The Well-Being of People Experiencing Homelessness: Sharing Space Examined Through the Lenses of Architecture and Social Work

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Summary
The sharing of space and social cohabitation in large cities is subject to various diktats. Between real estate speculation, revitalization, densification, and population movements, this sharing is often disrupted. What studies to date show is an unequal sharing of this space, to the detriment of marginalized populations, especially those experiencing homelessness. To be attractive, cities repel populations perceived as undesirable in terms of commercial and tourist activities. The access of people experiencing homelessness (PEH) to the city is therefore compromised, mainly because of their occupation of public space, which is deemed to be at fault. They have nowhere to go, nowhere to disappear. At the same time, when it comes to dealing with populations experiencing homelessness, housing is often placed as the cornerstone of all intervention approaches, and it is from housing that social reintegration (in a micro-sociological sense) or the reduction of social inequalities (in a macro-sociological sense) is thus thought through. What's more, many Western cities, such as Montréal (Quebec, Canada), are experiencing major housing crises, making access to housing more difficult than ever. Is it possible, then, to exist, use, circulate, and meet in spaces, without being anchored to a dwelling? This article seeks to take a fresh look at the practices involved in living together and social cohabitation, in order to identify those that contribute most to the well-being of PEH. More specifically, by turning to design practices (architecture, design, urban planning) and social intervention practices (social work, mediation, care), we will attempt to shift our gaze to encourage better sharing of urban spaces.

Keywords
Homelessness, architecture, social work, cities, inclusive design

Introduction

When we look at the sharing of public space, the reflexive process that follows invites us to examine not only physical delimitations and regulations, but also formal and informal expectations, recommended or prohibited uses, and the populations concerned. Public space is generally understood to be an outdoor or indoor space that can be used by all without any restrictions linked to this use (apart from public regulations); it is therefore often associated with the notion of accessibility (Blanchard et al., 2021; Gehl, 2012). This access is thus sometimes compromised for certain populations, both for issues of physical accessibility, when the place is not adapted to the mobility capacities of certain people; or for issues of symbolic accessibility, when we want to restrict access to a population perceived as being undesirable in the place (Margier et al., 2014; St-Louis, 2021). If access to space is an important component, so too is the way it is used. Indeed, there can be different uses of public space depending on the ways in which
it is perceived, conceived, and experienced (in reference to the triptych of space according to Lefebvre, 1991). Iveson (1998) defines the notion of public space using three models. First, there is the "ceremonial" model, which recognizes public space as a public and civic asset (notably through state ownership of these places). These places escape private ownership and are thus often associated with protest and celebration. He then identifies a "community" model, whereby space is considered public not because of its ownership (state vs. private), but rather by its capacity to host a community. Then, finally, he mentions a third and final "liberal" model, which conceives of public space as that which is accessible and open to all, without exception, linked to social differences. It is this third model that Iveson criticizes, as it invites the opposite injunction: "to be open to all those who are like us," i.e., open to those who engage in socially sanctioned behaviour. He therefore attempts to provide a theoretical framework for thinking about a fourth, "multi-public" model, which is based instead on taking account of differences in public space, and which considers that public space should be differentiated, to celebrate the difference between the groups that use it, and to allow various groups to establish their own norms within it (Iveson, 1998).

In this sense, what certain studies tell us is that the different ways in which urban public space is shared are to the detriment of certain groups. In fact, some studies show that, in order to make full use of public space, people must have their own private space (Bellot, 2005; 2021; Laberge & Roy, 2001; Lavigne, 2014; Loison-Leruste, 2014). People who do not have this private space, which is particularly the case for PEH, find themselves performing intimate acts in public space (sleeping, urinating, etc.) or occupying public space, which is perceived as misuse. They, therefore, receive a high number of infraction notices because this use is deemed to be wrongful (Bellot, 2005; 2021; Laberge & Roy, 2001; Lavigne, 2014; Loison-Leruste, 2014). This means that public space does not accommodate all the different groups it could. We could then say that access to the city and the use of its public spaces are increasingly restricted for PEH.

