Visible Homelessness

A Study in the Melbourne CBD and the City of Yarra

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Acknowledgments

1. INTRODUCTION

Local governments are at the forefront of the challenges posed by homelessness. Homelessness is a persistent and complex social issue requiring well-coordinated and long-term strategies to solve. As such, local governments have a limited capacity to effectively address the structural causes of homelessness. However, how local governments engage with homelessness at the local level has significant implications for the homeless population as well as the broader municipal community.

In lieu of lasting solutions to the issue of homelessness, local governments must balance their aims of creating clean and orderly public spaces with the rights of homeless residents to access those spaces. The issue of rough-sleepers and their belongings has been the subject of serious contention relating to the aesthetic and regulatory challenges they pose for local governments. In early 2017, the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Robert Doyle, announced plans to amend the Local Laws, claiming the belongings of homeless people constitute barriers to movement, and that local businesses are adversely affected by rough-sleepers in the area.

In September, the City of Melbourne decided not to adopt the proposed amendments to its Local Laws debated earlier in 2017, adopting instead a formal operating protocol in conjunction with Victoria Police, to address encampments of rough sleepers and those who 'aggressively' beg from members of the public. The protocol prohibits the gathering of groups of people sleeping rough in close proximity, specifies a 'reasonable' amount of possessions (namely, 'two bags which can be carried, and 'bedding like a sleeping bag, blanket or pillow'), and stipulates that ensuring unimpeded movement within and enjoyment of public space by members of the public to be the primary aim of the protocol.

Debates, and decisions made, within this municipality during 2017 seem to have been animated by claims that visible homelessness has adverse consequences for members of the public, and that these are likely to involve impediments to use of public space and the risk of to the welfare of the public.

Our research study sought to test some of these claims in the Cities of Yarra and Melbourne. The views of local businesses regarding homelessness and how it affects them were gathered through interviews and, through observational fieldwork, data was gathered regarding the physical spaces and belongings connected to those visibly experiencing homelessness.

Both Yarra and Melbourne are highly diverse municipalities, with historically longstanding populations of homeless people and other marginalised groups in public spaces. Yarra explicitly recognises the rights of homeless people to be in public space whereas Melbourne does not. Both municipalities have protocols determining when and how people should be approached. In both municipalities, when the presence of a homeless person or their belongings are deemed to constitute a hazard or impediment to amenity, city officials will remove a person's belongings and move them to another area.

This research found that the presence of visibly homeless people and their belongings do not constitute a serious impediment to the enjoyment of shared spaces by members of the public.

1.1 Executive Summary of Key Findings

- Homelessness is seen by traders as less of a problem than theft, drunkenness and vandalism.
- When homelessness is seen as coinciding with other problematic behaviours (such street drug use and sales), homelessness is regarded as a greater problem for traders than when these other behaviours are not present.
- Homeless people are generally viewed with sympathy, and most respondents support the idea of greater support and service provision for them.
- Many members of the public are either unaffected by visible homelessness or seek to interact with homeless individuals in a positive or supportive way.
- Most sites at which homelessness is visible are maintained in an orderly manner; others have minimal to moderate impact on members of the public.
- When activities such as street drug use and sales combines with activities associated with homelessness, sites become volatile and may also become larger.
- Homelessness often results in transience, meaning that sites can emerge and disappear rapidly.
- Significant variation at times was found between the two municipalities. Variation might result from a number of factors, singly or in combination, including differences in the built environment between the Melbourne CBD and the City of Yarra; differences in the populations using the two areas, with the CBD attracting larger numbers of transient members of the public; and differences in social attitudes that may reflect variations in social policy adopted within the two municipalities.
- No significant impediments to members of the public were observed at any sites during the project, in either municipality,

2. NOTABLE APPROACHES IN OTHER CITIES

A number of cities provide valuable comparative considerations when thinking about responses to homelessness in the Melbourne CBD and the City of Yarra.

