

FROM HOT SPOTS TO SAFE SPACES— SOCIO-SPATIAL INTERVENTIONS TO INTEGRATE HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS WELL

RESEARCH REPORT



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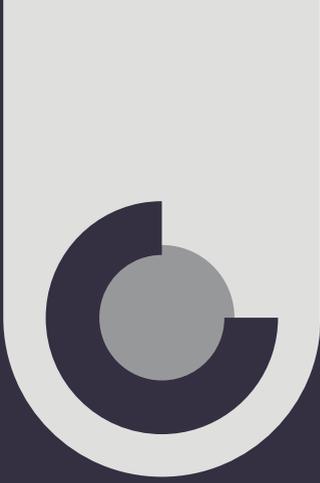


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GLOSSARY

SMUS (Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability)

An interdisciplinary initiative and toolkit that integrates spatial analysis with sustainability principles to inform urban planning and interventions. In this research, it was used to map and assess sites of homelessness in the City of Tshwane to develop sustainable and inclusive responses, such as turning ‘hot spots’ into ‘safe spaces’.

COT (City of Tshwane)

The metropolitan municipality in South Africa where the research was conducted. The City of Tshwane is both the geographic and governmental context for the study, which seeks to influence municipal policies on homelessness through ethnographic and spatial research.

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) (German Academic Exchange Service)

An organisation that funded this study through the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation (BMZ). DAAD supports international academic cooperation and funded this collaborative effort to investigate and address homelessness using spatial methods.

Hot Spot

A public space with a high concentration of homeless individuals, typically characterised by rough sleeping, makeshift shelters, limited or no access to basic services such as water, sanitation, and safety, and heightened exposure to crime, harassment, and public stigma. While traditionally seen as unsafe and problematic, the study reinterprets hot spots as sites of potential transformation—spaces where targeted socio-spatial interventions can foster dignity, protection, access to services, and pathways toward inclusion and stability.

Safe Space

A proposed alternative to 'hot spots'. These are areas designed to provide homeless individuals with security, dignity, and access to essential services such as food, hygiene, healthcare, psychosocial support, and vocational training. Safe spaces aim to be inclusive, low-barrier, and collaboratively managed by homeless individuals, communities, NGOs, and the government.

Homeless / People Experiencing Homelessness (PEH)

Individuals without stable, safe, or adequate housing often reside in public spaces such as streets, parks, or makeshift shelters. In this study, the voices and lived experiences of PEH are central, highlighting challenges like food insecurity, stigma, police harassment, and lack of access to employment, documentation, and social services.

FOREWORD

Since Covid-19, so-called ‘hot spots’ where there are concentrations of homeless persons, have increased in the City of Tshwane, South Africa’s administrative capital. Not only have ‘hot spots’ increased, but it contributed to greater visibility of homelessness in the City, and are also distributed across the metropole’s seven regions, including areas where historically there were no incidents of homelessness.

Local authorities tend to treat increasing evidence of homelessness through actions and bye-laws that tend to criminalize people, often displacing social challenges from one area to another, without conclusively addressing root causes.

Various responses seek, with differing results, to address homelessness in South Africa. Apart from overnight shelter, transitional housing, and access to supportive of social housing options, eThekweni and Cape Town also experimented with so-called safe spaces.

In this short-term research project, we aimed to identify hot spots in regions across the City of Tshwane¹, and then make recommendations for considering safe spaces in ten particular areas, which might have the potential to a) reduce vulnerability; b) improve social conditions; c) inform future policies and practices; and d) build a pipeline from streets to safe spaces / shelters to supportive / affordable housing.

We are grateful to Prof Jacques du Toit, who identified this opportunity for our Unit for Street Homelessness to collaborate with the Global Centre for Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability (SMUS), in doing this research.

¹ The City of Tshwane is the name of the metropolitan municipality that incorporates Pretoria. Pretoria is the administrative capital of South Africa.

The patience, support and critique of SMUS, and partners in other cities, and the financial support of DAAD, with back-funding from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation (BMZ), enabled the successful implementation and completion of this project.

Apart from Prof Du Toit, it is important to also acknowledge Dr Michelle Janse Van Rensburg, Remembrance Mokwena-Ngulele, Sam Moimane, Nombulelo Ndandani, and the team of field workers² associated with the project, who all contributed in ways that enable implementation of this project. Lourens Snyman and his team in the Department of Geography/GIS proved invaluable in supporting the mapping process that accompanied our research.

We offer this research report as a gift to the City – practitioners, officials and politicians – as we collectively seek to find lasting, humane, dignified and just solutions for homelessness.

We strongly recommend consideration for piloting a number of safe spaces, with a view of assessing impact, refining the model, and replicating it if proven effective and viable.

Stephan de Beer

Director: Centre for Faith and Community & Professor of Practical,
Theology University of Pretoria

August 2025

² Agreeneth Nomonde Macu; Mbali Siwela; Mbulelo Molaba; Thulisile Mashigo; Khensani Martha Makwakwa; Wendy Khweza

BACKGROUND

The Centre for Faith and Community at the University of Pretoria, in collaboration with the Department of Town and Regional Planning, UP, the Global Centre for Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability (SMUS), DAAD and the Tshwane Homelessness Forum, undertook to study the everyday spatialities of homeless dwellers in so-called ‘hot spots’ in the City of Tshwane. This study explored the daily spatial practices of homeless individuals to identify areas they perceive as safe and accessible—spaces often overlooked or unrecognised by local government and surrounding communities. It also examined how homeless individuals make use of existing assets such as facilities, institutions, and infrastructure, while documenting the significant barriers they face in accessing basic services and resources. These findings were systematically mapped to support informed decision-making. The study concluded with an in-depth analysis of ten identified sites, from which two were recommended for pilot implementation. The study was designed to contribute towards Sustainable Development Goal 11.

Target 11.1: Access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services; Target 11.3: Inclusive, sustainable urbanisation for participatory human settlement planning and management;

Target 11.7: Universal access to safe, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons, and people with disabilities;

Target 11.8: Cities adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans for inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation of risk and resilience to disasters.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The study aimed to collect, analyse and implement rigorous qualitative ethnographic data, supported by spatial tools, on 10 so-called “hot spots” in the City of Tshwane (Pretoria), where a concentration of homeless persons is living, with the view of:

- Altering views of “hot spots” in the minds of local governments, local business and civil society, from hazardous to potential solutions;
- Turning “hot spots” into safe spaces, with distinct benefits;
- Safe sleeping at night;
- Access to lock-up and ablution facilities
- Access to a bouquet of psycho-social and health services;
- Access to longer-term shelter and housing options; and
- Access to vocational integration.