In terms of preferred intervention practices to support populations experiencing homelessness, the Housing First approach is often put forward as the solution (Namian, 2018; Rose & Hurtubise, 2018). Indeed, obtaining housing is often placed as the cornerstone of the steps to be taken to get out of homelessness, and it is from housing that social reintegration (in a micro-sociological way) or even the reduction of social inequalities (in a macro-sociological way) is therefore thought of (Margier et al., 2014). Yet social and affordable housing is increasingly scarce in major Western cities, all of which are under pressure from real estate speculation (Meunier, 2020; Payeur, 2013; Robin, 2009). How can we think about social reintegration, residential stability, and poverty reduction when housing accessibility is reduced?

In order to make themselves more attractive, especially to attract investment and tourists, cities make populations perceived as undesirable invisible by relocating them to city outskirts (Bourgeois, 2008; Jouenne, 2007). At the same time, the revitalization of certain neighbourhoods is often to the detriment of the existing social fabric (Bélanger & Cameron, 2016). At the heart of this reflection lies the big question of social cohabitation and the representations that individuals make of the ideal uses of public spaces. Some populations, because they have no fixed abode, are, on the one hand, perceived as systematically misusing indoor spaces (by loitering in shopping malls, restaurants, libraries, etc.) or outdoor spaces (by occupying sidewalks, park benches, subway stations, etc.). On the other hand, these same populations, because they don't have a home of their own, find themselves in the public space to live out their daily lives. Sometimes they are waiting for a shelter or daycare centre to open, and sometimes they no longer have temporary access to shelters or day centres. More often than not, this daily life in the public space leads to over-judicialization, as well as the withdrawal of these populations from it through various police interventions. Bellot's team has demonstrated through various surveys that this over-judicialization is also a matter of social profiling (Bellot et al., 2005; 2021). Whether through municipal bylaws, laws, or various hostile practices (social, police, sanitary, architectural), PEH are pushed back, and, therefore, called upon to be constantly displaced (Herring, 2019).

In this article, we will discuss social cohabitation in its broadest sense, without framing the question in terms of housing, by
focusing on the different ways of existing in the city, considering that some populations do not enjoy equal access to it (Wasserman & Clair, 2010). Since private interior spaces are difficult to obtain, but public exterior space is mainly accessible to people that are housed, can we then exist in the city without inhabiting the city beyond housing? Our proposal will centre around three ideas. (1) Access to the city is increasingly difficult and restricted for certain populations. (2) Public policies are mostly focused on individuals and housing. (3) Communities and their social infrastructures could be included in the adaptation of social intervention and planning practices, in order to make public space more accessible to PEH. By diving into various social interventions and architectural practices, this article explores how different practices in both interior and exterior spaces can promote the well-being of PEH and encourage access to space.

Partial Access to the City

In contemporary Western cities, the way we live, circulate, use, and perceive space depends on a variety of informal and formal norms that categorize space (Lefebvre, 1991). These norms are socially constructed and may include relationships of power that influence our use of space (Bourdieu, 1993). Cities are often in economic competition and subject to real estate and aesthetic pressures that affect the sharing of space (Bélanger & Cameron, 2016). Cities will, therefore, both invest in (or divest from) certain spheres of development (social housing, public infrastructure, roads, etc.) in order to transform the identity of neighbourhoods to make them economically attractive, in a perspective of international and regional influence (Parazelli, 2013). In the context of certain revitalization processes, the visibility of marginalized people becomes, for a number of players, a social, symbolic, and aesthetic obstacle to the demands of ongoing economic development (Amster, 2003, 2008; Mitchell, 2003). To prevent PEH from occupying coveted tourist spaces, various strategies are used: compulsory consumption to occupy certain spaces, park regulations restricting access to these spaces after certain hours, absence of water points or public sanitary facilities, and excessive judicialization of harmless behaviour (Bellot et al., 2005; Fleury & Froment-Meurice, 2014; Zukin, 1995).

It is not just in public tourist spaces where PEH are excessively judicialized and forced to leave. Virtually any occupation they make of space is decried as a negative influence. Mary Douglas (2001) speaks of "dirt" and "pollution beliefs" in reference to various elements that appear symbolically out of place. For a long time, this fear of moral or health contagion meant that PEH were systematically excluded from the public sphere (Aranguiz, 2005). Today, often experienced as "Not in my back yard" (NIMBY) situations, this social pressure to displace so-called undesirable populations or groups is experienced not only by PEH, but also by community organizations, emergency services, and other services that come to their aid (Affordability and Choice Today, 2009; Amster, 2003; Lavigne, 2014; Herring, 2019; Laniyonu, 2018). Constantly pushed back, these populations very often become invisible and inaudible (Parazelli, 2013; MacDonald & Gaulin, 2020). This intolerance of the presence of PEH in public space highlights the contradiction that lies between the ideal of a public space open to all and the reality that public space is often only open to those who engage in socially sanctioned behaviours (Iveson, 1998).