2.1 Sydney

The regulation of visible homelessness in Sydney is informed by the New South Wales Government's *Protocol for Homeless People in Public Spaces*. The purpose of these guidelines is to 'help ensure that homeless people are treated respectfully and appropriately and are not discriminated against on the basis of their situation' (2013: 4). The protocol identifies the right of homeless people to be in public space and to participate in public events and life. In addition, the protocol delimits the grounds for police and city officers to approach homeless people. However, the protocol specifies that it only applies 'to homeless people who are in public places and acting lawfully', with the implication that those acting unlawfully are not protected (2013: 6). In addition, despite the stated right of visibly homeless people to be in public space, the City of Sydney employs public space liaison officers for the express purpose of responding to issues arising from visible homelessness in public places (City of Sydney website).

Unlike in Victoria, begging is not a criminal offence in New South Wales. Police and authorised municipal officers are not able to respond directly to this specific behaviour associated with homelessness. However, a range of regulatory responses by the police to homelessness still occur. There is an array of public order legislation that police and city officials draw upon to target people experiencing homelessness. In 2011, the New South Wales Parliament amended the *Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act 2002* (NSW) to grant police additional powers to move people on. Part 14 of the Act spells out the various criteria allowing police to direct a person to move on which include, if a person is obstructing another person, or if their presence 'constitutes harassment or intimidation', 'is likely to cause fear in a person of reasonable firmness' irrespective of whether another person is in the vicinity, is intoxicated and their intoxication is disorderly or gives rise to a risk to public safety or to persons comprising a group (ss. 197, 198, 198a). In addition to this, the *Summary Offences Act 1988* (NSW) was also amended to create a new offence of failing to comply with a police directive. These broad laws grant police an exceptionally high degree of discretion. Academic research and policy evaluation studies have shown over the years and in numerous jurisdictions that discretionary enforcement of public order provisions often disproportionally affect people experiencing homelessness (Adams 2014; Walsh 2008; Australian Human Rights Commission 2009).

In August 2017, after a 'tent city' of homeless people had evolved in Martin Place in central Sydney, the NSW Parliament passed the *Sydney Public Reserves (Public Safety) Bill 2017* (NSW) for the express purpose of its removal. The Lord Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore, had refused to order the camp's removal, referencing the guidelines' stated protection of the right of homeless people to be in public places and stating that the provision of long-term housing is the only effective solution to the situation. However, in response to Mayor Moore's stance, the Bill was introduced by Premier Gladys Berejiklian, and despite the guidelines disallowing discrimination against homeless people on the basis of their homelessness, this law granted police additional powers to remove unlawful occupations of Crown land, and the camp began dispersing peacefully within hours of the Bill being passed.

In short, while begging is not a criminal offence in NSW and while the City of Sydney nominally recognises the right of homeless people to be present in public places, there exists an extensive (and growing) array of legislative interventions allowing police and city officials to target visible homelessness and the perceived public disorder associated with it.

2.2 Seattle

Seattle has seen an ongoing struggle over homeless people's occupation of public space for more than ten years. In 2005, the city authorities announced a 10-year plan to end homelessness in the city; despite this, rates of homelessness continued to climb, thanks, it is said, to a persistent lack of affordable and social housing (Sparks 2017).

The city council's response to the worsening situation was unusual. In 2015, Seattle City Council voted to legalise homeless encampments on city property, one of a very few cities in the United States to do so (Sparks 2017). While this move undoubtedly stabilised and legitimised homeless camps, it also made them directly subject to governance and regulation by the city. For example, the camps are mandated to allow regular access to city officials, and representatives from various social and housing services, as well as being required to maintain city-defined standards of upkeep.

Legalisation of the camps also does little to address the lack of affordable and built-for-purpose accommodation. Camps continue to emerge, but only some are 'approved' while others remain 'unapproved'. This means that legalisation of homeless camps has not precluded the use of enforcement-based approaches such as 'sweeps'. These are carried out by city officials and involve the removal and sometimes disposal of belongings, and in the case of unsanctioned camps, the forcible eviction of people and the destruction of their temporary shelters. Sweeps were supposedly regulated by the Taskforce on Unsanctioned Encampment Cleanup Protocol; however, this was updated in April 2017 in the face of intense criticism of how sweeps were being carried out.