LITERATURE REVIEW

'Homelessness is a profound assault on dignity, social inclusion and the right to life. It is a prima facie violation of the right to housing and violates a number of other human rights in addition to the right to life, including non-discrimination, health, water and sanitation, security of the person and freedom from cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment.'

*- United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing
(A/HRC/43/43, para.30)³*

Homelessness represents a violation of the right to housing, and needs to be dealt as such, also by national, provincial and local governments in South Africa. The failure to have a national policy on homelessness, is indicative of government's failure to address this violation of people's dignity and right to life and well-being.

Safe spaces have been introduced since Covid-19 as an additional intervention to shelter-based responses to homelessness, providing secure spaces in public areas, where people can sleep, with access to basic services that are unavailable on the streets.

In both Cape Town and eThekweni (Durban) safe spaces were created, with different outcomes and differently assessed by different stakeholders.

Whereas safe spaces have been sparsely documented in eThekweni, apart from occasional newspaper articles, the idea and success of safe spaces, as part of a more comprehensive approach to address homelessness, has been fiercely debated in Cape Town.

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-housing/homelessness-and-human-rights>

In 2023, the South African Human Rights Commission reported that safe spaces were given a ‘thumbs-up’ by the City of Cape Town,⁴ which was at that stage welcomed by some activists and homeless service providers.

However, implementation of the safe spaces proved to be contested, with a stand-off between the City and some activist voices, and divided opinion between human rights activists and service providers.

Jonty Cogger, whilst not insisting on the closure of safe spaces, question the implementation thereof, in a 2024 article, suggesting that Cape Town has to revisit its approach. Reflecting especially on the nature of substance use, as a disease, he questioned the abstinence requirement of safe spaces in Cape Town, which prevented substance users to make use of it. Instead, he asked for an approach that would show greater care, matching substance use with harm reduction approaches⁵, which have elsewhere shown to be successful, not only in protecting lives and managing substance use, but often also in assisting users to be weaned of chronic dependency.

Unfortunately, Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis, instead of engaging Cogger’s constructive arguments (which the Mayor calls non-arguments) and concrete proposals, selected to label Cogger, suggesting that Ndifuna Ukwazi, the organisation Cogger works for, is ‘actually making life worse for the homeless’.⁶ Hill-Lewis insists that their sobriety rule in safe spaces ensures a better life for homeless people. Whether it picks up on the critique of Cogger and indeed assists people with chronic substance use problems, is another question. Cogger insists, ‘Homelessness and addiction cannot be dismissed as personal failings or mere “urban decay”. Safe spaces should not be places of control but places of care that meet the needs of the people they aim to help’.

⁴ <https://www.sahrc.org.za/index.php/sahrc-media/news/item/3583-city-s-safe-space-initiative-gets-a-thumbs-up>

⁵ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2024-12-17-safe-spaces-time-to-rethink-city-of-cape-towns-approach/>

⁶ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2024-12-18-safe-spaces-sobriety-rule-enables-a-better-life-for-homeless/>

Cogger and Hill-Lewis seem to agree on wanting to provide the best possible care for people who are unhoused, but differ deeply about what the best approach to care might be.

Cogger pleads for approaches that ‘shift from punishment to partnership’, and instead of criminalizing homeless people and those using substances, dealing with root causes rather. He writes, ‘Harm reduction and housing-first models offer a way forward – one that prioritises dignity, health and inclusion’. Far from advocating against safe spaces, as the Mayor might want to suggest, Cogger argues for complementing safe spaces with harm reduction and access to housing-first models, proven globally as best practices in ending homelessness.

Similarly, politician Sue Little⁷ and activist and person with lived experience of homelessness, Carlos Mesquita⁸ challenge the City of Cape Town for their overly positive branding of safe spaces. Little calls ‘for both rapid rehousing, interim housing and permanent supportive housing to help people move into independent housing’. Safe spaces, in Little’s view, should not be the end of the road, or an excuse not to offer proper access to longer-term supportive or independent housing. That is what people require and that is in line with Cogger’s call for ‘housing first’ approaches. In addition, Little emphasizes the importance of including homeless individuals in decision-making processes that affect them, ‘to ensure strategies, policies and solutions are effective and practical’.

Mesquita argues that many of the people in safe spaces ‘should be in long- term, specialised and serviced care facilities’. Similar to Cogger, he does not advocate for closure of all safe spaces, but instead states, ‘The City refuses to heed the advice of experienced counsel and the suggestions we are making on how to make their Safe Spaces effective in starting.

⁷ <https://forgood.org.za/cape-town-safe-spaces-city-must-stop-playing-pr-games-with-the-lives-of-the-homeless/>

⁸ <https://capeargus.co.za/the-dignity-project/2023-11-25-safe-spaces-not-an-effective-solution-to-homelessness/>

to positively affect reducing the number of people on the streets'. He argues that safe spaces should be real transitional spaces, 'where chronically homeless individuals are given a living space where they can exercise some privacy and be given agency over the life choices they need to make'. His emphasis is on transition and integration into long-term housing options, similar to Cogger and Little.

In the City of Tshwane, we had our own best practices in this regard. At Reliable House people with chronic substance use problems were assisted through housing and harm reduction programmes to recover. Unfortunately, the harm reduction process was terminated, and the management of Reliable House reverted to abstinence, even though evidence has shown the effectiveness of the model that was there. During Covid-19 in Capital Park, a public park was made available as safe spaces for about 50 unhoused persons. People had access to primary health care and harm reduction programmes, and a well-managed safe space showed great results. Unfortunately, after hard lockdown, this safe space closed down. Somehow, we fail to learn from our best examples, reverting to models that exclude or stigmatize some.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION & RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To understand the project, the research methodology and seven steps adopted by the project are described here. The study adopted an ethnographic approach through participant observation, and a small sample of respondents participating in a qualitative survey. This was utilised to collect data from people with lived experience and various stakeholders, including business people, community members, NPO officials, and government/municipal officials.

The study followed the following steps:

Step 1: *Identify and map 'hot spots' in different regions of the City of Tshwane*

Criteria used to identify hot spots included the combination of
(a) areas with a concentration of homeless dwellers where there is a lack of access to ablution, sleeping facilities and safety;
(b) high levels of fire risks; and
(c) complaints by surrounding neighbours.

Step 2: *Select 10 'hot spots'*

These were then chosen from the initial number of hot spots for location, degree of conflict with neighbours, potentially available resources of support in the area, and local neighbourhood buy-in.

Step 3: *Develop 'thick descriptions' of the 'everyday spatialities' of homeless populations*

In this step, the research team immersed itself deeper in the 10 sites, complementing initial information based on observation and surveys, with an asset map and perception map of the neighbourhood within which these sites are located.