In the post-industrial era, the arrival of the new middle class in urban areas was bound to create friction with the less affluent residents already in place (Chabrol et al., 2016; Van Criekingen, 2021). Cities rely on property taxes to finance themselves and offer their services. This relationship of dependence on residents leads elected municipal officials to want to please their electorate by responding to their visions for the use of space as well as regarding certain family values, civic morality, and neighbourhood safety that PEH do not seem to embody (Herring, 2019; Smith, 1996). This brings us back to a central question: for whom is the city, or in other words, who has a right to it?

The Multidimensional Reality of Homelessness and Socio-Political Interventions

The presence in space of PEH perceived as undesirable can be understood in light of the apprehension of the phenomenon of
homelessness often constructed as a social issue and public problem (Choppin & Gardella, 2013; Grimard, 2018). Still perceived as people whose morality is questionable, PEH are often the target of interventions aimed at their removal from public space and their (re)insertion into a more socially acceptable lifestyle (Bellot et al., 2021; Christie, 2005; DeVerteuil, 2003).

In Western societies, social intervention practices for PEH are mainly oriented toward taking responsibility and empowerment (Astier, 2007; Namian, 2022). People are responsible for their own integration into society, and it’s only when they are ready that they can take steps to "get back on their feet" or "get off the street". Social reintegration programs focus on three main elements that are in line with our main social values:

1. Having a job. With modernity, "work" has become the great social integrator of Western societies, and individuals who do not comply are quickly confronted with their "outsider" status (Becker, 1985; Castel, 1995).

2. Having a home. Adopting "behaviour that conforms to all family models" (Farge & Laé, 2000: 11).

3. Autonomy. Allows individuals to be masters of their own destiny, but gives individuals responsibility for their destiny (Dubet, 2002; Tönnies, 2010).

Individuals who do not adhere to these social imperatives find themselves outside the normative circuit, excluded from interactions that are socially valued. In this sense, homelessness can be understood as a function of the way in which social norms have been constructed and the way in which living together has been erected. To be "good" citizens, you need to have a job or be actively looking for one, just as you need to reproduce a set of so-called family behaviours, i.e., have a fixed abode and a way of life that revolves around it.

Since homelessness has been constructed as a social "problem" (and not a social phenomenon), what is attached to it are "solutions" to solve this particular "problem" (Ouellet et al., 2021). It brings us into a binary rhetoric of "to every problem there’s a solution". The solutions are mainly centered on the values put forward by society, i.e. the importance of making people autonomous (they must take part in their reintegration process), ensuring that they have a state income or salaried work (by offering support for these steps) and finding them housing (notably through transition programs). Moreover, these values are crystallised by the capitalist context in which we function. In regards of this social context, the legacies of spatial and penal management modalities of homelessness are still at work today, notably through the excessive judicialization of PEH for their mere presence in public spaces (Aranguiz & Fecteau, 1998; Bellot et al., 2005; Herring, 2021; Margier et al., 2014; Parazelli, 2021). As for the social management modality, it is seen above all through a particular type of political-social response, linked to the "concrete problem = concrete answer" logic, and that is putting an end to homelessness². To put an end to homelessness, various tools, devices, and funding have been made available to the various actors in social intervention and administration, often in a top-down manner (Fortin-Robitaille, 2017; Oudshoorn, 2022). One of the avenues favoured by the Canadian federal government to put an end to homelessness involves the implementation of Housing First-type programs (Homeless Hub, nd). At present, Canadian solutions focus almost exclusively on housing. However, while housing instability is the cornerstone of many homelessness situations, it is not the only explanation for the social phenomenon; housing cannot be the only answer. A complex social phenomenon may not require solutions, but rather adaptations to take account of this social reality that we are trying to gloss over. While we seem powerless to get rid of capitalism in the coming years, it is important in the meantime to think about ways in which we can increase the well-being of the people who suffer from it the most.