Seattle also has a range of public order ordinances relating to panhandling, begging, 'spanging' (begging without a sign), loitering, pedestrian interference, prostitution, nuisance (relating to noise, public urination, intoxication, obstruction of access and solicitation), trespassing on government land, sitting in the street and loitering with intent to engage in drug-related activity, all of which can be used against people experiencing homelessness (homelessyouth.org). In short, while the legalisation of camps was a welcome development, such a strategy did not preclude punitive approaches to regulating homelessness. Indeed, in Seattle's case, the legalisation of certain areas for use by people experiencing homelessness appears to have produced a stronger incentive to intervene when homelessness is encountered outside of sanctioned spaces.

2.3 Manchester

In the United Kingdom (UK), behaviours associated with homelessness such as begging, wilfully obstructing passage or causing alarm or distress are outlawed (*Vagrancy Act 1824; Highways Act 1980; Public Order Act 1986*). In addition, the UK has been at the forefront of public order and quality-of-life legislation (exemplified by the ASBO, or anti-social behaviour order) which can disproportionately affect the homeless (Winford 2006).

Like most cities, Manchester has a strategic framework for dealing with homelessness. This aims for a steady reduction in the numbers of homeless through a coordinated service effort, including the implementation of standards like 'No Second Night Out' (*Manchester City Homelessness Strategy* 2013-2018). However, these ambitious goals are undermined by a watering-down of protections, such as reforms introduced allowing local authorities to discharge their duty of care for homeless people with an offer of accommodation as well as empowering landlords to grant fixed term tenancies.

In the last several years, Manchester has experienced a significant increase in homelessness, with the number of rough-sleepers in the city quadrupling since 2010 (Perraudin 2017). The backdrop to these increases includes a lack of affordable housing, the widespread closure of hostels and boarding rooms, and cuts to social services at both national and local levels. The city has been under considerable pressure to act from multiple sources: those frustrated with the presence of rough-sleepers in the city and those demanding increased funding for specialist homelessness services following funding cuts in 2015 (*Manchester Evening News* 2015). In response to an ongoing protest by homeless people, a court injunction defined acceptable forms of shelter that homeless people could use. Doorways, cardboard boxes, bus shelters and sleeping bags were approved, while structures such as tents were banned, in an attempt to evict protestors without removing rough-sleepers (Williams 2015).

This year, a plan to end homelessness in Greater Manchester by 2020 formed a key pillar of the election campaign of the new mayor, Andy Burnham. Burnham announced he would donate 15% of his personal salary to establish a mayor's homelessness fund, and encouraged the local business community to join in. Monies will be distributed to homelessness services. In this vein, Burnham has publicly opposed national reforms to welfare payments (termed 'Universal Credit') because it will likely further double the numbers of rough-sleepers (Halliday 2017). Reform of laws directly affecting homeless people, such as those targeting behaviour associated with homelessness, does not appear to be part of the strategy, with prevention envisioned as the key.

3. A RESEARCH PROJECT ON VISIBLE HOMELESSNESS

The researchers carried out a study of visible homelessness at selected sites in each municipality. 'Visible homelessness' was defined to mean the presence of individuals who appeared to be homeless (for example, by sleeping in public places, or by displaying signs stating they were homeless) or of goods that appeared to belong to homeless individuals. Visibility was interpreted to mean that the individuals or their belongings could be seen by members of the public. Some sites were more obviously public than others: main thoroughfares, for example, provided highly visible locations in which the homeless person or their goods could be seen by many individuals at a given time. Others were sites that were visible only to a few individuals, such as laneways at the rear or commercial or residential premises. All sites were discussed with representatives from either the City of Yarra or Justice Connect and were either highly visible locations in the CBD, such as Swanston, Bourke and Elizabeth Streets, or, in the City of Yarra, included sites identified by council staff as locations that had, to varying degrees, resulted in the presence of the homeless occupant, or their belongings, being noticed by others.

The researchers sought to investigate a number of issues at each site. First, observation was carried out at the locations, to determine the characteristics of each site and its visual impact upon those using the space. Observations were carried out for varying lengths of time and at different times of day. Documentation was made using written notes, and, when it was possible to do so unintrusively, by photographing the site. Second, the researchers investigated the views of traders in the vicinity of each identified site, in order to discover their engagement with the site and any views as to its use by homeless individuals. The project's methods were reviewed by the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee, and protocols were agreed in order to ensure that the privacy of all individuals was respected.

