

Environmental justice and unsheltered homelessness

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Eccles Health Sciences Library
Climate Changes Health and Health Equity Lecture Series
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“No one is free to perform an action unless there is somewhere they are free to perform it.” – Jeremy Waldron (1991, p. 296)

What is justice, and where can we locate it in space and time?

(unsheltered) Homelessness

- Homelessness
 - Individualized descriptor; behavior
 - Socialized condition; result of political economic policies
- Definitions (HUD):
 - **Homelessness:**
 - An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, which includes a primary nighttime residence of:
 - Place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation (including car, park, abandoned building, bus/train station, airport, or camping ground) **(unsheltered)**
 - Publicly or privately operated shelter or transitional housing, including a hotel or motel paid for by government or charitable organizations **(sheltered)**
 - **Chronic homelessness:**
 - an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for a year or more, OR
 - an unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition who has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.



Homelessness

- Historically: hobos (traveling worker), train jumpers, single white male vagabonds – romanticized
- Causes of increased homelessness in the 1980s (Wolch & Dear, 1993):
 - Declining personal incomes
 - Loss of affordable housing
 - Deep cuts in welfare programs
 - Growing number of people facing personal problems that left them at high risk
- “New homeless”: females, families, youth, LGBTQ, employed, vehicles, doubled up, couch surfing, sexual exchange/assault (Lee, Tyler, & Wright, 2010)
 - Heterogeneous population
- Overrepresented in homeless populations:
 - Mental illness, substance addiction, physical disability, prostitution, veteran status, domestic violence, intergenerational poverty, stigmatization, disenfranchisement (DeMyers, Warpinski, & Wutich, 2017)
- Revanchist state
 - Moved away from areas of work, leisure, and consumption through laws and social practices (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2016; Mitchell, 1997)
 - Contained in ghettos of social services (Briegar, 2003; Stuart, 2014)
 - Imprisoned in jails or forced into illegal encampments (Beckett & Herbert, 2010; Herring, 2014)



