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**“No Person Shall…”: The Geographic Distribution of Homeless Encampments in Los Angeles**

**Introduction**

Sitting directly under the main artery of traffic in Los Angeles, the homeless encampment on Exposition Boulevard has existed for years. Noise is a constant. The sound of cars is heard at all hours of the day, gathering into a nearly continuous buzz, reaching its height with the afternoon and early evening rush hour, and somewhat fading at night but never disappearing completely. The tents are staged on the sidewalk on the southern side of Exposition Boulevard, nearly abutting the road - for many their doors open right out to it. Though quieter than intersecting Sawtelle Boulevard and Pico Boulevard a block to the north, Exposition - like many streets in West Los Angeles - is busier than its size would suggest. From 4:30am to 1:30am, trains on the metro E-line pass by every five to ten minutes, sending a metallic rumble through the air. Pedestrians and bikers - many of whom are inhabitants of the encampment, other nearby encampments, or are homeless individuals without even tent shelters to get through the night - pass by on the northern sidewalk during the daytime. And like on the 405 above, the cars are a constant, driving just feet away from the canvas-thin walls of the tents.

I have walked by the encampment almost every day since I moved to the area in September 2023. Google Images shows tents set up on the sidewalk since at least 2016. For the first few years these were isolated tents, but by 2021 there were at least six observable tents. By the time I first saw the encampment, at least a dozen tents occupied the sidewalk on the northern side of the street. With time its composition changed slightly, more tents popping up and spilling over onto the dirt patch behind the sidewalk. Then one morning in early November when I turned the corner, the encampment was gone and the sidewalk spotless. Encampment sweeps aren’t uncommon in LA, so I imagined enough people had called in complaints for the police or a sanitation squad to come remove it. That underpass does fall within a Special Enforcement Zone, so it technically should have been cleared out before it started. However, it wasn’t even two weeks before the first signs of an encampment popped back up. Within a month it was almost the same size it was before it was taken down, but this time on the southern side of the street. From the end of November until the beginning of March 2024, I saw the homeless encampment disappear and come back again at least two other times. In early March it was cleared again, but within a few days four tents had popped up on both sides of the street.

Homeless encampments have been fixtures of American urban life since at least the 1980s (Giamarino et al., 2024). But in the past decade, as cities around the nation have faced a homelessness crisis, the number of encampments has increased drastically alongside the number of unsheltered homeless. In 2019, two hundred eleven thousand people experienced unsheltered homelessness on a given night in the United States (“Unsheltered homelessness and homeless encampments in 2019,” 2021). More recently, the Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority’s 2023 homeless census estimated that the City of Los Angeles alone had 32,680 unsheltered residents, a fifteen percent increase over the previous year (“Los Angeles City Homeless Estimate Count,” 2023). Though other studies on Los Angeles have looked at the distribution of homeless encampments in the urban environment (Shin, 2023) and at enforcement (Giamarino & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2024), more needs to be done to demonstrate how the two work together. Furthermore, Los Angeles’ position at the epicenter of the homelessness crisis in the United States presents a pressing need for more research around the distribution of homeless encampments, policy, and enforcement.

Keeping this in mind, I ask the following questions in my study: What factors influence the location and spatial distribution of homeless encampments in the City of Los Angeles? How are ordinances related to homelessness enforced throughout Los Angeles? How does the built environment of Los Angeles impact the location of encampments? I begin by reviewing relevant research on homelessness in the revanchist city, the geography of homeless encampments, and practices of policing and enforcement of quality of life ordinances. Then, I analyze key sit-lie ordinances in the Los Angeles Municipal Code. Situating these in the context of modern-day homelessness, I go on to discuss the uneven enforcement of homelessness policies. I argue that quality of life ordinances in Los Angeles are enforced selectively, largely depending on the type of spaces in which homeless encampments are found and the economic status of surrounding neighborhoods. In this way, the city works to remove signs of homelessness from politically and economically valuable places to the periphery of the urban environment.

