some international students chose their housing independently from external influences. Because such students were few in number, urban geography’s traditional approach of focussing on external factors still stands as valid.
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Appendix A: Practical Implications of Research Findings

Introduction to Appendix A
In Chapters 2 and 3 it was argued that knowing when housing decisions were made would improve opportunities for countering housing segregation. Appendix A describes how the findings presented in Chapter 4 could be utilised by universities, policy makers and international students to counteract the current segregation of the student body at Australian universities. All recommendations assume that institutions, policy makers and students themselves have an interest in mitigating this segregation. Considering the results presented in Chapter 4, mitigating segregation should not take priority over ensuring that students are not socially isolated.

How institutions could counteract housing segregation
Institutions might wish to counteract housing segregation because of their duty of care (Deumert et al., 2005; Marginson et al., 2010). Furthermore, cross-cultural housing was positively linked to improved student wellbeing and better academic results (compare Chapter 2). Also, integrated student bodies increased the likelihood of students recommending institutions to their friends. This thesis provided insights into how universities and agents contributed to housing segregation. The following paragraphs suggest how institutions could mitigate housing segregation.

Change the housing narrative
The housing narrative that students and their parents were exposed to shaped their housing decisions and contributed to the current housing segregation by channelling international students into purpose built student accommodation (see Stage 3 of the housing timeline or p. 99). Universities could inform new international students about the true nature of different housing options on their housing websites (which are consulted by all international students). For example, they could state clearly that purpose built student accommodations are exclusively occupied by international students. This might lead some international students to reconsider their housing choice. The websites could also provide information on which housing types are typically chosen by local students. Chapter 4 showed how university housing websites implicated that purpose built student accommodation, college / halls, and shared housing on the free rental market held similar market shares. Offering transparent statistics regarding the different housing types would help to create a more truthful housing narrative.

Change the nature of housing advice provided by educational agents
Research question Q1 showed that following educational agents’ housing advice always resulted in poor housing satisfaction (see Chapter 4). Universities should either put significant
effort into training educational agents in housing matters, or encourage international students to do their own research on housing and avoid agents’ housing advice. While universities have little power to stop the practise of purpose built student accommodation providers to pay agents a commission, they can strongly advise international students to arrange housing through the official university housing websites.

**More university affiliated housing options**

Interviewees at both universities wished more university affiliated housing options had been made available to them and also praised its potential for enabling meaningful cross-cultural contact (see Table 78).

| Male, 23, Hong Kong, Undergraduate, The University of Melbourne | “In some cultures, like Hong Kong or most of the Asian countries, the universities actually provide some cheap accommodation options for the international students, and also for the local students. This gives the students an opportunity to experience uni life. But at Melbourne uni I would describe the residential colleges as a luxury. We received a lot of comments about the University providing cheaper housing options for students. But it is still only under consideration. I don’t think it is likely to happen. I also think that when students first arrange their accommodation from overseas they do not receive accurate information. They do not have the chance to inspect their apartments which disappointed many students. The apartments did not match their expectations. That is causing a problem. There is a big rushing time when the students come to Melbourne and then they find out their option is actually not good.” |
| Female, 23, China, Undergraduate, Victoria University | “I really, really, really recommend that the student village at our University will become bigger or cheaper so that more students can live close to campus. It is better when students live in the student village rather than take a house outside. One reason is safety, and one reason is that our uni can mix cultures in a better way in such a village! I hope they will change that! The Uni should provide the housing service more openly, more easy to access, they should be visible – at the moment their house is almost invisible.” |
| Female, 24, Malaysia, Postgraduate, The University of Melbourne | “[Uni] affiliated houses are really expensive because in terms of Internet, water, electricity they overcharge you a lot. I think it is good to stay there only for the first six month or the first year until you make some friends you can move out with. […] it’s a problem that not many uni affiliated houses are available. The uni should build some more.” |
| Male, 20, China, Undergraduate, Victoria University | “Housing is so much stress, especially at the beginning. I wish VU would just offer us a room in The Village. But that’s not big enough and it’s expensive. VU should offer a room to all students and build another student village.” |

Table 78: Quotes from students calling for more university affiliated housing

By providing housing options for more students (like universities in the UK, US and some Asian locations do already) Australian universities could create better opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural contact. Owning more housing options would also enable universities to provide emergency housing to international students experiencing financial problems. However, due
to high costs attached with building and managing housing options this solution, which students specifically call for, seems unlikely to materialise.