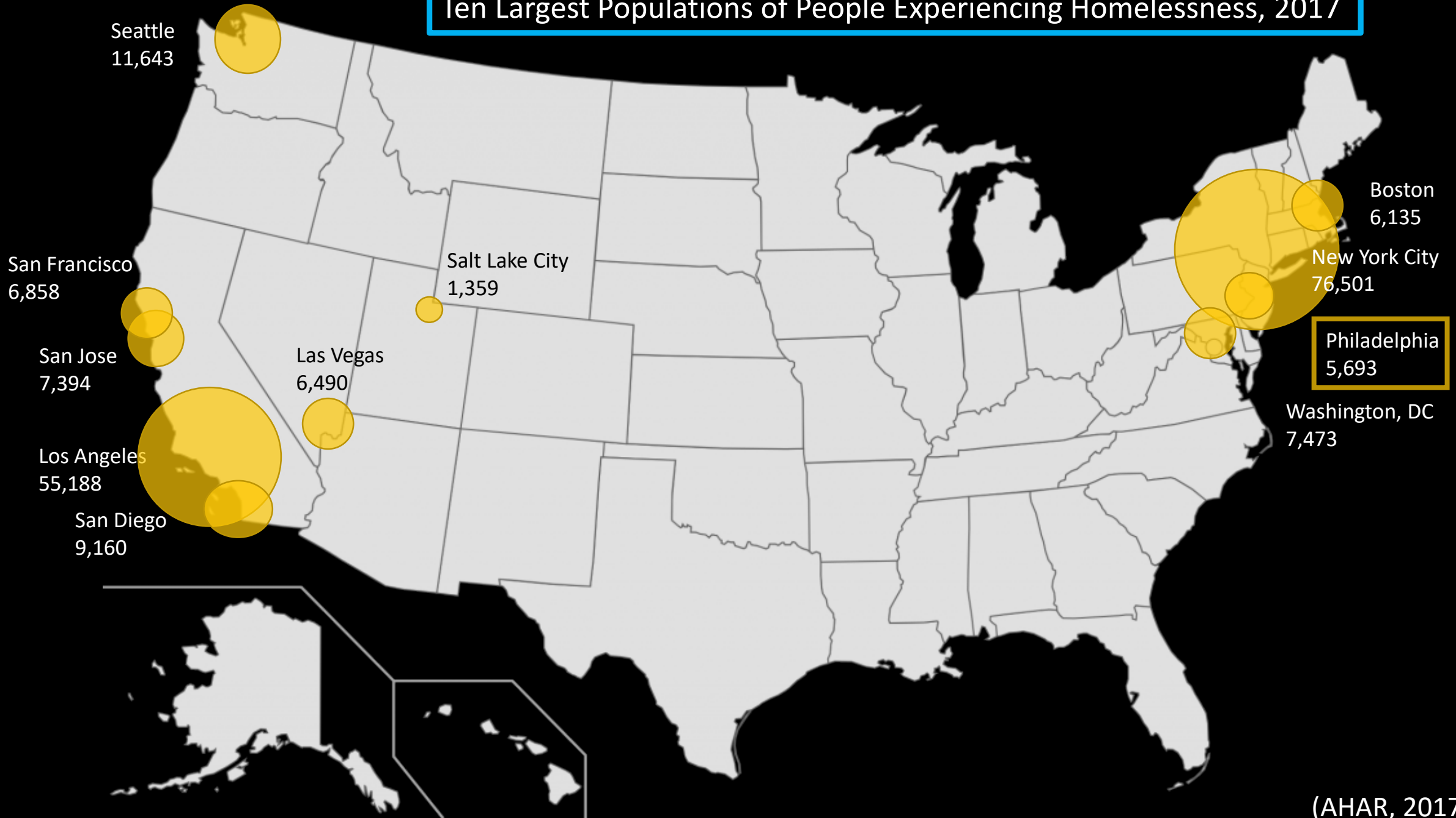
Homelessness and health disparities

- Shorter life expectancy
- Higher morbidity
- Greater usage of acute hospital services
- Less likely to access primary and preventive health services
- Increased risk for later-stage diagnosis of disease
- Poorer control of manageable conditions (e.g., hypertension, diabetes)
- Increased hospitalization for preventable conditions
- Increased unplanned hospital admissions
- Increased alcohol problems
- Increased drug problems
- Increased sexually transmitted disease
- Increased likelihood of physical assault
- Increased likelihood of sexual assault
- Decreased psychological well-being
- Increased hospitalization for mental illness
- Increased depression
- Increased rates of bodily pain
- ...

- Homelessness and health inequities are reciprocally intertwined, as homelessness exacerbates poor health and vice versa
- Homelessness is the location of accumulated adverse social and economic conditions