3.1 interviews with Traders

Thirty interviews were conducted with representatives of businesses operating in the City of Yarra and City of Melbourne municipalities. In addition to being a business owner, one interviewee was also the president of a registered business association representing a commercial area in the suburb of Richmond in the City of Yarra. The number of interviews was split evenly between municipalities. Interviewees were approached at their place of work. Where possible, researchers sought to interview the owner or a manager. Where not possible, the interviewee's length of employment at the business was established. No interviews were conducted with someone who had been employed at that location for fewer than six months. Business types varied widely, and included restaurants, grocery and food stores, clothing retail, travel agents, supermarkets, convenience stores and a tattoo removal parlour.

Interviews were primarily conducted in the business areas along Victoria Street in Richmond, Smith and Brunswick Streets in Fitzroy and along Swanston, Collins, Flinders and Bourke Streets in Melbourne's CBD. These areas were prioritised for their high concentration of businesses as well as a noticeable presence of homeless and other marginalised communities. Data collection in one area (Victoria Street) swiftly revealed that homelessness was an issue

that was difficult to separate from the activities engaged in by other individuals, both for interviewees and, at times, for the researchers, since sites observed were being used for activities connected with other behaviours, such as street dealing and purchase of drugs. It was notable in this area that interviewees frequently conflated homelessness with other issues: when questioned about their views on homelessness, interviewees immediately expressed frustration about drug use in the area, which they assumed to be associated with homelessness.

The views of the business communities about visible homelessness were highly diverse. All interviewees acknowledged the visible presence of homelessness and rough-sleepers and regarded it as relevant to the operation of their business. The relevance of the issue, however, was not correlated to its having a direct impact upon the business.

3.1.1 Analysis

- 83% (n25) said that homelessness had no impact on the business or that the impact was small or manageable.
- 56% (n17) regard the homeless community positively and empathise with their situation.
- 56% (n17) reported having positive or friendly interactions with homeless people on a regular basis.
- 46% (n14) view local government efforts in the area positively.
- 66% (n20) reported other issues (theft, drug use, public drunkenness, busking) as having a more serious impact on their business than homelessness.
- 30% (n9) reported that materials, belongings and rubbish associated with homelessness created a problem for the business.
- 73% (22) would like to see a solution that involves more support and assistance for people experiencing homelessness, while 6% (n2) did not and 20% (n6) were unsure.

Overall, most interviewees stated that the impact of homelessness on their business was either negligible or small. Though many of these reported being affected by homelessness emotionally, or talked about the effect of homelessness on the area or city generally. For example, one interviewee stated:

> *This is such a rich city and country, what does it say about us that we're unwilling to share that?*

Many also differentiated between wanting a reduced presence of visibly homeless people and supporting stronger regulatory interventions against homeless people. While many reported encountering homelessness on a daily basis, the majority saw this as a result of inadequate support systems and government action with some businesses actively trying to assist and support homeless people. For example, one business located on Flinders Street said that while homelessness did impact on their business, they still donated cardboard boxes for use as bedding and allowed homeless people to use their toilet.

Others were also keen to emphasise that they did not blame homeless individuals but, rather, the failure of government to support them:

> *Of course there's an issue with homelessness here, you can't ignore it. It's just part of being on Smith Street: it just blends into the background… What causes it doesn't matter though: drugs, mental health, whatever, that shouldn't be the focus. They just need more support and housing.*

While many interviewees reported noticing belongings in the street, this was different to being adversely impacted by them. In addition, of those respondents who considered rubbish and possessions to be a problem for them, several clarified that it was not homeless people leaving them. One interviewee who regularly has people sleep in the doorway of her business said that in the morning she'd have to clear away unwanted donations made to homeless people by members of the public:

> *They sleep in my doorway at night but are usually gone by the time I arrive. But people leave things for them while they're sleeping but it's stuff they don't want or need, so obviously they don't take it with them. So, I end up clearing away other people's donations.*

However, she had also found that the presence of a homeless person had some unexpected benefits:

> *I know this is a terrible thing to say, but someone sleeping in my doorway stops drunk people pissing and vomiting in it. Graffiti too, I used to get more of that here.*

Those that did report an effect on their business were unable to quantify the impact in terms of lost revenue: as one interviewee put it, '*You can't count the money you don't make or the customers that don't come in*'.