Adapting our Practices to Transform Spaces

If the solutions currently put forward by major Canadian cities are based on housing, this

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1 Examples include Built for Zero Canada, Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, National Alliance to End Homelessness, etc.
implies that the preferred intervention practices tend to act at the individual level. What we see in the field are practices, systems, and resources focused on "how to support a person out of homelessness." Homelessness must cease to exist, and this is done through various programs and benefits, for example, aimed at individuals (social assistance, housing support programs, etc.). The same dynamic can be observed when thinking about homelessness in terms of social cohabitation: when there are conflicts, the tendency remains to focus on the dynamics between PEH and neighbours or shopkeepers, always under the prism of putting an end to nuisance. Rather than prioritizing occupation of public space, its use as « transit spaces » is advocated by municipal regulation.

What we would like to propose in this article is to change the direction of our gaze, to shift the level of practices, in order to focus more on the community, collective aspect of structures and infrastructures, i.e., how and to what extent can we invest the mesosocial level? How can communities contribute to making public space more accessible to all populations? What actions need to be taken or transformed to promote unrestricted accessibility?

Our research team, made up of researchers based from both Architecture Sans Frontières Québec (ASFQ) and Université de Montréal, wanted to find out more about precedents in architectural projects and building design for PEH. In the wake of an activity with the Canadian Centre for Architecture around the documentary What it takes to make a home, which presents two housing projects designed by architects for PEH in Los Angeles (USA) and Vienna (Austria), we set out to identify all the projects of this kind we could find. Few scientific articles are available on the subject, however, and we broadened our literature search to include reviews of architectural projects (when a prize is won, for example), grey literature, and explanatory websites. This literature search was also broadened to include outdoor design projects, and from there, just over 150 documentary references were deemed relevant to understanding the link between homelessness and design practices. From these references, nearly 200 practices were identified by the team as contributing to the well-being of PEH. While the notion of “well-being” for PEH is subjective and can be expressed in various forms of personal experience, it can also be linked to collective experience (MacMillan, 1996). Various scales are used to measure well-being, and these scales refer as much to individual factors (having a purpose in life, accepting oneself, etc.), as to relational factors (having positive relationships with people around you, having autonomy) or even social factors (mastery of one's environment, having a sense of belonging to one's community) (Das et al., 2020; Haim-Litevsky et al., 2023; Seifert, 2005; World Health Organization [WHO], 2014). In this sense, the World Health Organization places well-being as central to public health (WHO, 2014). As part of our literature search, we adopted Moser’s (2009) definition of well-being, for whom an individual’s well-being depends on the match between individual satisfaction and aspirations relating to the environment and the objective conditions of said environment. Consequently, fostering well-being through design requires identifying the aspirations and needs of PEH in relation to their living environments, and implementing practices to design an environment that best matches them. We have therefore grouped into five broad categories the planning practices that can be developed for the benefit of these people: 1) recognizing the right to public space; 2) facilitating social cohabitation; 3) designing inclusive spaces; 4) creating a safe haven; 5) supporting self-determination. The first two take us to the city level, addressing the frictions that can arise when sharing public or collective spaces, indoors and out, and proposing ways of facilitating different types of use of places. The third category concerns the design processes to be prioritized in order to succeed in creating inclusive spaces for PEH, mobilizing a design concept that could be translated into "by and for" gestures. Finally, the last two categories present practices that concern the built environment itself. This research led to the projects developed, and the translation of planning needs sometimes seems difficult to grasp by professionals untrained in the complex reality of homelessness.

2 However, the scientific literature consulted had a number of limitations: to date, there has been little scientific documentation on the subject, there have been few post-occupancy studies on the impact of the

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publication of a catalog aimed primarily at community organizations, decision-makers and architects, to provide them with tools for certain decision-making processes. Using the catalog’s categories as a starting point, we coupled the previously identified design practices with complementary social intervention practices, then systematically emphasized or shifted the focus to situate it more at the community level.