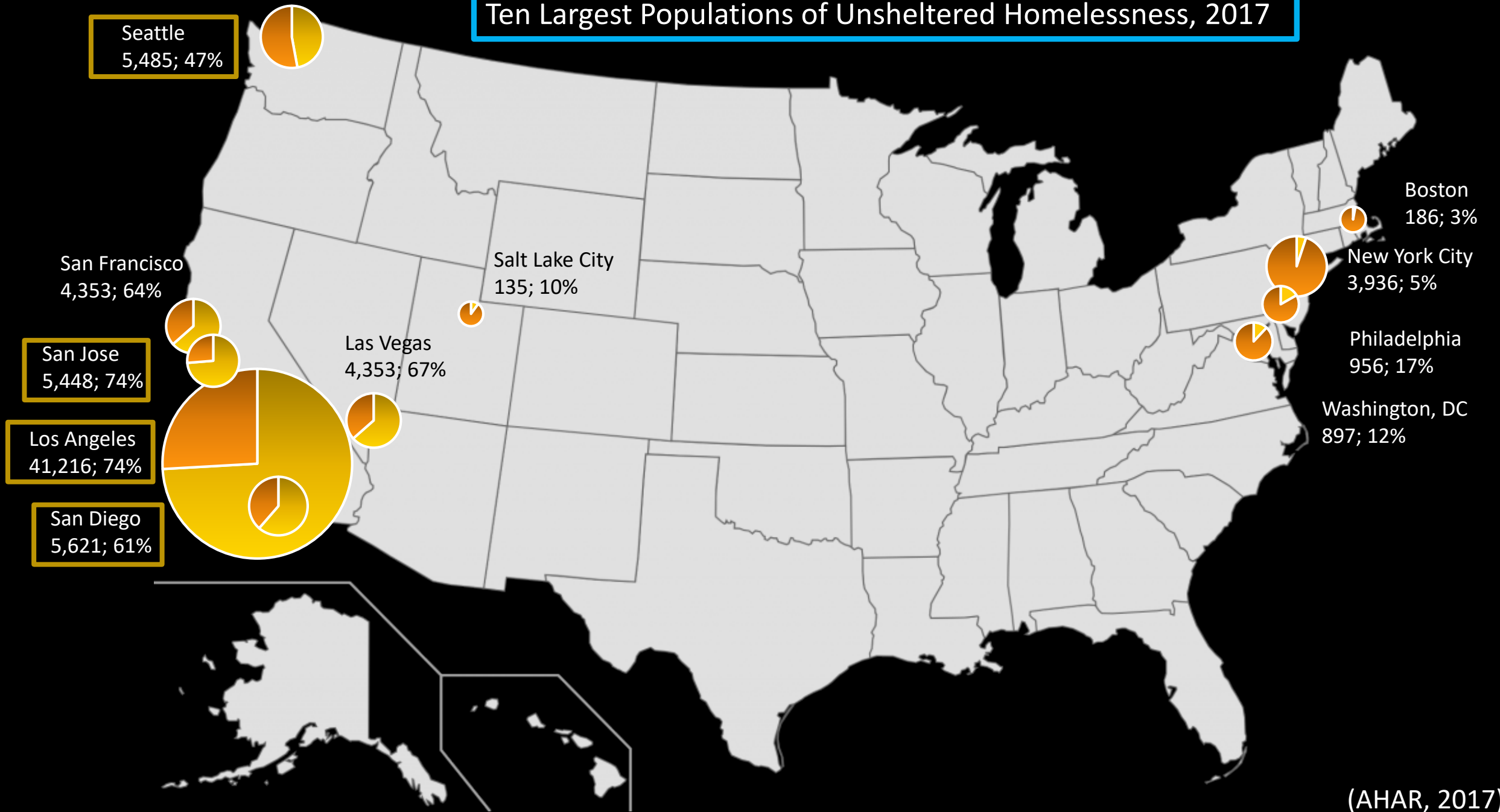


Ten Largest Populations of People Experiencing Homelessness, 2017



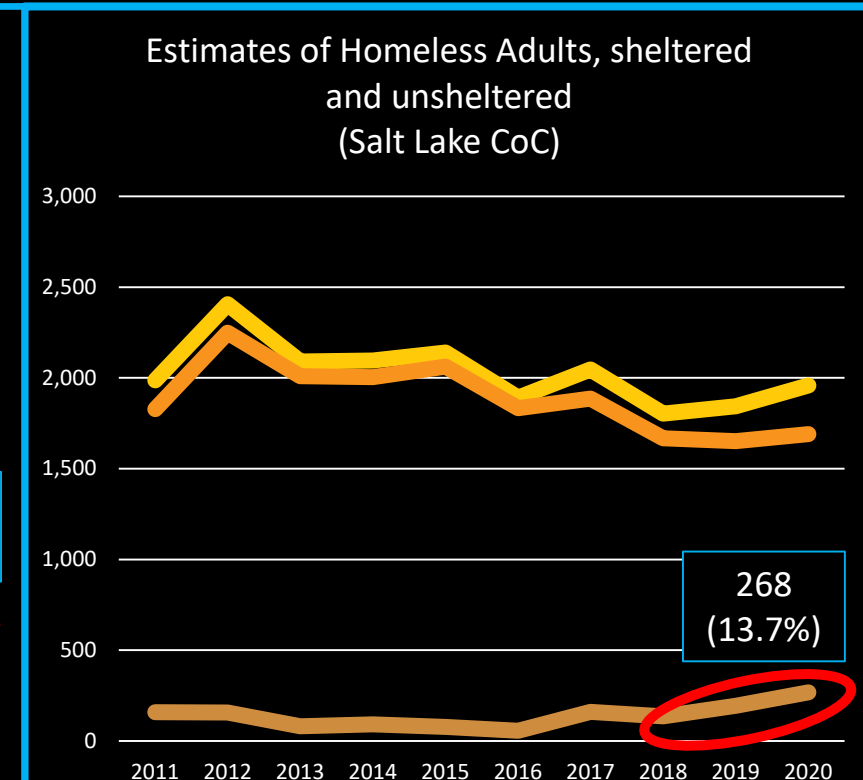
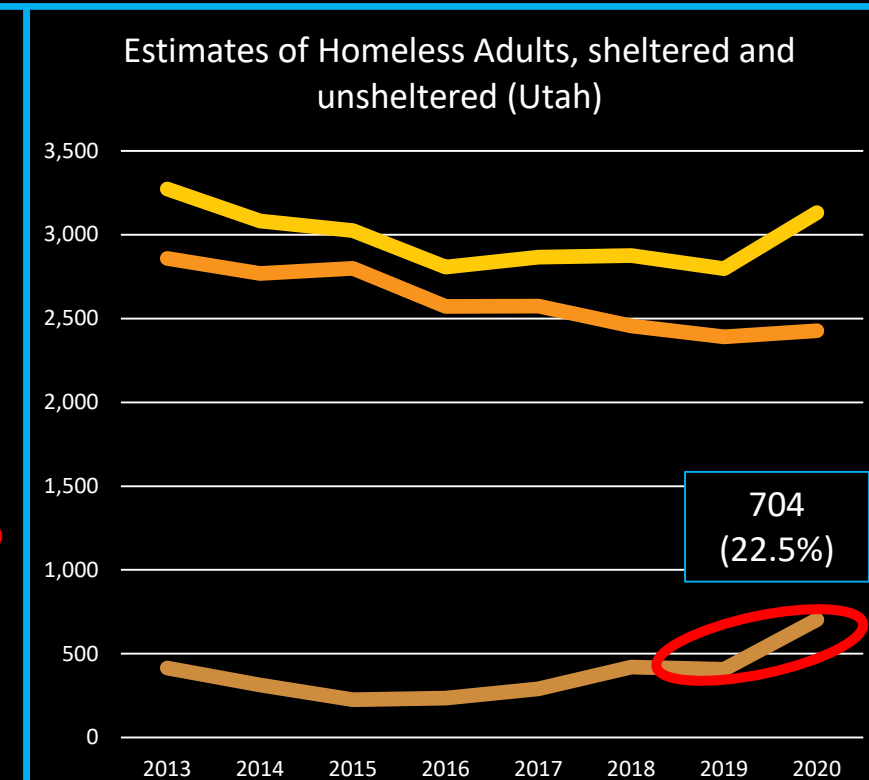
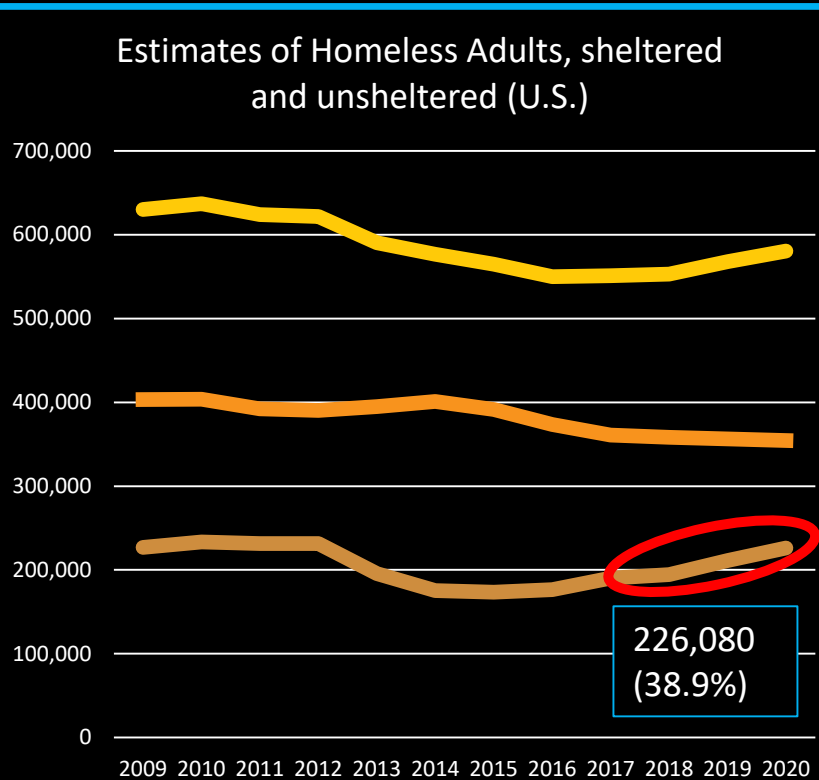
(AHAR, 2017)

Ten Largest Populations of Unsheltered Homelessness, 2017



State of (unsheltered) homelessness

- Point-in-Time (PIT) Count



homeless adults total sheltered homeless
unsheltered homeless



Ecologies of homelessness

- **Ecologies of homelessness – environmental justice**

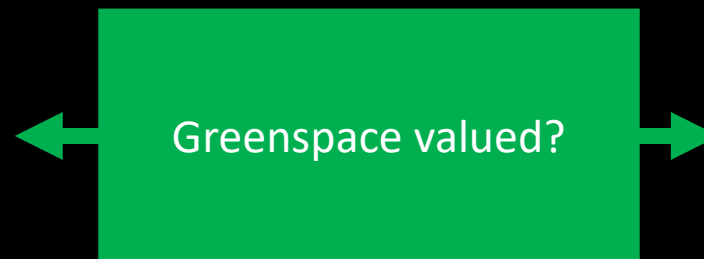
- Daily lived experiences and interactions of unsheltered PEH with the environment
- Increased exposure and vulnerabilities to environmental events, climate change, and pollutants
(Pepper & Jocoy, 2013; Turkewitz, 2017; DeMyers et al. 2017; Gee, 2017; DeMarco et al. 2020; Hardenbrook et al., 2022)
- “It is the fundamental physical circumstances – exposure to the elements, the struggle to keep clean, the discomfort of bedding down on concrete – that are the most piercing.” (Gee, 2017)