Instead, the problems they reported were harder to quantify: time spent cleaning up what they perceive as mess, finding interactions with homeless people emotionally difficult, or a generalised sense of frustration. For example:

> *It's not a problem exactly, but if someone is in distress, dealing with that person can be difficult or upsetting for my employees so I have to manage that really proactively.*

Only three respondents, all located in the Victoria Street area, reported a significant negative impact. However, all associated homelessness with other issues (notably, drug use). One interviewee stated:

> *They have homes, they're all using drugs. They pretend, so they can not work and not pay taxes, that's how they get government money and free housing: using drugs.*

Another respondent in the same area said: '*All homeless, all use drugs. Very, very bad.*'

These responses manifest frustration with issues of public order, but also demonstrate how homelessness may become conflated with other issues.

Of those that felt their business was adversely affected by homelessness, not all supported increased regulatory interventions. In fact, most simply wanted effective, and lasting, solutions:

> *Arrest them, move them, help them, anything!*

Police come but don't do anything. Help comes but they just come back. Do something!

Like those concerned about drug use, many took the opportunity to express frustration about other issues. Several noted drunk people on weekends as a major problem for their businesses. They reported a number of problematic behaviours associated with drunkenness, such as public urination, vandalism and disruptive behaviour. One store clerk reported that young intoxicated men come in and steal from the store during the evening trading hours; others constitute a nuisance through drunken pranks (such as bringing traffic cones into the store).

One business in Melbourne's CBD reported persistent problems with buskers:

Most of our job is communication and when someone is right outside doing a bad Oasis cover, you just can't do your job… We have reported it to the council and they do move elsewhere but then someone new sees the spot and starts up. It's a regular thing we have to deal with.

In each municipality, the majority of respondents stated that the effect of homelessness on their business was low. There were, however, some notable differences between the two areas.

- In Yarra, 73% (n11) of businesses reported holding the homeless community in a positive regard whereas only 40% (n6) in the City of Melbourne reported the same.
- In Yarra, 66% (n10) regarded local government efforts on homelessness positively, compared with just 26% (n4) in Melbourne.
- In the CBD, 73% (n11) reported holding some negative views of the area compared to 26% (n4) in Yarra.
- 86% (n13) of participants in Yarra saw increased support and assistance as their preferred solution while 60% (n9) in Melbourne though the same.

Notably, only one CBD interviewee reported participating in the Project Connect Respect program, although this was not an issue explicitly investigated by the research study.

3.1.2 Key Findings from Interviews

- Homelessness is seen by traders as less of a problem than theft, drunkenness and vandalism.
- When homelessness is seen as coinciding with other problematic behaviours (such street drug use and sales), homelessness is regarded as a greater problem for traders than when these other behaviours are not present.
- Homeless people are generally viewed with sympathy, and most respondents support the idea of greater support and service provision for them, although there are variations in the strength of these views between the two municipalities.

3.2. Site Observations

The observational fieldwork conducted as part of this project focused on the visible presence of individuals engaging in activities associated with homelessness, such as rough-sleeping or begging, and of goods and materials associated with these behaviours.

The aims were to ascertain the level of public interaction with individuals and/or their belongings, and to assess whether materials appeared to impede the access to amenities or services of other street users.

Observations were conducted discreetly: if a person was present with their belongings, care was taken to not alert them to our purpose. In addition, care has been taken to not include any identifying details in data analysis. Periods of observation usually lasted between 30 minutes to an hour, though some were significantly shorter (for example, if an individual packed up their belongings and left the area).

Sites across both municipalities were chosen either because they were known to be frequented by people engaging in rough-sleeping and begging, or because the site had been identified by the City of Yarra or Justice Connect as currently inhabited by a homeless person.