Considering the strong evidence that cross-cultural housing enabled cross-cultural friendship formation (see Chapter 2) and the call for such housing by international students themselves (see Table 78), increasing institutions’ engagement as housing providers might be worth the financial investment.

**Innovative housing programmes**

Australian universities should establish innovative housing programmes and experiment with new ways of providing international students with relevant housing information, like open twitter feeds and discussion forums on the housing website. All truly innovative and technology-based concepts of providing students with housing information require a change of institutional attitude towards information. Honest reporting, done by students themselves rather than by the housing offices as is currently the case, will showcase weaknesses in the housing market and allow new international students to make truly informed housing choices. Universities might be unlikely to establish such programmes as they cannot fully control the public image of their brand any longer.

As an example of an existing innovative housing program, staff at Victoria University mentioned the Housing Buddy program, which was in hibernation during the data collection for this thesis. New international students were put in contact with second or third year international students prior to arriving in Melbourne. The senior students advised the newcomers on housing matters and provided them with valuable word of mouth information. The nature of this programme would have further strengthened the segregation of the student body though. A slight modification of the programme could transform it into a powerful tool in mitigating segregation. New international students could be paired up with local students, which would interrupt the reoccurring repetition of the housing patterns of previous generations of international students. These local housing buddies would likely channel more international students into mixed student housing and ultimately encourage more cross-cultural friendships, which in turn would improve cross-cultural understanding amongst local and international students. The most likely obstacle for such a programme is the recruitment of enough local housing buddies. Consequently, these positions would need to be incentivised in an attractive manner. Students could be rewarded by the right to participate in popular exchange programmes, competitive graduate programmes, or by receiving scholarships. Alternatively, the positions could be part of a university subject dealing with cross-cultural communication or the housing market.
Reflecting on the four conditions for meaningful contact, a weakness of such a programme becomes evident: The housing buddy programme is not on eye level. It suggests a power imbalance. While this new approach is not risk free, universities need to experiment with different solutions to serve international students as well as possible.

**Improve opportunities for cross-cultural contact on campus**
Chapter 4 showed that international students often moved into further housing with their friends or friends of friends. Because most international students only had international friends, further housing options continued to be segregated. All efforts to increase cross-cultural contact on campus will translate into more international students sharing further housing with locals. Especially during the first weeks of university life a lot of events were segregated (see Table 79). International student orientation, Chinese orientation and language specific events provided valuable information to the specific groups but they also made it likely that the particular group takes on an identity of ‘international’, ‘Chinese’ or ‘language specific’.

- International student airport welcome stand organised by industry body
- International student airport pickup organised by the international office at their university
- International student Orientation-Week organised by the international office at their university
- Chinese student Orientation-Week at Victoria University
- Compulsory visit of the international student office as first engagement on campus
- Welcoming and orientation events from purpose built student housing providers
- International student organisations (ISA and MUOSS) run events for new international students at both sampled universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 79: Selection of events for international students prior to regular orientation week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

International students established friendships with other internationals during segregated orientation programmes. When arriving together at the first days of university, the idea that ‘international students only hang out amongst themselves’ was reaffirmed in the minds of local students. As most friendships were formed early on, it is crucial to intensify cross-cultural contact opportunities in the first weeks of the first semester. Maybe it would be helpful to postpone all international-only events to week two or three of the semester.

**Minimise the time pressure international students experience**
In Chapter 4 it was argued that international students who acted under time pressure (close to the start of semester) chose segregated purpose built student accommodations for their initial housing options because it was the easiest way the minimise house hunting stress. Universities might counteract this by providing free temporary housing in residential colleges / halls to international students. During the semester break residential colleges / halls ask undergraduate residents to move out, leaving many rooms unoccupied. These rooms would be
offered to international students for two or three weeks before the usual housing rush at the beginning of semester. International students could go house hunting under less strenuous conditions and would have access to word of mouth information regarding the local housing market by communicating with the remaining postgraduate students and staff in the residential colleges / halls. This approach would also slightly reduce the number of students who are house hunting close to the start of semester. Having international students reside at a residential college for a short time would provide additional opportunities for cross-cultural contact.