- **Political ecologies of homelessness**

- Local homelessness influenced by globalized political economic conditions and trends
 - Housing markets, sanitization/corporatization of public space, unemployment rates, minimum wage rates, availability of physical and mental health care, anti-homeless ordinances, local and state politics, etc.
- Ideologies of health and cleanliness (public, environmental, individual) that underline displacement and abatement procedures (Rose, 2017)

Housed

- Middle-class leisure
- Space of community
- Value added to surrounding urban space



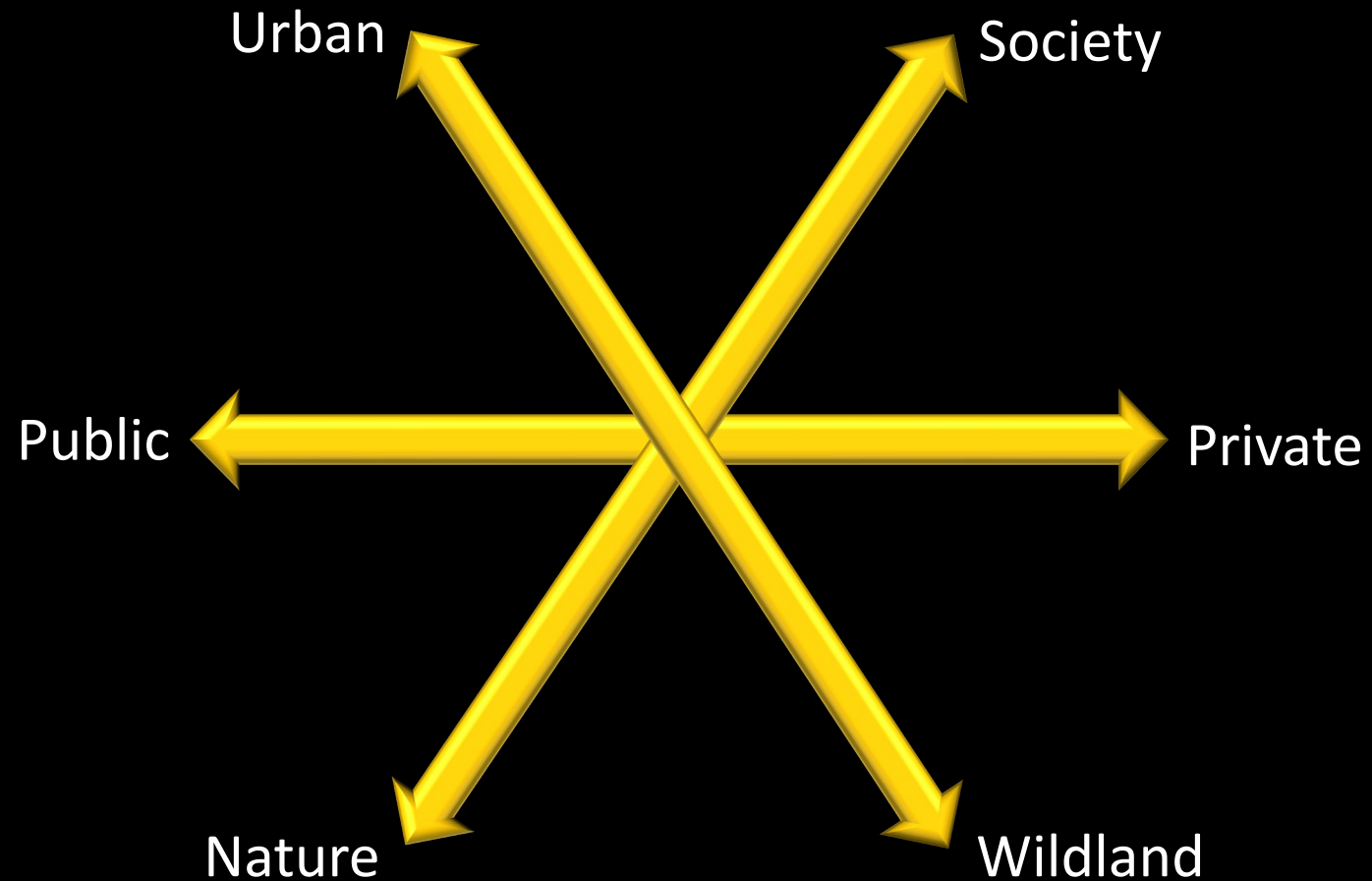
Unhoused (PEH)

- Creating privacy
- Space of survival
- Space of community
- Protection from authority, public scrutiny, violence

(Rose, 2019; Speer & Goldfischer, 2020)



Confounding Dichotomies



Ethnographic themes

- Positive and negative understandings of place
- Local, place-based knowledges
 - Security, maintenance of livelihoods
- The production of leisure
- Stereotypes and stigma of living on the Hillside
- “Functional, but fragile”
- Colonialist displacement:
 - through outdoor recreation and conservation
 - through neighborhood encroachment



“This is my space.
That’s his space
there. But this is
my space. I own it.”