Many of these sites were situated in high-visibility commercial areas. In these cases, the people observed were usually begging – an activity that requires a level of visibility. However, other sites were well-hidden and were being used solely for living and sleeping. In the latter sites, data collection was much more difficult, and was often curtailed by the researcher's desire to respect the privacy of the site's inhabitant. The main sites for observation were along Brunswick and Smith Streets in Fitzroy, Victoria Street in Richmond in the City of Yarra and Collins, Swanston, Bourke and Flinders Streets in the CBD. Supplementing these was a collection of other sites where data was collected in one-off periods of observation. The dynamic nature of the practices of homeless and rough sleepers meant that several areas that had been named as highly active sites, such as Swan Street in Richmond, yielded few opportunities for data collection.

This highlights an important issue arising from the nature of homelessness: transience and instability. Areas with high activity at the beginning of data collection later became inactive, and other areas not initially slated for observation were added on later as they became active. Homelessness and rough-sleeping (and consequently, the materials associated with them) are characterised by inconsistency and impermanence.

The sites and types of materials observed varied dramatically. Some sites consisted of a single person sitting on the street, arms and legs pulled in close with nothing but an upturned cap in front of them. Other sites had multiple people, mattresses, milk crates, animals, blankets, food, bags and even homely decorations and utilities in them. Sometimes belongings were highly organised and neat with the individual trying to minimise the impact on other street users while others were messy and haphazard. Some sites were marked by low activity, with people either sleeping or huddled up. In others, people engaged actively with passers-by, chatting, calling out or displaying a variety of signs. In one site, homelessness and rough-sleeping was present but were overshadowed by a highly dynamic illicit drug trade. This site was marked by intense activity sometimes involving approximately a dozen individuals.

3.2.1 Analysis

Most sites observed involved minimal materials associated with homelessness or rough-sleeping. A typical site might include a begging cap, a drink bottle, a mat or crate for sitting on and a bag. At such sites, the impact on other people accessing the space was negligible. Pedestrians had to avoid stepping on or running into the person, though this is the same amount of care required for any non-homeless person encountered on the street.

Some sites were positioned on corners or were characterised by spread-out and disorganised belongings. In these sites, pedestrians were required to proactively navigate the materials, though all those observed managed this with ease. These sites were more common in the CBD.

Researchers observed the public interacting with the people inhabiting observation sites many times, usually to donate. Donations usually appeared to be money, with food or drink observed as an alternative donation.

No interactions were observed that appeared to be unsupportive or aggressive. Members of the public either continued their activities apparently unaffected, or engaged in an apparently supportive interaction with the homeless person. The relative frequency of donations, whether of money or food, and of conversations indicates that many hold a sympathetic perspective on homelessness and wish to engage in a helpful or positive manner. However, researchers did note that interactions (whether or not accompanied by a donation) were more frequent in Yarra than in Melbourne.

Sites marked by the presence of more material possessions resulted in more obvious impact on the physical space of the street and the other users of the space. The more belongings present at a site, the more space was rendered unavailable for others. It was noted, however, that sites with a lot of belongings were less likely to be in prime commercial spaces or on major pedestrian through-routes. The few locations that both had a considerable amount of materials and a location on busy pavements were generally maintained to a high degree of neatness. One site observed on Brunswick Street, and later having moved to Johnston Streets, was decorated with a palm frond. The person using the site had even installed hooks on the wall from which to hang bags to minimise the impact of their belongings on the space available to others. However, a few sites, notably on Elizabeth Street in the CBD, were large and highly disorganised.

An important distinction that emerged from the research data is the difference between sleeping rough and begging. These behaviours are distinct though may co-occur and tend to be conflated with one another. A person may be begging in one area but sleeping elsewhere, inhabiting prime commercial space but not begging, or sleeping in and begging in the same space. The differences between these may appear minor but are important: the type of activity often determines where it is taking place as well as what kind of goods are present. For example, many people observed engaging in begging had very few belongings with them, while sites with many belongings were often in isolated areas or were hidden away.