Recognizing the Right to Public Space

To ensure recognition of the rights of PEH to benefit from and gain full access to public space, it is important not to use design to make them invisible. This can be done by denouncing the presence of hostile design in public places, by paying attention to the effects of revitalizing neighbourhoods historically occupied by PEH, or by prohibiting forced evictions from the makeshift camps they set up. Design can also be used to advocate the right to the city for PEH. This refers to the idea that every person, whatever their social and economic status, has the right to participate actively and democratically and shape the city in which they live. The right to the city encompasses a range of different rights, such as the right to access basic services and facilities like drinking water, sanitation, housing, and transport, as well as the right to participate in decision-making processes that affect the development and management of the city (Harvey, 2010; Lefebvre, 1968). While the installation of temporary sanitary structures can be achieved quickly by installing chemical toilets or portable water fountains, making PEH’s voices heard is a challenge from the point of view of organization and intervention, for example.

According to Harvey (2010), we have a collective right to change and transform the city. This means collectively reshaping the urban environment to meet the needs and desires of all, rather than the interests of a privileged few. This includes the right to challenge existing power structures and economic systems that perpetuate inequality and exclusion in urban areas. Harvey (2010) also emphasizes the importance of democratic participation in urban decision-making, where communities and citizens have a say in shaping the policies and practices that affect their lives. Yet while social work can make an interesting contribution, supporting people whose voices are often inaudible to have a voice of their own, meeting basic needs (food, clothing, shelter) is generally a priority for these people (Fleury et al., 2021; Zur & Jones, 2014). In this prioritization, secondary needs are often insufficiently satisfied. In Quebec research on accessibility to services for PEH, one of the elements that emerged as promoting access to services and the satisfaction of secondary needs was the movement of services and professionals towards PEH (Grimard, 2006; Roy et al., 2005). For example, public consultations on new construction or redevelopment projects require a certain knowledge of regulations and technical language. This requires an understanding of the potential impacts that such construction or redevelopment may have. Secondly, you need to get out there and make your voice heard. While preparation is necessary for anyone seeking to question or challenge a process of urban change, the struggle for day-to-day survival of PEH more often than not leads them to prioritize their primary needs and therefore not to turn up to this type of activity (Fleury et al., 2021). Shifting the location of these consultations to the area where people concerned live (however they live) would enable greater accessibility to public services. The right to public space is, therefore, a call to action for greater social justice, equality, and democracy in urban areas, based on the realities and capacities of all the populations who live and cohabit in these spaces.

Facilitating Social Cohabitation

Development projects designed for PEH are often poorly perceived by their neighbours. This is expressed in the "Not in my back yard" (NIMBY) phenomenon, which reflects opposition based on prejudice, consultation, or planning issues (Connelly, 2005). Beyond the different uses of public space, for which perceptions, concepts, and lived experiences differ (cf. Lefebvre, 1991), social cohabitation implies the sharing of space between individuals according to modes of agreement that include conflict, tolerance, and

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3 For more details on these analyses, photographic illustrations, and graphic explanations, see the catalog

Architecture + Homelessness: Inclusive practices for a supportive city (Grimard et al., 2023).

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collaboration (Dansereau et al., 2002). For example, two myths that need to be deconstructed suggest that projects aimed at people experiencing residential instability would damage the aesthetic character of neighbourhoods, and that the implementation of such projects would reduce the real estate value of neighbourhood properties. To counter this, involving the neighbourhood through public consultation from the outset of the project design process can help develop projects by addressing fears upstream, while promoting the integrity and well-being of users (Affordability and Choice Today 2009; British Columbia [BC] Housing n.d.; Connelly 2005). This is not to say, however, that power relationships do not manifest themselves in these consultation processes. An inverse movement to NIMBY has developed in recent years, identifying a form of political empowerment, yes in my backyard! (YIMBY), to reverse the all-too-frequently hostile discourse (Sibley et al., 2022). "YIMBY campaigns are largely situated within individual municipalities, offering a space for political and social mobilizing" (Sibley et al., 2022, p. 18). This political mobilization and support through community action can be seen in the work of human rights groups. More broadly, it is even possible to extend mobilization and use design as advocacy for the right to the city, to raise awareness of homelessness among the general public.

In the design of the projects themselves, certain planning practices seem to favour cohabitation, such as those integrating places for sharing between residents and neighbours (for example, the layout of a community garden in the MLK1011 supervised apartment project in Los Angeles), or those designing buildings that conserve and enhance existing landscape and urban qualities (by preserving play spaces, for example, or by adopting a similar aesthetic to neighbouring buildings) while also offering a public domain activity (the VinziRast project, in Vienna, was thus conceived as a shared housing project between PEH and students, while also having a café open to everyone on the first floor). Architecture designed by renowned architects can facilitate the social acceptance of projects for PEH, while proudly displaying the legitimacy of their presence in the city, as in the case of the Star Apartments complex, designed by architect Michael Maltzan, which houses around a hundred PEH, stands out with its flashy architecture and was the subject of a work at the 2018 Venice Biennale.