- Dave, Hillside resident



“There is a large
homeless
population... They’ll
be removed next
week.”

“We’re going to clean
them out. Any stuff
out there, we’re
going to clean up.”

NON-APPROVED C.

The Salt Lake Valley Health Department, under authority of Utah Code Annotated 26A will remove all trash, debris, and any personal items left on this property, and dispose of it.

You are hereby notified to remove any personal items you wish to keep. Any personal items remaining on site after Monday will be considered abandoned.

TRAVELERS AID

328-8996

SLUHD, L.E.H.S. 2-10-11
Bureau of Sanitation and Safety Date

move out

Cleansing Public Nature



Recent local trends in homelessness - SLCo

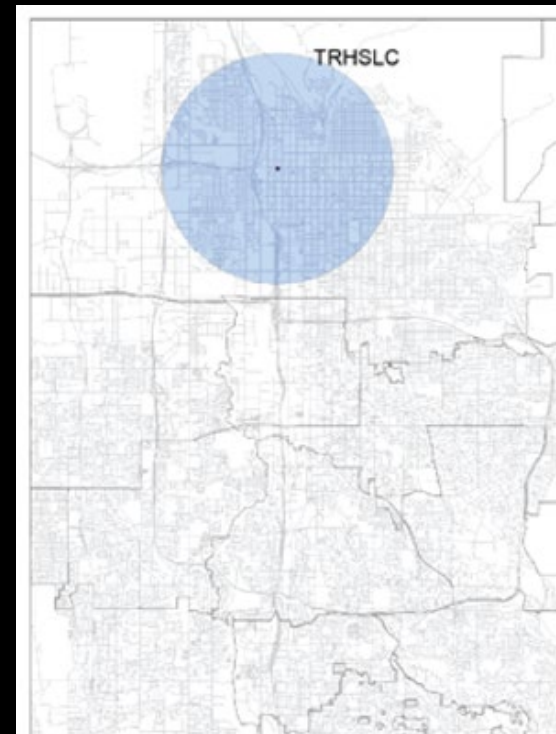
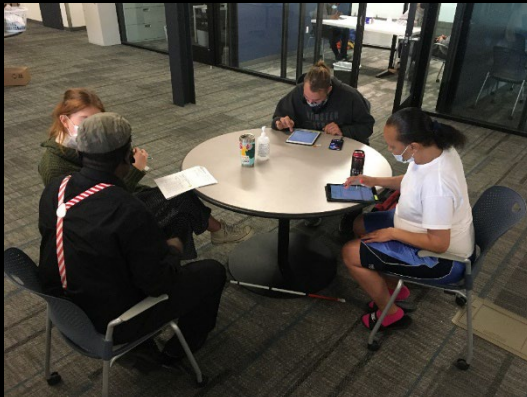
- Operation Rio Grand – August 2017 (Utah.gov)
 - Phase 1: Public Safety and Restoring Order – Identify, arrest and lock up dangerous criminals
 - Phase 2: Assessment and Treatment – Assess, treat and support individuals
 - Phase 3: Dignity of Work – Public/private partnership to increase employment opportunities and training
- Shelter System Change – 2019
 - Closed the downtown SLC shelter
 - Opened multiple decentralized Homeless Resource Centers
 - Overall decrease in bed availability
- Abatement Procedures
 - Increased encampment clean up and displacement events of PEH encampments