**Literature Review**

Tent cities and homeless encampments have been largely painted by the media and public officials as part of the fallout of the Great Recession. In its immediate aftermath, news programs highlighted middle-class workers who, after losing their jobs, had little choice but to move into an encampment. However, the homeless encampment has been present in the modern American urban fabric since at least the 1980s. Rather than the product of economic crashes from the recession or before, they are the results of changes in urban policy during the last years of the twentieth century (Herring, 2014). Cuts to welfare programs, including basic social services, shelter programs, and transitional housing weakened the safety nets that undergirded some of the poorest sectors of society. This coincided with an increase in sheltered and unsheltered homelessness across the United States since many individuals could no longer support themselves with government support stripped away.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century housing costs have increased substantially. A sustained lack of affordable housing is the primary cause of homelessness across the United States (Boston University). As housing prices in an area rise due to market pressures including the influence of gentrification, its existing inhabitants who can’t afford to pay the rent increases may face displacement. Those who can’t find a place to relocate to or don’t have a personal safety net - either in the form of savings or communal support - may face homelessness. Though the affordable housing crisis has been felt in almost every urban area in the United States local governments are often powerless to face it, lacking the political power of will to seek out solutions (“Unsheltered homelessness and homeless encampments in 2019,” 2021). Few cities embrace policies to bolster affordable housing in their plans on homelessness, instead orienting them towards more “short-term, politically viable solutions” (Boston University) that have negative consequences in the long run. Though recent initiatives at the federal level highlight the lack of affordable housing as a pressing concern, the majority of action to alter zoning and land use laws around housing must be taken at the municipal level. But in the case of homelessness, where the subject of the crisis is a marginalized group with an immense array of politically-contrived stigmas, effective policy is difficult to implement at the local level, especially when it runs against the short-term political demands of the electorate and special interests.

The banishment of some sectors of the population from certain spaces in the city lies at the core of the concept of the revanchist city. Urban revanchism is conceptualized as a reaction by privileged parts of society and commercial interests against minorities and marginalized groups - an attempt to save the “urban future of gloom” marked by “crime, violence, drugs, unemployment, and immigration,” ideas thoroughly associated with “depravity” and “laced through with terror.” (Smith, 1996) Such discourses justify the “cleansing” of the city through displacement and destructive redevelopment, both necessary precursors to the processes of economic and social change brought about by gentrification as well as the foundations for modern homelessness in the American urban fabric. These discourses of revanchism are intimately related to both official and unofficial acts of gentrification. Displacement by outpricing, encampment sweeps, and heightened implementation of laws targeting the homeless destabilize and desettle housed and unhoused populations alike, which increases homelessness and perpetuates the cycle of precarity in which homeless people find themselves.

Urban policy manages homeless encampments through the selective enforcement of “quality of life” ordinances. Previous analyses have highlighted the role that quality of life ordinances play in governmentally-sanctioned actions taken towards homeless encampments. Though these ordinances are written without any explicit spatial or economic biases, they are often unevenly enforced (Amaral, 2021; Goldfischer, 2020). Instead of being the neutral arbiters of policy, encampment sweeps become political actions that are informed by the public’s perception of homelessness and the desire of a local government to preserve their reputation and legitimacy. In San Francisco, such ordinances are usually introduced by commercial interests. After their passage, they are most heavily enforced “in low-density residential areas and near the neighborhood merchants who played the biggest role in bringing the issue to the attention of local” (Amaral, 2021).

Quality of life ordinances are not enforced equally throughout an entire city. Rather, they are tools that cities use to implement strategies of spatial banishment (Giamarino and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2024) that seek to remove homelessness from the public eye. Herring (2014) identifies a dialectic of seclusion and exclusion of the homeless that come about from the state’s strategies of encampment management and the homeless’ strategies of adaptation. Through selective enforcement of quality of life ordinances in “prime spaces” (Herring & Lutz, 2015) - areas that hold high economic or social value where the dissonance between the ordering of the city and the disorderliness of homelessness would be highly visible - unsheltered homeless individuals are banished to “marginal spaces”. In contrast to the high value associated with prime spaces, marginal spaces have little social, economic, or political value. They include spaces carved out of public infrastructure, industrial areas, and derelict zones of the city.