This is also where social mediation and outreach work can play a vital role. Through a variety of social activities, social mediation enables links to be forged between different groups, fostering dialogue and creating new forms of sociability (Margier et al., 2014). This is particularly true of social infrastructures. In this sense, for Klinenberg (2018), social infrastructure is not "social capital," a concept generally used to measure people's interpersonal relationships and networks. Rather, investing in social infrastructure allows us to see whether the physical conditions, which will subsequently determine whether social capital can develop, are in place. When social infrastructures can be deployed, are present, and used, they promote contact, the expression of various forms of support, and collaboration between friends and neighbours, for example. "Strong social infrastructure promotes interaction and collaboration among friends and neighbours such as fostering contact, mutual support, and collaboration, while a deteriorating social infrastructure hinders social activities, leaving individuals and families to fend for themselves" (Klinenberg, 2018, p. 5). These may be parks, public libraries, or community centers. For example, the presence of social mediators in Quebec City's "Vie de Parvis" project (Lapointe, 2018), as well as their presence in an encampment for PEH in the city of Granby, is aimed precisely at supporting the various social relationships that emerge in and around these places. Social infrastructures are, therefore, physical places, modulated in the image of the people who use them.

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4 See: https://www.archdaily.com/950370/mlk1101-supportive-housing-lorcan-oherilby-architects

5 See: https://architectuul.com/architecture/vinziirast

6 See: https://skidrow.org/buildings/star-apartments/


8 https://granby.ca/fr/itinerance

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Designing Spaces to Include the Voice of Those Affected

As mentioned above, the voices of PEH, who are often directly affected by public development projects, are rarely heard in public consultations and decision-making bodies. This sidelining in modes of governance can be explained in part by reduced participation in social, cultural, and political life due to the stigmatization, discrimination, and marginalization of which they are the target (Whiteford, 2011). But also, as already indicated, due to the satisfaction of more urgent needs than that of being heard on urban development issues.

If we take a step to the side, in the development of planning projects, we find three interrelated processes: the concept, consultation, and research processes. Approaching these processes with a concern for inclusivity requires developing a better understanding of the needs of the people affected by the project, encouraging their involvement by recognizing their experiential knowledge, and taking their points of view into account, and then validating the conceptual choices made throughout the process, to ensure that the spaces and facilities thus designed are flexible enough to effectively meet the specific needs of the various groups living there (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, 2008). This requires design teams to take an interest in PEH, making room for them and translating their needs into technical terms. This does not necessarily imply that all parties involved share the same vision, or even that the result is consensual. Rather, it is a matter of sharing a common interest in the future and future of a place, a space (Dovey, 2014). Social intervention becomes relevant to provide accompaniment to create places conducive to expression, whatever that expression may be. In social work, we tend to create "safe spaces" to avoid exacerbating the vulnerability of PEH. However, making one's voice heard in this type of context requires moving from "safe space to brave space" (Arao & Clemens, 2013). This means taking risks, but these risks can be measured. Access to this process, on the other hand, is more difficult for vulnerable and oppressed populations. It is in this sense that architecture and social work can work on the mechanisms of participation in this social production of space.

Setting up a Safe Haven

Experiencing homelessness can generate significant trauma. According to Pable et al. (2022), people who have experienced such trauma need spaces that enable them to manage stress, preserve their intimacy, feel safe and secure, and be in the presence of beauty and attractive, meaningful objects. It is, therefore, important to create a safe, comfortable, and peaceful environment for these people: a safe haven. Rollings and Bollo (2021) define a safe haven as a space of protection, refuge, and respite, as opposed to the less secure places previously occupied. As Molony (2010) also points out, the feeling of home is intimately linked to that of enjoying a place not only of safety and security, but also of comfort and relaxation, where there are fewer restrictions imposed than in public space.