Step 4: *Facilitate local participatory meetings*

Homeless dwellers and neighbours entered into conversation about turning 'hot spots' into safe spaces ,guided by three questions.

- 1.What are the obstacles that would hinder such a venture?
- 2.What would make such a venture work?
- 3.What would a local collaborative look like to enable successful implementation?

Step 5: *Research report*

Based on Steps 1-4, we drafted this research project, including a number of recommendations, e.g. a specific proposal for the City of Tshwane to consider piloting 2-3 initial sites as safe spaces for homeless dwellers; recommending standard operating procedures (SOPs) or guiding principles for the creation and management of such; indicating partnerships and a bouquet of services and support that would be required; indicating the specific roles and responsibilities of inhabitants of safe spaces, local government, surrounding neighbours, non-profit organisations, and academic partners)

Step 6: *On-going engagement*

The report will form part of an ongoing effort to engage the City of Tshwane, the Gauteng Department of Social Development, and local private sector in financially supporting the adoption of the selected sites.

Step 7: *Piloting 2-3 safe spaces in the City of Tshwane*

Piloting of 2-3 safe spaces to be done with the view of testing and refining the concept, generating data that will cultivate an alternative view of 'hot spots' and supporting full roll-out of the proposal

The study's journey

THE ROAD IN A SNAPSHOT



ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To ensure the study meets the standards of good scientific research, upholds credibility, and ensures the protection of participants (Strydom 2011: 129), ethical clearance for the study was obtained through the ethics committee of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, assured that their participation was voluntary, and were free to withdraw at any point during interviews or focus groups.

LIMITATIONS

- **Data Collection:** Homeless individuals are often faced with 'forced mobility', which may affect the accuracy of the information. Lack of trust or distrust due to past exploitation may result in the wrong personal and sensitive information being provided.
- **Lack of spatial data on homelessness:** Because of their fluidity and mobility, results of enumerating the homeless population the normal census are still being questioned, resulting in this population often being excluded from spatial data sets and spatial planning.
- **Complexity of integrating multidimensional and multifaceted information:** This study was a transdisciplinary study, involving different disciplines, community practitioners and people with lived experience, and gathering information on social, health, spatial, and environmental data, requiring different data collection tools. Whilst positive, such collaborative approaches, with multidimensional techniques and analysis can be complicated.
- **Time and resource-intensive:** The short time-frame of the study placed limitations, as a project of this nature requires time and resources.
- **Fragmentation of responsibilities amongst stakeholders:** Different stakeholders have different priorities, e.g. politicians, officials, NPO/NGOs, faith-based groups, people living on the streets, and business. Each has different needs and different expectations.

Food security

The main problem that was voiced at one site was that food security for all homeless people was a struggle. They mentioned that things like violence, theft, or employment become unimportant if you are too focused on thinking about where your next meal will come from. They stated that access to food will benefit the homeless communities since this issue causes many of the challenges faced in the homeless communities. One of the beneficiaries mentioned that once you do not have food, you resort to theft/violence to be able to meet that one basic need.

Theft

One of the other challenges that people face when living on the streets is that of theft. People experiencing homelessness are vulnerable to crime and theft of their belongings. One of the beneficiaries at a drop-in centre reported that the fear of theft causes him to have impaired sleep patterns. He also needed to carry all his belongings with him when he leaves for his shelter, which can be heavy and tiresome. At a shelter for men, someone mentioned that their belongings were being stolen to discourage them and to influence them to resort back to the help of substances to cope. This is done so that the people selling the substances continue to generate an income. They further stated that the increased stress and a decrease in hope that they experience when their documents, or the phones and laptops they used to apply online for new documents or for university, are stolen, led to an increase in the use of substances to help them cope with the stress and the loss of hope.

Harassment and ill-treatment from the Metro Police

Many people cited harassment and ill-treatment from the Metro Police. One of the beneficiaries arrived at a drop-in site with red burnt eyes due to the police using pepper spray on him when he was asleep under a bridge. The beneficiaries reported feeling afraid of the police and do not feel that they can reach out to the police to protect and help with the challenges they face when living on the streets.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this section, three sets of data will be integrated, with a summary at the end. Resulting from this section, specific recommendations are then made in the next section. The sets of data include (i) field work done by students of the University of Pretoria's Department of Occupational Therapy; (ii) individual interviews / surveys with people living in hot spots and focus groups made up of stakeholders in the surrounding neighbourhoods; and (iii) a brief comparative analysis of safe spaces in the cities of Cape Town and eThekwin⁹. These three sets of reflections will be followed by a brief reflection on the research methodology that was employed and a summary of the research findings will conclude this section.

Field work [Occupational Therapy students; University of Pretoria].

This portion of the research was done during May/June of 2024, led by Michelle Janse Van Rensburg. The section here below is authored in a narrative style by Michelle, and represents an extract from a more comprehensive document, gathering findings from field work done, describing the experiences of those inhabiting hot spots or homeless shelters.

⁹ (i) Focus groups were conducted by occupational therapy students, under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Michelle Janse Van Rensburg, during the period May / June 2024; (ii) Identification of hot spots were done under the leadership of Ms Nombulelo Ndadala (an activist and community practitioner from Tshwane Leadership Foundation) and Mr Sam Moimane (Chairperson of the Tshwane Homelessness Forum and community practitioner); Field work was conducted by Theology students under the guidance and supervision of Ms Remembrance Mokwena-Ngulele; (iv) Assessment and description of safe spaces in Cape Town and eThekwini were done by Ms Remembrance Mokwena-Ngulele and Prof Stephan de Beer. Prof Jacques du Toit provided methodological advise.

At Reliable House it was also mentioned that even though they call the police to help them when something is stolen or when a fight breaks out, the Police do not come or they arrive very late.

Access to employment

People living on the street struggle to find employment to break their cycles of exclusion. This is largely due to the lack of documentation such as IDs, CVs, matriculation certificates and other necessary documents for job applications. Some of the people at the drop-in site reported that they had to flee their country and are not South African citizens, therefore, they cannot get the documentation to apply for work. Some of the members at a men's shelter also want to start studying again, but due to lack of funding and, again, the lack of documents, this proves to be a very difficult task. They also struggle to find the time and the money to go apply for new documents and university when they need to do a lot of little jobs to get them enough money for food.

Lack of education or skills

For some of the respondents, the most acute need was the lack of education or appropriate skills to secure employment. Many of the respondents could not read or write, which are necessary life skills they needed to have in order to apply for jobs. One of the people stated that he does not mind whether he lives on the street or in an apartment; he just wants a job to get an income and provide for his family. He said, 'if we receive skills so that we can get a job, then all my problem will be solved'. People felt that pop-up shops, drop-in centres and NGO-based programmes do not equip them with the necessary skills to improve their living circumstances, focusing more on providing in their basic needs such as food, water, showers and clothing. They reported feeling trapped in circumstances where they needed to rely on these sites for their basic needs, but cannot live independently and are not being empowered to rise above their circumstances. They feel that this was not sustainable and provided an example through describing what happens over weekends. Drop-in centres close down over weekends.