Although marginal spaces can have some political value, their peripheral locations and relative invisibility provide ideal spaces for encampments. Local governments treat them as zones of toleration where they can direct homelessness, while homeless people seek them out for the stability and privacy they provide. Though technically still open to police actions at any time, their relative invisibility protects them from the constant threat of encampment sweeps. “The availability of space to occupy with ample invisibility is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for durable encampments,” writes Herring (2014). It is the “visual spectacle” of homeless encampments that stimulates local governments into action, a spectacle that the seclusion provided by marginal spaces largely precludes. Studies on the spatial distribution of homeless encampments also highlight the importance of marginal spaces. Finnigan (2021) finds that the spatial distribution of encampments in Oakland, in addition to being influenced by proximity to social services and the economic status of the section of the city, are largely located in marginal spaces such as industrial areas and under freeway overpasses.

In his article on Washington, D.C.’s NoMa neighborhood, Howe (2023) examines the role of private-public collaboration in gentrification, homelessness, and displacement. With the creation of the NoMa Business Improvement District (BID), officials and commercial interests worked alongside each other to gentrify the neighborhood, making it “look ‘clean and safe’ for potential investors and residents.” As the processes of gentrification get underway, homelessness may increase as it did in NoMa. Though apparently contradictory in terms of wealth, gentrification and homelessness often go hand in hand as public-private initiatives - such as NoMa’s BID - have historically led to the displacement of long-time residents and the sustained harassment of homeless individuals, which is justified as neighborhood improvement. In fact, this is at the core of BID projects. Commercial and residential actors who wish to preserve or increase property values often blame homelessness for suppressing them and see it as an obstacle to future development. In NoMa as elsewhere, the BID successfully pressured the city to “enforce current anti-homeless laws and perform more ‘cleanups’ of the camps” (Howe, 2023).

Though enacted under the rationale of preserving the living standards of a city’s inhabitants, quality of life ordinances work by criminalizing the basic activities that homeless individuals must perform to survive. The city delegates the power to enforce these ordinances to agencies, specifically the police, who work to “purify” streets and sidewalks of homelessness. Quality of life ordinances cover a variety of actions that can be perceived as “homeless.” Giamarino and Loukaitou-Sideris (2024) identify four categories of ordinances that American cities enact: camping ordinances, which may prohibit sleeping, sitting, and setting up camp on sidewalks and in other public places; loitering ordinances, which ban staying in the same place for a prolonged period; panhandling ordinances, which criminalize begging and other forms of solicitation; and food ordinances, which ban eating, drinking, receiving and cooking food. Quality of life ordinances that target sitting, sleeping, and camping are also called sit-lie laws. Sit-lie laws and quality of life ordinances often have geographic relevance written into them, being tied to certain places and not to others. These include parks, on board public transportation, bus stations, public right-of-ways, and in front of certain commercial properties. Not every city that has one type of ordinance has another type.

Underlying these ordinances is a conception of the city in which space “partitions” the human experience into acceptable and unacceptable actions. “Cities partition space to control general and specific purposes and its use,” writes Parker (2020). The initial assignation of public space to public purposes excludes private behavior such as sleeping, and thus homeless people.” Historical, physical, and conceptual, partitions divide the city into areas of specific uses that should not be violated. By partitioning the urban experience, private behavior is separated from public space, excluding homeless people who have no choice but to perform their “private behaviors” in public places while further delegitimizing their right to the city.

Although homeless people often have no other choice but to perform their necessary human actions in public spaces, their lack of access to private spaces paradoxically justifies their exclusion from the city. Their inability to use either “appropriate” private- or city-maintained sanitation infrastructure gives rise to a “rhetoric of trash” that paints the homeless and their ways of living as inherently filthy and unsanitary, while their forms of shelter and personal belongings are seen as garbage dirtying public spaces (Speer, 2016). Consequently, actions that remove signs of homelessness from the public consciousness gain legitimacy. Encampment sweeps and stringent anti-homelessness laws, then, become more accepted among the housed population.

**Methodology**

I utilized primary source analysis and ethnographic observation as my methods of data collection. By using two distinct methods - one that creates interpretations of written documents and another that records and interprets observable phenomena - I can provide multiple types of data that contrast with and bolster each other through new layers of meaning and analysis.