**Timing of efforts to help**
The international student housing timeline showed that universities have the strongest impact on international students’ initial housing decisions. Institutions’ limited resources should therefore target students in this early stage. In regards to further housing decisions, maintaining a powerful online housing board / website and maintaining the current quality of drop in services might be sufficient for students without financial problems but to service students with financial difficulties, universities must extend their emergency housing options and housing grants / rental assistance programmes to international students. Additionally universities should persistently and actively advocate for policy changes as described in the following paragraphs.

**Provide more assistance to international students in financial difficulties**
Improving access to loans, emergency housing, and scholarships will benefit international students who are experiencing temporary financial hardship.

**How policy makers could counteract housing segregation**
Policy makers have a duty of care for international students and should therefore counteract housing segregation. Also, higher levels of international student satisfaction improve the likelihood of ongoing economic success of the crucial higher education sector in Australia (compare Chapter 2).

**Provide cheaper public transport**
Chapter 4 showed that the biggest policy issue in relation to housing segregation was expensive public transport. This thesis agrees with Obeng-Odoom (2012, p. 213) who concluded that “a housing policy for international students that focuses solely on supply side, without considering demand side issues such as transport concession is too narrow.”

Cheaper public transport would result in more international students considering housing options that are not within walking distance to their university. Consequently, the housing
market around university campuses would be less pressurised. Cheaper public transport would relieve international students experiencing financial difficulties from some stress.

Public transportation costs could be reduced in different ways. Firstly, international students could be treated like locals and receive a concession card which would reduce public transportation costs by about 50 percent. Alternatively, international students could be granted free public transport in all of Victoria in an effort to spread the financial impact of international students in a fairer way throughout the community. This would likely increase intra-state tourism. Lastly, public transportation could be included in international students’ tuition fees. Public transportation would appear to be free and trigger a wider spread of international students throughout the community and encourage intra-state tourism. Policy makers would cooperate with universities to include public transportation costs into tuition package. No matter which of these options was implemented, cheaper public transportation would relieve some stress from the housing market surrounding the universities and improve access to affordable housing for international students. Many international students in this sample tried to cut their living expenses wherever possible. They perceived it impractical to cut costs on housing by moving further away from campus (where rental costs are lower) as public transport was considered as overly expensive, scary and a waste of precious study and socialising time. Providing international students with free or reduced public transport and ensuring they felt safe during their commute would likely take pressure off them and improve their wellbeing.

**Change visa restrictions regarding work and underage students**

Removing the 20 hours per week limit on international students’ working rights might enable them to work their way out of temporary financial difficulties without being forced to move housing or work illegally.

Also, the visa regulation requiring underage international students to move into homestays might need to be reviewed once further research confirmed the suspicion that such housing setups necessarily resulted in segregating and socially isolating students. The sample size of students in homestays in this thesis (n=2) was too small to make conclusive remarks. So far the results suggest that the matter should be further investigated to ensure the wellbeing of underage international students in Australia. Once further research confirmed the preliminary findings of this thesis, alternative housing arrangements for underage international students (such as living in residential colleges / halls with a high degree of pastoral care) should be considered.
How social networks could counteract housing segregation

Friends
Friends always gave housing advice based on their own experiences. The quality of housing advice through friends can only be changed by exposing them to different housing experiences. This again highlights the importance of this thesis and improving access to cross-cultural housing options for international students.

Family
Families impacted initial housing decisions most strongly and their influences on housing decision diminished over time. Families are unlikely to change their strong preferences for booking housing from overseas. This puts the onus back onto the institutions to provide more cross-cultural housing options that are bookable from overseas, especially affordable housing options for international students from less affluent backgrounds.

Some students and families will experience financial hardship. This puts the onus back onto institutions and policy makers to assist students.