For two days people cannot access basic needs such as food or a shower. They become totally reliant and dependent on these sites for their basic needs, which also had an impact on their mental health, causing feelings of hopelessness and depression.

Access to clean drinking water and warmth in winter

People lack access to clean drinkingwater. They accesswater by drinkingfrom the taps in the parks, asking people on the street for water or asking for water at fuel stations. This comes with its own challenges, as they are often poorly treated and dismissed when asking for water from others. People also lack warmth in winter. Many of the beneficiaries have torn clothes and no blanketor mattress to keep them warm at night.

Stigma and judgment

People living on the street often experience stigma and judgement from others. At a male shelter they mentioned the struggle to get jobs due to the stigma that homeless people use substances, are dirty, steal,and are uneducated. They mentioned that such judgement and the looks they receive from passers-by, take away from their dignity. It also affects them to get food or buy anything because they feel like they are being watched the whole time. In the interview at a men's shelter, people reiterated that being homeless is not a choice but people treat them like it is. There are various aspects that cause homelessness and they wish that people kept an open mind.

Duration of homelessness

Some of the respondents experienced homelessness since they were 10, 11 years old. At such a young age, they found the first group that they could,to experience a sense of safety. The groups that they found were not always a good influence, but they provided them with the protection they needed in order to survive on the streets. When they landed on the streets this young, the older group members often forced them to go beg on the streets in order to get money for food. However, when the older group members bought food, they shared it with the children and they all ate together.

Conflict and violence

Conflict within homeless groups living together, or violence between groups, are also experienced. It became evident at a male shelter that the high stress environment leads to an increase in fights between the residents. They accuse each other of stealing things, which escalates to fights which could even be life threatening. In an interview at one of the shelters, it was mentioned by some of the men that they are sodomised on the street, and could even be killed if they did not show adequate respect to others. These are drastic consequences that not everyone has to deal with, but people who experience homelessness are forced to deal with.

Family separation

Parents who are homeless, and mothers especially, face the risk of being separated from their children. In an interview with women living in a female shelter, one of the members mentioned that her biggest concern was to find a home so that she can regain custody of her children. Some shelters have an age limit that prevents children over a certain age from living in the shelter with their parents. In some shelters, the age limit is as young as 6 years old. In another shelter the age limit for girls is 18 years and for boys, it is 13 years old. It differs between shelters.

Surveying hot spots

A participant in the surveys, living in region 7 of the City of Tshwane, spoke of a 'hot spot' as a place where homeless people live, but it is not safe 'because some people do not respect others'. Most participants spoke of safety concerns, being exposed in public spaces like parks, taken advantage of, and being blamed for crime that is committed by others coming from outside.

The most common characteristics of 'hot spots', as observed and described by those who participated in our survey, were the following:

- Lack of access to drinking water
- Lack of food
- Limited options for personal sanitation and hygiene
- Lack of protection against harassment from law enforcement agencies
- Police does not respond when called for assistance
- Theft of personal belongings
- Having to carry their belongings with them everywhere they go, for fear of it being stolen
- Impaired sleep patterns due to being unsafe, and weather conditions

The most common characteristics of people sleeping in these spaces include the following:

- Unemployment
- Lack of income or minimal income
- Lack of skills
- No place to call 'home'
- Lack of documentation (being stolen and lack of finance to replace it)
- Lack of services over weekends (drop-in centres operate during week days)
- Lack of social support
- Bad influences on the streets.
- Experiencing stigma and judgment from the public
- Lack of trust from the public and potential employers
- Lack of warm clothing (socks, jerseys, blankets)
- Exposure to harmful use of substances
- Children living with parents are detrimentally influenced by negative conditions and influences on the streets

| Region number | Location | Number of homeless individuals | Safety and security (Sleeping situation) | Safety and security (Fire) |
|---------------|---|--------------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| 1 | 1 Mabopane Station | 51-100 | Rough sleeping | Medium |
| 2 | 1 Soshanguve Block L and M | 26-50 | Makeshift shelters | Medium |
| 3 | 1 Garankuwa Zone 1 and Zone 5 | 26-50 | Makeshift shelters | Medium |
| 4 | 1 Pretoria North/ Akasia | 26-50 | Rough sleeping | Medium |
| 5 | 2 Hammanskraal Station | 51-100 | Rough sleeping | Medium |
| 6 | 3 Johan heyns | 26-50 | Rough sleeping | High |
| 7 | 3 Burgers Park | 26-50 | Rough sleeping | Medium |
| 8 | 3 Church Square | 26-50 | Rough sleeping | low |
| 9 | 3 Bosman station | 26-50 | Rough sleeping | low |
| 10 | 3 Marabastad | 26-50 | Makeshift shelters | low |
| 11 | 3 princess park | 51-100 | Makeshift shelters | High |
| 12 | 3 Pretoria West | 51-100 | Rough sleeping | Medium |
| 13 | 3 Attredgeville | 51-100 | Rough sleeping | Medium |
| 14 | 3 Moot | 51-100 | Makeshift shelters | low |
| 15 | 3 Hatfield | 26-50 | Rough sleeping | low |
| 16 | 3 Arcadia | 101-200 | Rough sleeping | low |
| 17 | 4 Lyttleton (Along the railroad and under the | 26-50 | Makeshift shelters | High |
| 18 | 4 Centurion (Along Royal hotel) | 26-50 | Rough sleeping | none |
| 19 | 4 Centurion (Irene taxi rank) | 51-100 | Rough sleeping | low |
| 20 | 5 Eersterust Cemetery (between Mamelodi & Eersterust) | 51-100 | Makeshift shelters | High |
| 21 | 5 Stormvoel Road (Railway Wall Eersterust) | 26-50 | Rough sleeping | High |
| 22 | 5 Highlands park | 26-50 | Rough sleeping | Medium |
| 23 | 5 Between Eersterust & East Lynne (Bush) | 101-200 | Hidden Natural Spots | High |
| 24 | 5 Kentucky (East Lynne) | 26-50 | Rough sleeping | High |
| 25 | 5 Rayton (Near Main Road) | 26-50 | Rough sleeping | High |
| 26 | 5 Cullinan (Near Railway Station) | 26-50 | Rough sleeping | High |
| 27 | 6 Mamelodi East Railway Stations | 26-50 | Rough sleeping | High |
| 28 | 6 Next to Stergas complex | 26-50 | Makeshift shelters | High |
| 29 | 6 Under Bridges (Solomon Mahlangu Drive) | 6-10 | Rough sleeping | High |
| 30 | 6 Denneboom Station (Mamelodi West) | 26-50 | Makeshift shelters | Medium |
| 31 | 6 Silverlakes Area (near Golf Estate) | 26-50 | Makeshift shelters | Medium |
| 32 | 6 Menlyn Mall Area | 6-10 | Rough sleeping | Medium |
| 33 | 6 Constanca park Near Garsfontein Road | 26-50 | Makeshift shelters | High |
| 34 | 7 Bronkhorstspruit Taxi Rank | 26-50 | Rough sleeping | High |
| 35 | 7 Zithobeni Dumping Site | 26-50 | Rough sleeping | High |

We have identified 35 hot spots in the 7 regions of the City of Tshwane (See table below). The 35 identified spaces are not necessarily all the hot spots in the city, and since the surveying was completed, some of the areas were closed down or fenced in to prevent people from living in these spaces. New hot spots also appear from time to time.