The main method of data collection that I used is primary source analysis, specifically policy analysis. The Los Angeles Municipal Code (LAMC) lays out the tools and strategies that the city government and agencies have at their disposal to enforce the spatial norms on homelessness. Several quality of life and sit-lie ordinances are set up by the LAMC, all varying in scope and purpose. Some cover the landscape of the city at large, while others home in on places with specific functions of urban life. Some are used today almost exclusively to target perceived threats of homelessness, while others are more general in their reach and affect homelessness and encampment location only indirectly. Still, no matter the original or intended use of a section of the municipal code, the mechanisms it puts in place can be used in any situation that is applicable. For my analysis, I reviewed key sections of the LAMC, considering the ordinances they lay out and the spatial distribution of enforcement. Other resources, including a map of the Special Enforcement Zones that cover the City of Los Angeles, give me a grounded geography in which to base my analyses of enforcement in the physical, economic, and social urban landscapes.

Given that this is not a legal study, it would be incomplete without considering the visible effects of the policies and ordinances I reviewed. To provide complementary data, I used ethnographic observation. I observed select homeless encampments, including one in West Los Angeles on Exposition Boulevard below the 405 freeway and a series of encampments located on and around the overpasses above the 101 freeway where it cuts through Downtown Los Angeles and Chinatown. I visited the encampments in Downtown Los Angeles one time in late February. On the other hand, I observed the encampment on Exposition Boulevard twice in an ethnographic context towards the end of February and the beginning of March, as well dozens of times since September 2023 in a passing manner. I have used these casual observations and recollections to provide context where my field notes couldn’t.

**Data**

In Los Angeles, the major sit-lie law is section 41.18 of the Los Angeles Municipal Code (Giamarino & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2024). While there are other laws that regulate public assemblages, the storage of personal property, and the obstruction of the public right-of-way, section 41.18 is wide-reaching and is what is most commonly used to justify encampment sweeps. Every subsection of 41.18 (except for subsection F which sets the punishment for malcompliance) includes language that bans the “sitting, lying, or sleeping, or by storing, using, maintaining, or placing personal property” on a “street, sidewalk, or other public right-of-way” (41.18 L.A.M.C, 2021). Given the comprehensiveness of the law, the desire of the city to preserve its public image, and the desires of the homeless for stability, homeless people are usually directed away from the most visible and valuable places to marginal spaces in the city. However, there is unevenness in this process of visibility and marginality. From this, I identify Special Enforcement Zones (SEZs) as an important policy and enforcement strategy for managing homelessness in Los Angeles and go into it in further detail.

*41.18 and Special Enforcement Zones*

Subsection C of LAMC 41.18 grants the city council the ability to establish zones of enforcement that don’t necessarily meet the conditions subsections A or B. Though section 41.18 doesn’t specify a name for these zones, on signage and in the public sphere they are referred to as Special Enforcement Zones. Subsection C has four further subsections, two of which, subsections 2 and 4, lay out the circumstances under which the city council can designate SEZs. These subsections, while often overlapping in their reaches, provide different methods of and reasons for the establishment of SEZs.

Investigating where SEZs are and can be found is critical to understanding enforcement patterns. Subsection C(2) specifies several of the physical features of the urban environment around which the city council has the power to set up an SEZ. “No person shall,” the ordinance begins,

sit, lie, sleep, or store, use, maintain, or place personal property, in or upon any street, sidewalk, or other public right-of-way within the distance stated on the posted signage (up to a maximum of 500 feet) of a designated overpass, underpass, freeway ramp, tunnel, bridge, pedestrian bridge, subway, wash, spreading ground, or active railway, where the City Council determines, in the designating resolution, that the public health, safety, or welfare is served by the prohibition, including, without limitation, by finding that sleeping or lodging within the stated proximity to the designated area is unhealthy, unsafe, or incompatible with safe passage.

Subsection C(4) has a much wider scope than subsection C(2). Instead of limiting designations of SEZs to certain infrastructural features, it gives the city council broad discretion to establish an SEZ wherever it deems necessary to protect the public from health hazards and crime. “In order to designate a section of the street, sidewalk, or other public right-of-way as prohibited under this subdivision,” is says,

the City Council shall determine, in a designating resolution and based on specific documentation, that the circumstances of continued sitting, sleeping, lying, storing personal property, or otherwise obstructing the public right-of-way at that location poses a particular and ongoing threat to public health or safety.

These “threats to public health and safety” include occurrences of death or injury, recurring violent crimes, “fires that (result) in a fire department response”. However, they “are not limited to” the aforementioned phenomena, apparently giving the City Council a wide scope in determining what is and what isn’t a threat to the public.