How international students themselves could counteract housing segregation
As mentioned in Chapter 2, many international students wished to have more contact with local students. Housing was shown to be effective in fulfilling this wish (see Chapter 2). In providing international students with clear information about the likely outcomes of different housing scenarios they will be able to make more informed housing decisions. The following tables are meant to aid housing decision making of international students.

Likelihood of emotional and social outcomes with different types of housemates
Table 80 summarises some of the research findings from Chapter 4 in a way that helps international students to think about their potential housemates and housing types in a new way.
By moving into purpose built student accommodation without housemates already established deep friendships among housemates; compare Todd and Nesdale, 1997.

Table 80: Links between relation to housemates prior to moving in and emotional and social outcomes

Chapter 4 and Table 80 show that when friends or friends of friends were available as housemates, moving in with them guaranteed housing satisfaction and emotional support. When no friends or friends of friends were available as housemates it was important to go to a purpose built student accommodation recognising that social isolation was a possible outcome. By moving into purpose built student accommodation without housemates already

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relation to housemates prior to moving in together</th>
<th>Emotional Support in Accommodation</th>
<th>Growth of social network size through accommodation</th>
<th>Cross-cultural contact with locals through accommodation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential College / Hall (High level of pastoral care and 100+ housemates guaranteed the establishment of deep friendships among housemates; compare Todd and Nesdale, 1997)</td>
<td>All interviewees reported strong emotional support in the college / hall environment.</td>
<td>Because of the large number of housemates and the large number of events and socialising opportunities all interviewees made many friends and grew their social network significantly.</td>
<td>All residents in the sample made local friends in their college / hall. No significant separation of local and international students within the accommodation and the associated socialising events was reported.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend of a friend (students had housemates recommended to them through their social network)</td>
<td>All interviewees established deep friendships with their housemates and received emotional support from them.</td>
<td>Housemates utilised each others’ social networks and widened their circles of friends.</td>
<td>Because their housemates and their associated social networks were exclusively international local friendships were never established this way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends before living together (students moved in with a good friend)</td>
<td>As housemates were already good friends with the interviewees they always provided strong emotional support.</td>
<td>Never, housemates already frequented the same social circles and did not grow their social networks through their housemates.</td>
<td>Never, as students’ friends were always internationals students themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively picked stranger (students picked housemate from a range of possible applicants)</td>
<td>Students always had at least some emotional support in their housing. (OK or deep friendships)</td>
<td>Students often engaged with their housemates’ social networks.</td>
<td>Sometimes. In a minority of cases students proactively chose local housemates this way and deep friendships emerged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randomly assigned stranger (students were assigned housemates by landlord without being asked their opinion)</td>
<td>Level of emotional support varied in unpredictable manner: Some interviewees had a lot while others had none.</td>
<td>Some students were able to grow their social networks this way, whereas many were not.</td>
<td>Never, the practice of randomly assigning housemates was only found in housing types exclusively occupied by international students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homestay (underage students are required to stay with host families)</td>
<td>Level of emotional support was very low and students felt isolated.</td>
<td>Because of their social isolation students did not grow their social network through this housing option.</td>
<td>While the host families were local, no meaningful contact with them occurred and no cross-cultural friendships were established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with Partner (student shared housing with their partner)</td>
<td>In cases where housemates were partners, they always provided strong emotional support.</td>
<td>As partners were co-nationals who did not have a pre-existing social network in Melbourne students did not increase the size of their social network through this housing setup.</td>
<td>Partners were co-nationals. Meaning cross-cultural contact was not possible in this housing setup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Alone (students preferred to live in an apartment by themselves)</td>
<td>As students lived by themselves no emotional support was offered through the housing setup.</td>
<td>Interviewees living alone could not benefit from housemates’ social networks.</td>
<td>Interviewees living alone could not engage in cross-cultural contact with housemates.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
known to them (friend or friend of a friend) interviewees moved into a segregated housing option where all housemates were labelled as “randomly assigned strangers”. This type of relationship to future housemates was least likely to result in friendships (only three out of 16 students established a deep friendship with their housemates this way). Colleges / halls and shared housing on the free rental market were better alternatives for students who could not recruit housemates through their social network. Moving into a residential college / hall always allowed for friendships with locals and high housing satisfaction. As this housing option is very expensive, staying there for one semester / one year before moving out with friends made in this environment is a great way to guarantee high housing satisfaction, a large social network and deep friendships with housemates.