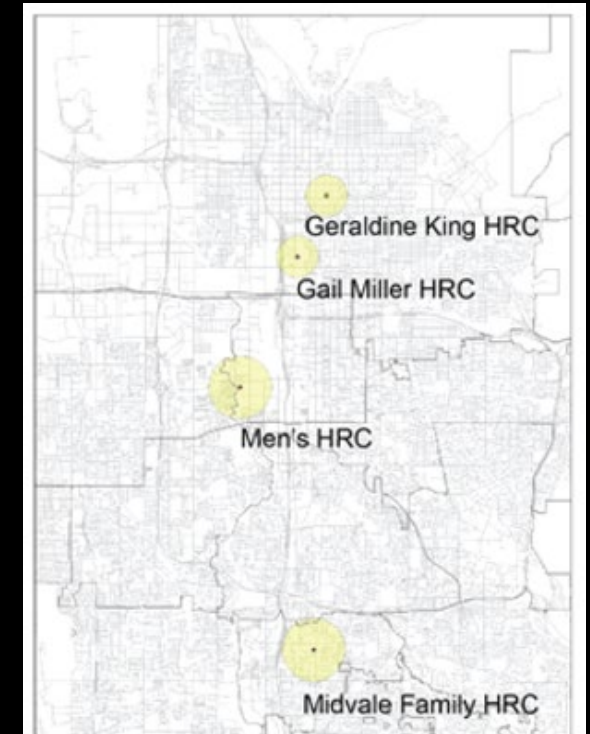
Decentralizing sheltering services

Understanding the impact of decentralizing homeless services on mobility in Salt Lake City. (2020-2021). Sarah Canham, Ivis Garcia, Jeff Rose, Shannon Jones. National Institute of Transportation and Communities (NITC) General Research Grant

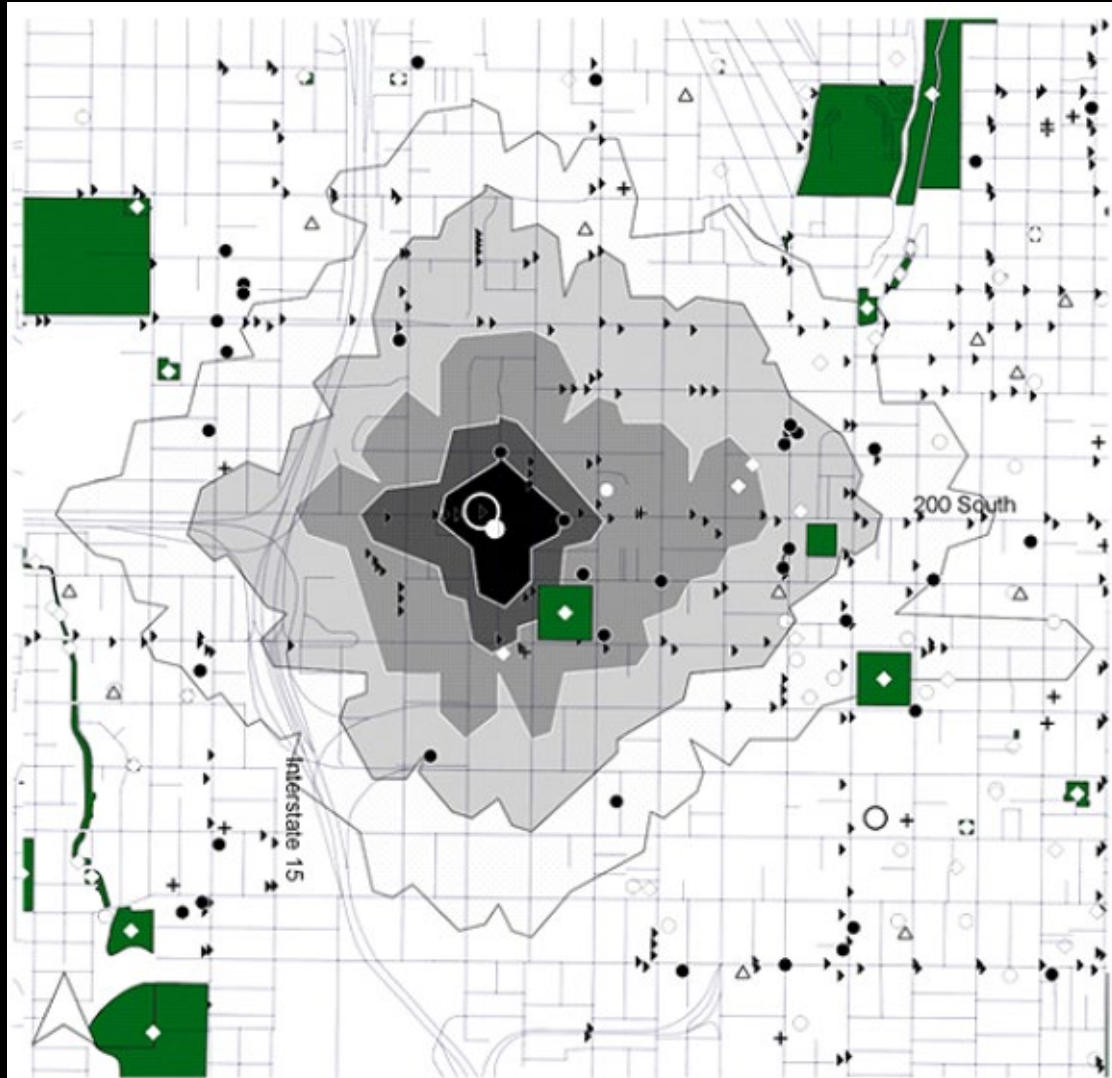
- Purpose:
 - To understand how the decentralization of homeless services has influenced transportation demand and mobility patterns for persons experiencing homelessness; and
 - To understand how transportation and mobility changes affect access to services and supports.
- Findings
 - Decentralized HRCs located distant from needed and desired services and resources