SEZs are widely dispersed throughout Los Angeles and are tied to different locations. Those passed under resolutions are usually located by parks, libraries, freeways, and specific stretches of streets and sidewalks. In 2022, the City Council passed a bill to declare SEZs around all public schools and daycare centers (“LA City Council Backs Ban,” 2022). Other subsections of 41.18 prohibit camping up to one thousand feet away from “designated (facilities), opened after January 1, 2018, that (provide) shelter, safe sleeping, or safe parking to homeless persons, or that (serve) as a homeless services navigation center”. This automatically creates a zone of exclusion around all new homeless shelters. In all, there are more than 2,400 SEZs in Los Angeles.

Both clauses have their own relevance to SEZs, even if much of the information seems redundant. Subsection 2 identifies a variety of the spaces where homeless encampments are likely to appear. Three of the spaces included in the section above are exclusively tied to freeways - overpasses, underpasses, and freeway ramps. Three more spaces - tunnels, bridges, and pedestrian bridges - are often part of or adjacent to freeway infrastructure. All of the mentioned spaces, however, are marginal spaces, areas carved out of the built urban environment that serve little use to anyone else. Though “street(s), sidewalk(s), and public right-of-way(s)” around these areas technically serve as places of transit for cars, bikes, and pedestrians, homeless encampments form around them because of a sustained lack of use for their designated purposes.

The clauses both utilize rhetorics of health and security in their justifications. In establishing an SEZ, the city council must determine “in a designating resolution” that there exists some threat to the public’s well-being. However, since homelessness is often automatically associated with unhealthiness and criminality, it becomes a simple act to declare an SEZ on grounds of “public health or safety.” It can be a trickier thing to do when an SEZ resolution needs to rely on a specific phenomenon, such as “repeated serious or violent crimes.” But from my analysis of SEZs across Los Angeles, public safety is rarely the reason given for their implementation; of the 315 resolution locations in Los Angeles, in only 29 the reason given is “Public Safety” (“Los Angeles Municipal Code 41.18,” n.d.) This implies visible signs of homelessness, lack of sanitation, and obstruction of public rights-of-way are usually enough to justify an SEZ.

*Unevenness of Enforcement*

Though homeless encampments and SEZs can be found to some extent in almost every neighborhood in Los Angeles, one thing remains true about them: enforcement of sit-lie laws is very uneven. Despite the depth of coverage that the city is given to enforce quality of life ordinances, they don’t always seem effective even with the supposedly bolstered enforcement that SEZs and high-income areas provide.

By taking city council-specific data on homelessness from the 2023 Los Angeles Homelessness Census and comparing it with the median incomes per district (“Median Household Income”, 2017), much of the spatial distribution of homelessness in Los Angeles can be explained through an economic lens. In general, there are higher numbers of homeless dwellings in districts with lower average incomes than there are in districts with higher average incomes. Using city council districts as areas of measurement is especially relevant, considering that so many of the policies and implementation practices related to homelessness in Los Angeles stem directly from actions taken by the city council and its members. SEZs, for example, must be introduced to and passed by the city council before they can become effective. The Los Angeles Municipal Code also must be altered by the city council, so any changes to quality of life ordinances need to be approved by it.

There are some notable exceptions to the spatial and economic patterns of homelessness that I have previously observed. City Council district 11, which occupies all of the west coast of Los Angeles, is one of the richest districts in Los Angeles with many established high-income neighborhoods and equally many neighborhoods that have recently undergone gentrification. However, the 2023 Homelessness Census places it third out of the fifteen districts by the number of observed dwellings (“Los Angeles City Homeless Estimate Count,” 2023). I have observed several semi-stable homeless encampments in District 11 that exist for many weeks or months at a time before sweeps, only to spring back up again within a couple days. The Exposition Boulevard encampment, for example, has passed through four cycles of destruction of regrowth. Though I cannot measure the continuity of the residents after each sweep, the speed with which it pops up again - usually reaching half its prior size within a week of the sweep - shows that there is a collective knowledge that this stretch of street will not be consistently enforced. These encampments, clearly, aren’t without enforcement. But it is not a consistent pattern of enforcement and it does not appear so off-putting to homeless people that they never return.