Goeller score card: Matrix displaying ten identified sites along the four criteria in order to make a decision for the two/three sites to propose implementation for pilot project.

| | Mabopane Station | Church Square | Burgers Park | Moot: Park | Hammanskraal | Marabastad | Bronkhorst-spruit Taxi Rank | Constantia Park | Stormvoël Road (railway wall, Eersterust) | Irene Taxi Rank |
|--|--|--|---|--|---|---|--|--|---|---|
| Description | Main transportation hub of Mabopane with large no of homeless individuals using substances | Public open space in the city centre, surrounded by historical buildings | Public park in the inner city, which is a heritage site | Public park in Gezina (on the edge of the Moot area) | The bridge along the busy R101 main route, also known as the Old Warmbaths Road, near the Spar Complex. | An old mixed-used community on the edge of the inner city (location?) | Taxi rank, public space, located in a low-income area of Bronkhorst-spruit | Public park (location?) on Garsfontein Road in Constantia Park | On the edge of the Eersterust township next to main road to Eersterust / Mamelodi | A public space in a southern suburb of the city |
| Demo-graphics | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| Existing infrastructure | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Community involvement | 5 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Perceived benefits to whole community | 5 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Rating: | 18/20 | 19/20 | 19/20 | 17/20 | 16/20 | 13/20 | 11/20 | 10/20 | 10/20 | 8/20 |

| | |
|-----|--------|
| 0-1 | Low |
| 2-3 | Medium |
| 4-5 | High |

- Three sites scored High (Mabopane Station, Burgerspark and Church Square). This concludes that the likelihood for these sites to be successful are high. These are all supported by the ethnographic data gathered and the spatial data.

We used the Goeller Score Card, displaying the sites alongside each other, and using the four criteria (shown in the table) to score the sites.

Based on this, we have identified three clear sites to be proposed as pilot safe spaces, with a fourth site to be considered as an additional pilot site. The sites are Mabopane Station, Church Square, Burgers Park and Moot: Park.

Comparative analysis of safe spaces: City of Cape Town and City of eThekweni (Durban)

‘Safe spaces’ have been adopted in both Cape Town and eThekweni as additional strategies to shelter or transitional housing, to address homelessness more constructively. Members of the research team were able to attend to some of the lessons learn from these two cities.

Cape Town:

- The City of Cape Town offer 700-800 safe spaces at night. Their safe spaces, originally started as public spaces that were secured, now also include facilities more similar to shelters.
- It shelters unhoused people from the elements [except in extraordinary cases such as floods, etc], and are often under bridges, overhangs, or in other public open spaces owned by the city, with limited amount of cover. In some such spaces tents are allowed, and the city is now also considering use of empty parkades at night.
- In Cape Town perimeter security is provided by the municipality, and sometimes toilets, washing facilities, lockers or other form of storage are provided for people's goods.
- The rationale for safe spaces as that it provides protection and access to minimum facilities to a large number of people at minimal cost. What started out as temporary spaces during Covid-19 is now seen as part of longer-term interventions to address homelessness. Well- managed safe spaces also hold benefits for the broader public and host neighbourhoods.
- Because it is municipally recognized, there are no harassment by the police, other law enforcement agencies or the public, or, should harassment occur, it would be dealt with.
- Internal maintenance and cleaning of these spaces are mostly self- done with weekly cleaning of toilets and paving, offered by the municipality.
- Though municipal-led, services to these spaces are sourced out to NPOs or businesses.
- Barriers to entry are low so as to allow optimal use of such spaces. No drug use is allowed in these spaces.
- Some spaces provide access to social work services, through NPOs, which is positive, and allowing for transition into long-term housing. In safe spaces where there is no access to additional services, people tend to get stuck in these spaces. NPOs would typically provide access to day services.

- The City of Cape Town now distinguishes between safe spaces (in the description above), designated sleeping spaces (without ablution or any of the above securities, but allowed), and shelters.

eThekwini (Durban):

- Though eThekwini borrowed from Cape Town, and also started with the provision of safe spaces since Covid-19, the city has not integrated safe spaces and well-reflective manner into their approach to deal with homelessness.
- In eThekwini there are two safe spaces, officially supposed to have about 150 persons per space, and one building for women exclusively, hosting about 100 women. The Jewish Club, however, has no ceiling on the number of people allowed in, which of course translates into problems with managing the site, which is self- managed by the occupants.
- In the two open spaces there are tents with pellets or blankets and temporary toilets. Ablution includes cold water showers.
- Perimeter security is provided outside.
- Initially males and females were divided but this was not sustained, although the building for women assists in providing women with more privacy and safety.
- People should have access to social work services in all these spaces, but this could not be confirmed.
- The main rationale was to reduce the number of people living on the street, and to provide safety and social controls during Covid-19.
- One of the main weaknesses of safe spaces in eThekwini is the failure to integrate this properly as part of a more comprehensive homelessness strategy.

Reflection on research methodology

The SMUS toolkit lends itself to inter- and transdisciplinary research.

- It was designed to integrate spatial analysis with sustainability principles, guiding urban planning and action.
- The toolkit has potential to help address homelessness, as it combines urban, social, psychological, health and environmental factors in its assessment of urban spaces, and as a design tool kit for sustainable spaces that better integrated marginalized populations.
- Jacques du Toit, professor of urban planning and methodological advisor to the project, said the following:

'As a methodological advisor to the project, who was not directly involved in the field work, the contributions to my own understanding are more of a methodological than an interpersonal nature. I learned (i) that ethnographic methods can provide a rich source of qualitative data to set the scene for the application of other methods (in our case, mapping and site selection); and (ii) how my own understanding of a specific site selection criterion was changed for the better, following verbal feedback from a team member who was directly involved in the field work'.