**Ideal initial housing type decision matrix for international students**

Chapter 4 showed two factors to be especially important for internationals students’ housing decisions: financial limitations and social networks. The decision making matrix (see Table 81) focuses on what housing type international students should choose in the light of the research presented in earlier chapters. Ideal and alternative choices of housing type are given as well as a suggestion of which housing types are perhaps least preferred. This table is only a reflection of the research findings and does not mean to discredit any housing choices made by individuals.
### Ideal ways of choosing initial housing – a decision matrix for international students wishing to maximise cross-cultural friendships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International students lacking friends that could be utilised as initial housemates in Melbourne</th>
<th>Financially fairly limited international students</th>
<th>International students from a financially sound background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best choice</strong>: shared housing on the free rental market with local strangers (likely to increase size of social network and enable cross-cultural contact)</td>
<td><strong>Alternative choice</strong>: shared housing on the free rental market with international strangers (likely to increase size of social network)</td>
<td><strong>Best choice</strong>: college / hall (guarantees local friends and large social network)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alternative choice</strong>: shared housing on the free rental market with local strangers (likely to increase size of social network)</td>
<td><strong>Less Preferred</strong>: purpose built student accommodation (likely to be socially isolated and likely too expensive); college (too expensive)</td>
<td><strong>Less preferred</strong>: purpose built student accommodation (likely to be socially isolated)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International students with friends that could be utilised as initial housemates in Melbourne</th>
<th><strong>Best choice</strong>: shared housing on the free rental market with your friends or friends of friends as housemates (guaranteed friendly housing environment)</th>
<th><strong>Best choice</strong>: college / hall with your friends or by yourself (guarantees local friends and large social network)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alternative choice</strong>: shared housing on the free rental market with local strangers (likely to increase size of social network and enable cross-cultural contact)</td>
<td><strong>Alternative choices</strong>: purpose built student accommodation or housing on the free rental market with your friends or friends of friends as housemates (moving in with friends eliminates social isolation); shared housing on the free rental market with local strangers (likely to increase size of social network and enable cross-cultural contact)</td>
<td><strong>Less preferred</strong>: purpose built student accommodation by yourself (likely to be socially isolated in the housing context)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less preferred</strong>: purpose built student accommodation with your friends or friends of friends as housemates or by yourself (this housing type is likely to be too expensive and when moving in with friends bares little advantage over shared housing on the free rental market)</td>
<td><strong>Less preferred</strong>: purpose built student accommodation by yourself (likely to be socially isolated in the housing context)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Nodes used during the original coding process

The following lists present the free nodes and tree nodes that were used during the original coding of the interview data with the NVIVO8 software package. When analysing specific research questions tree nodes were repeatedly altered and reorganised.

**Free nodes**
- Arrival in Australia
- Decision pro Melbourne
- Decision pro study abroad
- Effects of Housing Stress
- Exclusion
- Family
- Finances
- Friendship Formation
- Further Housing Outcome
- Housemates
- Housing and Overall Experience
- Housing Knowledge
- Housing Preference
- Housing Problems
- Housing Satisfaction
- Housing Segregation
- Housing Types
- Ideal Housing Strategy
- Initial Housing Outcome
- Parents
- Personal Problems
- Post Graduation Plans
- Predeparture Friends and Programmes
- Previous Housing Experience
- Proactive
- Public Transport and Commuting
- Racism and discrimination
- Safety Security
- Social Network
- Student Clubs
Summary
Time Pressure
University Housing Service
Utility Costs
Visa
Work

**Tree nodes**
Agent
Cultural
Existing Opportunity
Family
Friends
Internet
Previous Experience
Rules Laws
Social Network
Specific Location
Timeline
Uni Other
University Housing Service
University Location
University Website
Author/s:
KUESTENMACHER, SIMON

Title:
Student housing as social opportunity: external influences on international students' housing decisions

Date:
2014

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/43246

File Description:
Student housing as social opportunity: external influences on international students' housing decisions