Another cluster of unenforced SEZs is found in Downtown Los Angeles between the city hall and Union Station. Though the City Council district in which it falls has a much lower average income than District 11, the encampment is found in the city center and the prime space that it suggests. In this area of about 0.3 square miles, there are five overlapping SEZs - two are centered on shelters, one on a park, one on a daycare center, and one on a freeway ramp. But despite the density of SEZs and the high occurrence of homelessness that they imply, there is little observable enforcement. Though I didn’t observe any homeless people sleeping, sitting, or camping in the park - El Pueblo de Los Angeles on Olvera Street, a major tourist attraction - there are many tents on the streets immediately around it. Signs of homelessness are most visible around the 101 freeway and in the marginal spaces it creates. Tent encampments line the surface-street overpasses that cross the freeway and the sidewalks that parallel it.

Since neither economic disparities between areas of the city nor legal actions such as the declaration of SEZs are enough to fully explain the distribution of homelessness in Los Angeles, I propose in my discussion section that by considering the marginality of space alongside other factors we can have a clearer idea of enforcement patterns.

**Discussion**

The theoretical framework of the revanchist city can give light to the mechanics of enforcement in prime spaces and gentrifying areas, elucidating the difference between the actual value and the potential value of real estate as well as the perceived effects of homelessness on that value gap. Urban revanchism isn’t limited to explicitly gentrifying areas. It can happen anywhere in the city where discourses of depravity, trash, and danger are used, no matter a neighborhood’s level of wealth. Nonetheless, the spotlight that urban revanchism puts on economic conditions only partly explains the observed enforcement patterns of quality of life ordinances.

My ethnographic observations have distinguished that even in broadly high-income areas, there exist marginal spaces in which unsheltered homeless people find factors that appeal to them for setting up camps. These spaces are relatively out of the way of common paths of transit (specifically foot transit), have little to no commercial or residential use, and are already associated with homeless people and encampments. They often go ignored by apparati of enforcement that don’t have the budget or political willpower to continually fight a Sisyphean problem, as well as by nearby residents who have reluctantly grown to accept some degree of homelessness in the periphery of their neighborhoods.

I argue that the marginal spaces that homeless people inhabit and in which they are left alone for a sustained period of time act as zones of semi-toleration. Zones of toleration are usually conceived of as delineated stretches of the city in which the police minimally enforce quality of life ordinances. But as opposed to the semi-defined, semi-legalized zones of toleration that stretch many city blocks like Skid Row in Downtown Los Angeles, marginal spaces are not necessarily bounded by streets or lines drawn on a map. Rather, they exist throughout the city and often have more to do with gaps of utilization in infrastructure than in hands-on management from the city and police. Still, their separation from valorized parts of the city lead to the creation of “accepted spaces” for homelessness.

Freeway underpasses and overpasses in Los Angeles are principal examples of these accepted spaces. Underpasses and other parts of freeway infrastructure are mentioned in section 41.18(c) of the LAMC as places where the City Council can prohibit habitation. In fact, they are some of the most targeted areas for resolutions; at least fifty-eight SEZs are posted at freeway underpasses (“Los Angeles Municipal Code 41.18,” n.d.). However, sit-lie laws are not evenly or consistently enforced there. I have recorded multiple underpass and overpass encampments in West and Downtown Los Angeles that have existed for sustained periods without police interruption. Though they are not immune from sweeps and pressures from police, they can act as semi-temporary grounds for homeless people to set up camp.

Freeway infrastructure is almost taken for granted as a place for the homeless in Los Angeles. The vacant niches that they provide fall well within the definition of marginal spaces since they aren’t considered a legitimate place for public activity, besides momentary passage. No licit economic activity is permitted to take place in overpasses and underpasses, for example, and even though some pedestrian-friendly stretches fall under the “public right-of-way,” they receive relatively little foot traffic. Even when there is significant foot traffic, they are almost conceived as an impermeable barrier, a line that pedestrians don’t cross.

This appears to be the case with the encampment on Exposition Boulevard. Located near a metro stop, the sidewalk near the encampment has a moderate-to-high level of foot traffic throughout the day, though the tents give pedestrians unobstructed passage on one side of the sidewalk. Its presence led to the establishment of an SEZ in May, 2023. The SEZ explains the semi-consistent ordinance enforcement in the fall, but fails to provide a reason for the long periods of toleration. I propose that it is due to the conceptualization of the underpass as an accepted space for homeless people, even though it finds itself in the context of an urban environment and urban policy that does not wish to provide a place for homeless people.