Summary of research journey and findings

- The field workers, together with the community practitioners identified 36 hot spots within the seven regions of the City of Tshwane, with an emphasis on ‘people living under the sky’¹⁰
- A google form was populated with a set of identifying criteria. The core team undertook a process of assessing, attending and deciding on narrowing down the hot spots to 10 sites.
- The field workers then compiled thick descriptions of the everyday spatialities of the homeless population in the 10 sites – i.e. people’s experiences, understandings and interactions with these spaces.
- These descriptions helped to inform a final recommendation for pilot sites (see Annexure).
- We were greatly assisted by the Department of Geography/GIS with mapping of the different sites, and also with asset mapping within each site. Information that was collected was matched to exact physical coordinates of the site, and through an Epi collect data app, field workers were able to collect and organise data.
- Participatory meetings were held that included stakeholders, local and provincial government officials, researchers and people with lived experiences of homelessness. These meetings helped as soundboards and reflective meetings to consider the data, and contributed greatly towards participatory and inclusive co-construction of knowledge

¹⁰The way in which practitioners in Bengaluru, India, distinguish between street homeless populations and people living in precarious forms of housing.

Recommendations

1. We recommend the methodology that was used in this project as a possibly valuable tool to be complementing other research methods in informing interventions supporting homeless and other vulnerable populations.
2. The study recommends that the following sites be adopted and piloted by the City of Tshwane, with support from the Gauteng Department of Social Development (championed by its Northern Corridor), and in close partnership with the Tshwane Homelessness Forum: Mabopane Station; Burgers Park and Church Square, with the Moot: Park, as an alternate or fourth option.
3. These sites are very different from each other – urban township; city centre park; city centre public open space; suburban park – and they are also different in terms of levels of complexity, yet all four of them fulfilled the criteria used to measure which might be the most important – and viable – sites for piloting safe spaces in Tshwane.
4. Participants in the research project were in support of safe spaces that are guided by the following clear principles:
 - Safety and dignity: The space must protect against violence (from others participants in the space, the general public and law enforcement agencies). Perimeter fencing should be considered, and/or appropriate support from the City to ensure that the Metro Police and SAPS support participants in safe spaces, instead of criminalizing them.
 - Homeless individuals should participate in decision-making, safe keeping and daily maintenance of the spaces.
 - Low barrier access: Identity documents and payment should not be made requirements.
 - Allow flexibility in opening and closing of spaces, to enable participants to move in and out to seek for employment opportunities, or ply their trade.

- The space must offer access to holistic support including basic services such as food, hygiene, primary health, psychosocial services, and vocational skills.
- Safe spaces should not be concentrated in the city centre only, but also other areas which offer opportunities for employment such as factories.

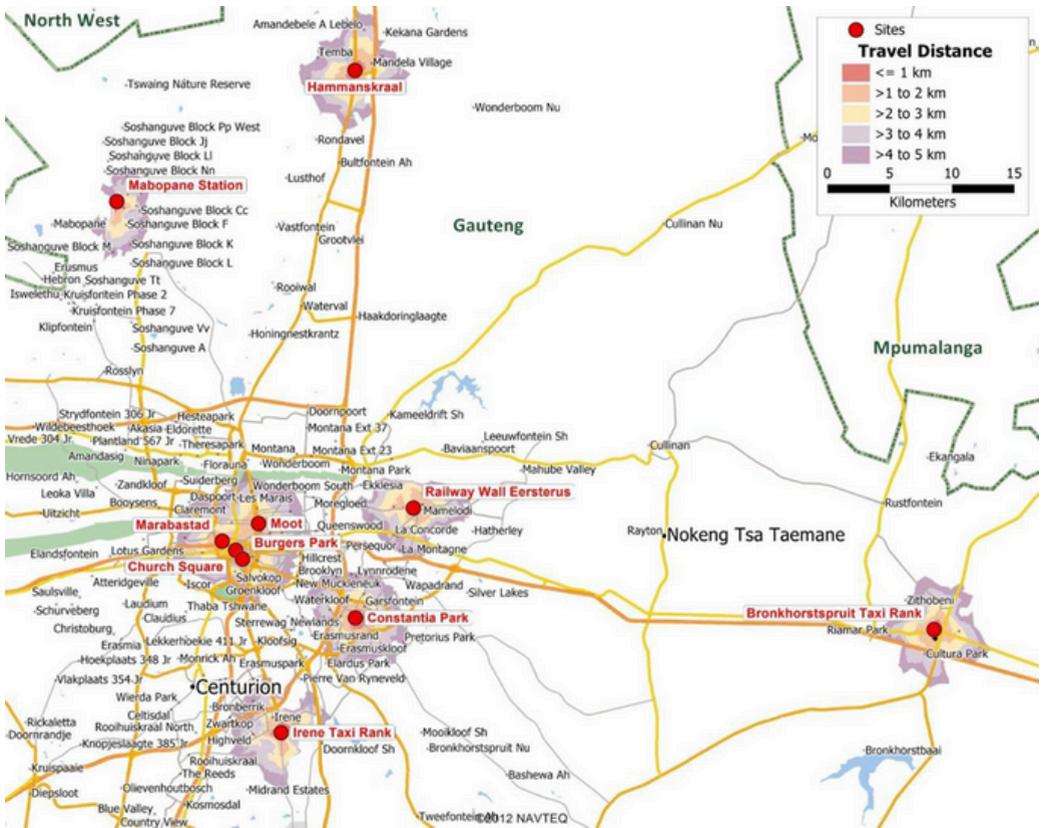
In addition, based on the Cape Town and eThekweni experiences, and debates, our research concludes:

- Safe spaces should not be seen as an end in itself, but merely as transit spaces that, complemented by the above services, should enable people to move into permanent supportive, social or affordable housing.
- Safe spaces should focus on care and not on punitive measures. Instead of insisting on sobriety, harm reduction programmes should be coupled to safe spaces, to support substance users to exit homelessness sustainably.
- Substance users are the most likely homeless population that will not access shelters or transitional housing because of the strict criteria. Safe spaces could offer protection to substance users and the public, through managed use, together with harm reduction interventions. In Tshwane, the COSUP programme has been implemented very successfully between the City of Tshwane and the University of Pretoria, but should be rolled out consistently, with appropriate funding support at safe spaces.
- Management of safe spaces could be done in conjunction between residents and approved non-profits. Self-management should be encouraged with non-profits providing a top-up support in terms of caretaking and access to social and other services. Appointment of non-profits should be made on a fair and equitable basis through a call for proposals.