This dimension brings us back to the notion of ontological security, i.e., the state of well-being anchored in a sense of constancy in the social and material environment, necessary for rebuilding a personal identity after experiencing a traumatic ordeal. The environment should thus support "[...] the ability to complete daily routines, privacy and freedom from surveillance, control, and having a secure base for identity construction" (Rollings & Bollo 2021, p.17). The trauma-informed design approach is based in this sense on the idea that the built environment can have an impact not only on people's self-determination, but also on their sense of dignity, self-esteem, and recognition.

PEH are often confronted with environments that can be infantilizing and constraining, which works against the development of a sense of ontological security. On the contrary, spaces designed to accommodate them should not only reject all architectural elements reminiscent of institutions (e.g., materials or colors that might recall prison, hospital, or another place of constraint and coercion), but also be customizable, thanks to flexible layouts that are easy to decorate.

This is also reflected in intervention practices that are trauma-informed, emphasize safety, offer opportunities to regain control over aspects of one's life, and focus on people's strengths (Hopper et al., 2010). Thus, the qualities of the physical environment should be redesigned to

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reinforce these elements, rather than forcing users to adapt to them. In this sense, design comes to the service of social intervention, which must play a role in supporting people in their safe appropriation of space.

Supporting Self-determination

In addition to interior design, it is also necessary to develop living environments adapted to the diversity of the public and their various daily activities. This can be achieved, for example, by providing apartments of varying sizes that can accommodate families, singles, or pets. As PEH are often displaced to the outskirts of cities, exacerbating their vulnerability and invisibility, the options provided must also consider the services and networks already in place in the targeted neighbourhoods or sectors. For example, access to a range of local services, public transport, and community resources.

Design can also be used to support informal housing initiatives or political lobbying by PEH. To avoid interference in the informal governance of spaces, it is important that designers learn from communities and avoid imposing their vision. In support of the self-determination of PEH, work needs to be done to review our normative categories of living. Experiencing homelessness is to live a life under the eyes of others. Public space, though sometimes hostile, can be “home” for some PEH. For Leroux (2008, p. 15), "all territories where everyday gestures are repeated are inhabited". Pichon and her team (2010), without focusing exclusively on the usual characteristics of housing - whether four-walled, hard-walled, or one's own conceptualize the sense of home as giving rise to a variety of possibilities, including development, attachment, appropriation, and anchoring.

It may also involve creating a familiar space that can be associated with personal identity (place identity). Self-expression can take the form of space appropriation processes (Dovey, 1985). Through the design of space (inside and out), the development of a sense of home can be achieved in particular by applying certain design strategies that offer both personal spaces for occupants, for example, by providing visual and acoustic privacy, and spaces for meeting or welcoming guests, while ensuring that the aesthetics of the space reflect people’s tastes and preferences. By shifting our view, it is, therefore, possible to let people live in urban camps, by giving them the means to secure or improve the facilities or by ensuring that the presence of these encampments creates solidarity rather than oppression from local actors.

Conclusion

While the scientific literature has enabled us to target certain needs for certain populations experiencing homelessness, there is still very little information concerning the needs of several groups over-represented among Montréal’s homeless population, such as the indigenous or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, intersex, asexual, and two-spirit (LGBTQIA2S+) communities. What’s more, according to a review by Meda (2009), the needs of PEH rarely feature in urban planning regulations and instruments. On the contrary, many exclusionary zoning measures create homogeneous communities free of people deemed undesirable. This type of zoning has increased the concentration of PEH in downtown areas, limited the number and type of community service facilities, and restricted the development of affordable housing projects (Oakley, 2002). The development of more inclusive zoning tools, therefore, has the potential to contribute to the well-being of PEH on a wider scale.

However, through the different scales of planning strategies and social intervention practices presented so far, we can already see that there are many possible avenues for developing inclusive practices, designed to encourage different access to and uses of public space. These varied examples of possible strategies for designing and intervening in public spaces, buildings, and interiors offer a glimpse of how we might go about reversing the dynamics of exclusion, perceptions of what constitutes a home, and the agency of design to the realities of street life. It then becomes possible to put forward other design gestures that, rather than making them invisible or excluding them, support the well-being of PEH in the city. This article puts forward five ideas for improving the well-being of PEH in public spaces. These are to ensure improved access to public spaces, to encourage different uses of places without restriction, to design spaces that are inclusive of
the realities experienced by PEH, in consultation with them, and to create safe places, while supporting the self-determination of PEH.

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References


practices/assets/documents/sshrc-ks-homelessness-final-report.pdf