Cities and police departments are generally aware that homelessness is not solved by encampment sweeps and quality of life ordinances. Sweeps that successfully and permanently remove homeless people from one area without providing a lasting housing alternative will simply lead to their settlement in another area and encampments will be established once again. To constantly chase homeless people from one place to another would drain the city’s budget without leading to any real change. Instead, they allow encampments to exist temporarily in marginal spaces inside larger, non-marginal neighborhoods.

As a tool of homelessness management, SEZs seem to be effective when consistently enforced; the problem is that their enforcement is geographically and temporarily uneven. The economic status of an area and the spaces that fall within an SEZ contribute to its level of enforcement. When homelessness is extremely recurrent - as it often is in marginal spaces - there is less incentive to enforce ordinances like 41.18 in specific places.

**Limitations**

In the process of conducting my study, I had to deal with several factors that limited its scope, both in regard to the time frame and the methodology. First, the schedule of the academic quarter forced me to narrow the focus of the study. Ten weeks is not a lot of time to spend researching. Since the first four weeks were committed to conceiving the framework for the study and conducting background research to provide a context for it, the amount of time committed to collecting and analyzing the data came out to only a few weeks.

Second, my lack of prior involvement in the field of study and amongst the subjects of my study initially hindered my ability to collect data. The unsheltered homeless form a highly marginalized segment of society with little political and economic sway. In order to interview homeless people in an ethical manner, I contacted local service-providing organizations that work with homeless individuals in the hope that they could coordinate interviews. However, since I had no previous relationship with those organizations there existed none of the trust that is foundational for requests like that, which proved detrimental in organizing interviews.

Third, I had to change the methodology that I initially devised. In my initial project proposal, I outlined ethnographic interviews as my primary, possibly only, source of data collection. But after trying to contact nine different organizations that work in homeless rights activism and provide services to the homeless, I realized that my original plan wouldn’t be fruitful. Only one got back to me, but only to say that they didn’t have an apparatus set up for outsiders to conduct interviews with their service population. This led me to shift my methods to primary source analysis, specifically of city ordinances related to homelessness. Ordinance analysis has guided my study towards a focus on how policy and enforcement affect the location and distribution of homelessness, as opposed to the ethnography-centered research I had originally thought I would carry out. Policy analysis offers its own unique lens through which I could investigate the same ideas I had in mind at the start of my project: how neighborhood-level economic patterns affect the geographies of homelessness; marginal and prime spaces; and patterns of enforcement of homeless ordinances. Furthermore, it shed light onto other mechanisms of enforcement that I may not have otherwise looked as closely at, such as encampment sweeps and Special Enforcement Zones in Los Angeles - especially how they operate as strategies of exclusion and seclusion.

**Conclusion**

The enforcement of quality of life ordinances is uneven in Los Angeles. Since they work to regulate homelessness and to limit its presence in the public consciousness, discrepancies in enforcement are often determined by a space’s centrality in the public consciousness. Marginal spaces play a crucial role in the distribution of homelessness since they are somewhat overlooked and separate from the formal economy. Informed by a politics of value and visibility, they act as ideal zones of containment and toleration for a city government that seeks to remove signs of homelessness from the public view but realizes that strategies of invisibilization won’t solve homelessness. Thus, they become semi-accepted spaces for homeless habitation. Marginal spaces are never immune to the enforcement of quality of life ordinances and encampment sweeps. However, they provide varying levels of stability for homeless people.

Though limited in scope, my study provides a basis for future research to build upon. Future avenues of research should investigate the temporality and economic environments of marginal spaces. Though some homeless encampments in marginal spaces may last weeks, months, or even years with little to no action taken to remove them, the motives behind such enforcement actions and when they are taken need to be clarified. The Exposition Boulevard encampment, for example, has a very uneven pattern of enforcement that ethnographic observation alone cannot explain fully. There could also be more research into the factors that permit stable encampments in high-income and gentrifying areas where homelessness is highly visible even when market forces would seemingly encourage stricter enforcement of quality of life ordinances. Numerous factors influence the distribution of homeless encampments, yet creating a cohesive and comprehensive analysis of how one factor interacts with others would take more time than a single academic term can provide. This, however, is necessary considering the extent of homelessness in Los Angeles and the lack of clarity behind ordinance enforcement patterns.

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