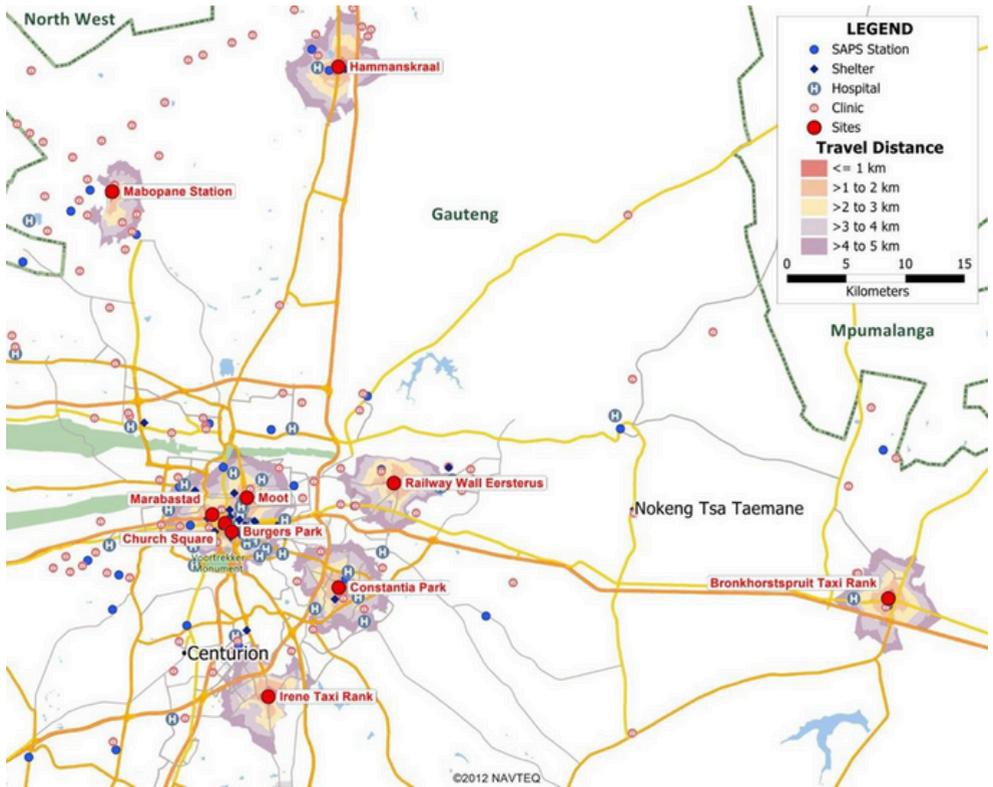
- Safe spaces should be cost-effective in how it is implemented. One of the critiques in the Cape Town model is how the highest percentages of the city's allocated budget for safe space are used towards security and management of the spaces by non- profits, whilst only a tiny percentage actually provides direct services to those living here. We propose a breakdown of 33% for direct services, 33% for caretaking/services (NPOs) and 33% towards securing spaces for those living here.

Safe spaces should be places of care – protecting from the elements; connecting to services; portals into long-term housing and healthy living.

Maps



Basemap 1: Indicating travel distance relevant to the city centre (selected 10 sites)



Basemap 2: Indicating social and other infrastructure available near hot spots (selected 10 sites)

Annexure

SITE DESCRIPTIONS

REGION ONE

1. Mabopane Station

Number of people: High, about 51 to 100 individuals within and around the stations.

Defensible space: High, the space has ample areas that can be identified and negotiated for creating some sort of enclosure.

Resources: High, Mabopane Station offers access, to facilities such, as bathrooms and waiting rooms which can be appealing to individuals experiencing housing instability and seeking temporary refuge. Access, to Community Services; Mabopane Station is situated close to social welfare facilities like NGOs and charitable organizations that offer aid to individuals by providing food assistance and healthcare services among forms of support, in the vicinity of the station can make it a desirable spot.

Economic possibilities arise when stations draw a crowd that potentially leads to economic activities such, as vending goods or seeking donations from individuals present there. Train stations often see a lot of foot traffic due, to the flow of people each day which makes them popular spots for individuals to seek assistance, with money or shelter

Degree of conflict: Medium, Local buy in: In some areas of the city or town center where there are people living together can form a sort of community or group to support each other and meet others going through experiences over time and places like Mabopane Station may become popular meeting points where they can see familiar faces and make new connections.

Local buy-in: High, Being, in crowded places can give a sense of security compared to being alone, in areas because there is risk of encountering violence and a higher chance of receiving help during emergencies. The community also feels integrating the homeless individuals will foster a sense of safety and minimize “criminal activities”

REGION TWO

1. Hammanskraal

Number of People: High, approximately 111 individuals are reported in this area, often relying on the station and mall for basic needs. The lack of formal shelter leads to precarious living conditions.

Defensible space: High, the site is next to a bridge, homeless individuals using the bridge as roof when necessary.

Resources: High, Hammanskraal Station because local authorities, NGOs and Community leaders could come together to provide services like food, medical care, mental health support and social services. Limited access to healthcare and social services. Safety concerns due to high traffic and a transient population.

Degree of conflict: Medium, the community in this area seem to have accepted the reintegration with the homeless individuals. It can be observed around the mall, homeless individuals pushing local community shopping trolleys and assisting with unpacking their grocery into their vehicles. This creates that as though there is still name calling such as “Nyaopens”, there is also a sense of wanting to reintegrate and work together

Local buy-in: High, Interviews indicated some increased awareness among local businesses about the need for support, and capitalising on the positive attitude could assist in stronger collaborations towards creating a safer space and workable solutions at the site.

REGION THREE

1. Burgerspark

Number of Homeless individuals: High, about 26 to 50 individuals

Defensible: High, the area has potential to negotiate some enclosure, or some sort of protective fencing.

Resources: High, one of the park's standout features is its proximity to empowerment opportunities. It serves as a hub for essential resources and support services, making it easier for homeless individuals to access vital assistance. Local organizations and churches in the area offer various programs that can fundamentally change lives, such as food distribution etc.

Degree of conflict: Low, Burgers Park, because it is an invaluable community space that extends its warmth and support to both the homeless population and local residents. The Park plays a crucial role in fostering a welcoming environment where individuals can feel safe and included.

Local buy-in: High, Moreover, the nearby churches actively involve individuals in volunteer roles, creating opportunities for community engagement. This not only provides the homeless with a sense of purpose but also strengthens connections between them and local residents, fostering mutual understanding and compassion.

2. Church Square

Number of Homeless individuals: High, about 25 to 50 individuals, witnessed during the lunch hour, receiving food from one of the mobile soup kitchens. The number vary during specific time of the day.

Defensible: High, the area is an open space, however there are also possibilities to negotiate with businesses around to find a workable solution.

Resources: High, Private and public entities around the area

Degree of conflict: High, as this is business hub, it is often seen as a bad image or face for the businesses around.