3.2.2 Differences between Municipalities

Observation sites tended to be more active and were easier to find in Melbourne than Yarra. Melbourne's CBD is highly concentrated, and is geographically smaller than Yarra. Observation in the Melbourne CBD was more predictable than in the City of Yarra. Sites were more stable and, if a site had become inactive, others could easily be found nearby. In addition, Yarra has many more alleys, alcoves, vacant lots and back streets than Melbourne, which the homeless can utilise for ad hoc shelter and privacy. Due to the geographic size, comparatively low density of Yarra, and the greater dynamism of use by homeless people of locations within the area, longstanding sites within the municipality were harder to come by. Travelling to, from or between sites also took more time and effort.

The resulting difficulties for data collection were significant. For example, at one site in Yarra, there is an ornamental rotunda in a park which has a small gate granting access to the space underneath the rotunda's floor. Researchers observed several people who appeared to be homeless entering the gate, though had no way of documenting this without entering it themselves. There were multiple sites like this in Yarra to which the researchers could not gain access for a variety of reasons.

Sites in Yarra were generally well-maintained compared to those in the CBD. One location in Yarra was decorated, and hooks had been installed on the wall from which the occupant could hang bags to keep them off the street. In Melbourne, locations where people were sleeping tended to be the most disorderly. One site on Elizabeth Street comprised two mattresses (both occupied), and a large collection of backpacks, shopping bags, blankets, crates and other miscellaneous goods spread around them. While this site was not located near a building's entrance, its size did mean the space for available for pedestrians was noticeably reduced. CBD locations are both more visible, as a result of the nature of the built environment and of the high numbers of people using the area, and sometimes used both for sleeping and begging, meaning that a homeless person's goods may be visible to more people and for longer periods of the day. In Yarra, homeless people tended to beg in highly public or frequently used space, and then move elsewhere for sleep and privacy.

One notable difference was the frequency with which homeless people received donations. This was observed to be more common in Yarra than in Melbourne. In Yarra, researchers observed numerous occasions on which people received multiple donations, and it was uncommon for donations not to be made. In the CBD, donations were less frequent, and some periods of observation saw no donations made.

3.2.3 Key Findings from Observations

- Many members of the public are either unaffected by visible homelessness or seek to interact with homeless individuals in a positive or supportive way.
- Most locations at which homelessness is visible are maintained in an orderly manner; others have minimal to moderate impact on members of the public.
- When activities such as street drug use and sales combines with activities associated with homelessness, sites become volatile and may also become larger.
- Homelessness often results in transience, meaning that sites can emerge and disappear rapidly.

- No significant impediments to members of the public were observed at any locations during the project.
- Researchers observed notable differences in responses to homeless people by members of the public between the two municipalities. These variations might arise from differences in the built environment, in the populations using the public spaces of the two municipalities, and through the effects of social policies adopted in the two areas. influence by external factors on this such as local policy or the built environment.

While possessions associated with homelessness can have some impact on an area, claims that they constitute a significant impediment for access to buildings, businesses and services are not borne out in our study.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Our research showed that visible homelessness, in the form of the behaviours and materials associated with it, is marked by diversity and impermanence. People who are experiencing homelessness occupy public space in a variety of ways. They may be neat or messy, quiet or loud; sites can be small and contained, or spread out and disorganised. Regardless of how homeless people occupy space, the impact of their inhabitation of space along with their belongings on other street users was shown in this study to be minimal.

Few businesses reported being directly or negatively impacted by the presence of homeless people, though many expressed both their concerns for their welfare and a desire for more to be done at all levels of government. Those that did report a negative impact on their business expressed high levels of frustration. Their only preference was that the solution, whatever it is, be effective.

It should be noted that not finding evidence of direct impact does not mean that encounters with homelessness in public space are not emotionally confronting or challenging. The generosity shown to people inhabiting the street suggests that encountering homelessness does have an emotional effect on other users of the street. Several interviewees stated that while homelessness had no effect on their business economically, the fact that people in their community are homeless should be seen as a problem within the whole community. This report does not therefore claim that nothing should be done about visible homelessness, but rather that claims about the impact of homelessness on businesses and other members of the public using public space are ill-founded and should not be overstated.

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