Local buy-in: Low, reluctance to consider any good that might come out of creating safe environment for the homeless within this space, rather, more buy-in ward “cleaning u”.

3. Marabastad

Number of Homeless individuals: High, various parts of Marabastad, but particular spot there is about 26 to 50, this number is more if inclusive the different parts of Marabastad (more than 100).

Defensible: Low, the spaces are open areas, pavements and next to a river.

Resources: High, there are business and few public entities

Degree of conflict: High, Needs further exploration.

Local buy-in: Low, to be explored further.

4. Moot Area: the area comprises of few spots around, however the one specific spot that is an open park, next to Steve Biko Hospital

Number of Homeless individuals: High, around 26 -50

Defensible: High, the area has potential for enclosed, there is a very old steel “stand” structure available within the park, which sometimes the people all run under when it is rainy or vey hot

Resources: High, within several public institutions, including the academic hospital.

Degree of conflict: medium, division amongst locals on the sentiments

Local buy-in: Medium, Unclear

REGION 4

1. Irene Taxi Rank

Number of Homeless Individuals: High, with over 60 people regularly occupying the area. Despite safety concerns, other key factors appear to attract individuals, indicating its importance to the local homeless community.

Proximity to Resources:

- **Education:** Close to a school, providing potential access to educational opportunities or support for families.
- **Law Enforcement:** SAPS station nearby, which could help ensure security and support.
- **Healthcare:** Access to nearby health facilities.
- **Transportation:** Conveniently located at a taxi rank with easy access to public transportation.

- **Faith-based Support:** Two churches are in proximity (one four blocks away and the other six blocks away), which could play a supportive role.
- **Business Opportunities:** Nearby mall, wholesale market, and other business hubs offer potential employment opportunities and access to essential goods.

Defensible Space: High, it appears as if there is a wall, which may offer some security. A more thorough assessment of defensible space and sleeping arrangements is necessary.

Degree of Conflict: Medium, Requires further assessment. No known issues with neighbouring communities, but additional local feedback may clarify potential challenges.

Local neighbourhood buy-in: Medium, Most probably receive neighbouring support as the neighbouring community values organised and less destructive spaces.

2. Along the railway, Lyttleton

Number of Homeless Individuals: Low, approximately 1-10 people currently occupy this area. However, there is a nearby shelter that may soon close, which could lead to an increase in the local homeless population. This makes establishing a safe space particularly beneficial.

Proximity to Resources:

- **Sanitation:** Access to sanitation facilities and ablution blocks.
- **Educational Institutions:** Primary school, secondary school, and college within reach.
- **Law Enforcement:** Nearby SAPS and Metro stations.
- **Healthcare:** Hospital access is available in the area.
- **Transportation:** Accessible via train and bus routes.

- **Faith-based:** Several churches are nearby, which could play a supportive role.
- **Business Opportunities:** Close to a mall and recycling hub, providing potential employment or economic engagement for residents.

Degree of Conflict: High, this hot spot is near an informal settlement that often causes disruptions, such as noise and air pollution from fires, impacting neighbouring areas.

Local neighbourhood buy-in: Medium, Most probably receive neighbouring support as the neighbouring community values organised and less destructive spaces.

REGION 5

1. Stormvoel Road (Railway Wall Eersterus)

Number of Homeless Individuals: High, there are 26 to 50 people in the hotspot

Location (Defensibility/Suitability): High, the presence of the railway wall creates a naturally enclosed environment, enhancing the ability to establish a well-defined and defensible space, which may improve safety and ease of monitoring the area.

Degree of Conflict with Neighbours: High, the existing public sentiment is currently unwelcoming. This high level of tension suggests a significant degree of conflict with nearby residents, likely rooted in concerns over safety. The neighbourhood holds a stigma that everyone who is homeless is associated with some sort of crime, since drug use and exchange are prominent in the area.

Local Neighbourhood Buy-In: Low, Due to the reported unwelcoming sentiment from the community, buy-in from surrounding neighbours is currently low. Positive engagement or initiatives may be required to improve relations and increase support from the neighbourhood.

Potential Available Resources: High, the area has access to numerous resources, including essential services from the NGO Mountains and Valleys that provides has a shelter nearby, and often offers food to the people in the hotspot. The hotspot is next to shops and on the road, giving the dwellers access to public transportation. There is a church nearby too that may assist in transforming the lives of the dwellers. This availability of resources is a strong point, as it offers various forms of support and potential for personal and professional growth for residents.

REGION 6

1.Constantia Park Near Garsfontein Road

Number of Homeless Individuals: High, 26 to 50 people.

Location (Defensibility/Suitability): High The area is located within a park, which adds a natural, open setting while also offering space for possible development. Nearby Metro Police, main road access, and a generally low crime rate contribute to a suitable and defensible environment for community initiatives.

Degree of Conflict with Neighbours: Low Situated in an affluent area with potential for partnerships with local residents and churches, there may be more openness to community upliftment, reducing potential conflict with neighbours. The neighbours also provide employment to the homeless community by letting them do gardening and housekeeping duties. The residents are able to use the bathrooms in the houses they work at and they get food there.

Local Neighbourhood Buy-In: High Given the presence of community-focused institutions like large churches and a generally safer environment, there's a higher chance of buy-in from local organizations and residents such as those that allow the people in their homes who may support initiatives for upliftment and integration.

Potential Available Resources: High. The area has strong access to economic, social, and infrastructural resources, including nearby businesses, public transport, police presence, space for amenities, and community organizations like churches that can offer supportive programs and resources.

REGION 7

1. Bronkhorstspuit Taxi Rank

Number of Homeless individuals: High, about 26 to 50, however this number could be considered to be a little bit higher if proper count is done.

Defensible space: Low, the taxi rank is an open area and there are hardly any visible wall or opportunity to work on it or to fence around it.

Resources: Low, Facilities are limited, with no electricity and only basic sanitation. Community support is modest, with food and temporary shelters such as tents provided by local organizations like Mountains and Valleys Ministries, which also runs rehabilitation programs. Some university groups (UP and UNISA) and nearby churches assist with basic needs, but access to healthcare remains a challenge due to the remote location.

Degree of Conflict: High, Interviews with commuter highlight the rank's importance in daily life, providing affordable and accessible transportation. However, challenges such as overcrowding and limited facilities are frequently mentioned, impacting the overall commuter experience. This often leads into the commuters not welcoming the homeless individuals and labelling them and calling them names such as "Nyaopens" and associated with criminal activities.

Local buy-in: Low, In Bronkhorstspuit, homelessness includes both South Africans and refugees, who are seeking shelter after faced with evictions. This further adds on the negative attitude by the local community and resistance or un-willingness to reintegrate with the homeless individuals.

Unit for Street Homelessness
Faculty of Theology and Religion