A. Pre-decentralization (TRHSLC)



C. Post-decentralization (HRCs)



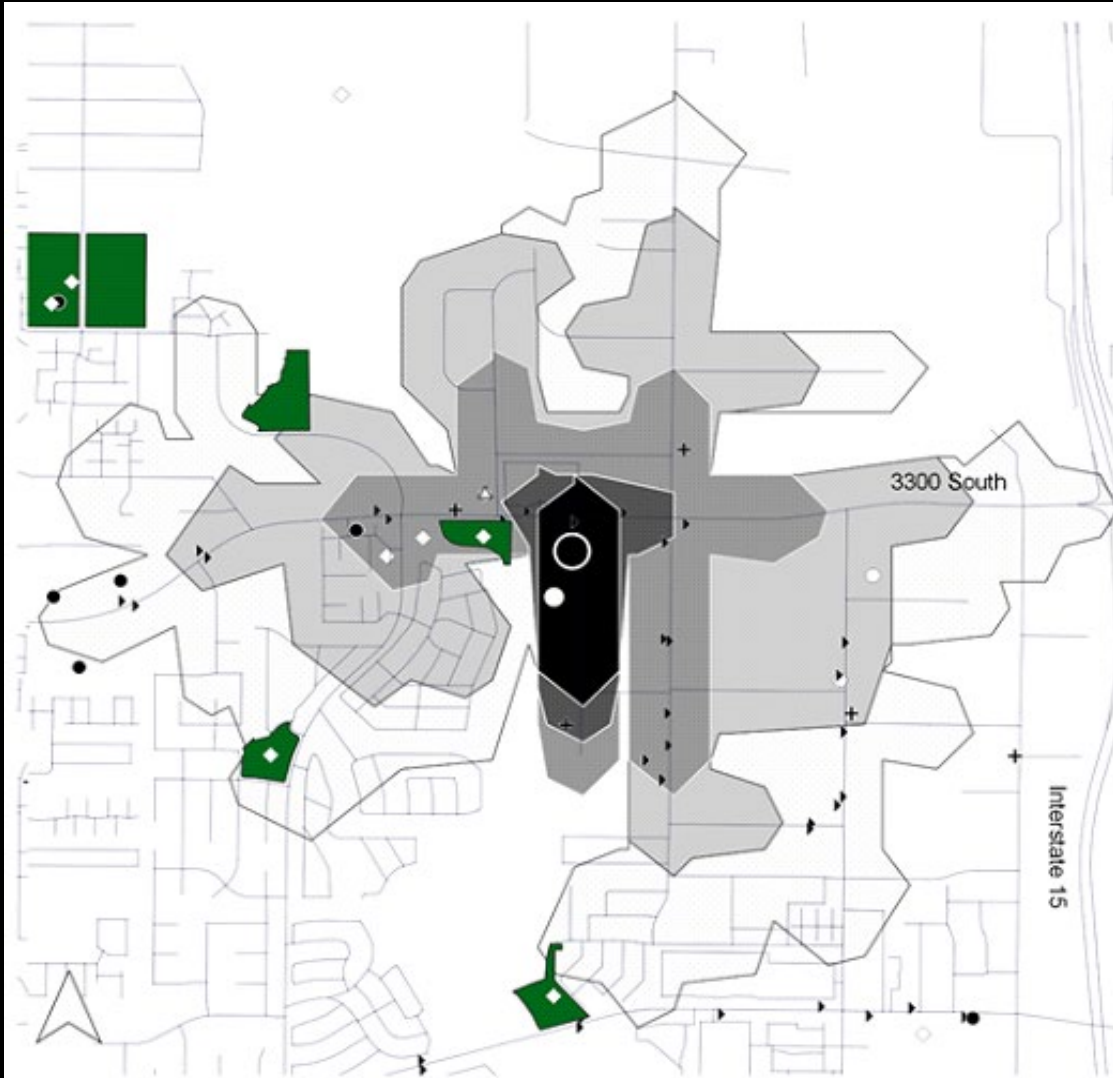
0 0.25 0.5 mi

Legend

- TRHSLC
- Transportation
- Community Services
- + Healthcare
- Shopping
- Parks and Recreation
- △ Schools

TRHSLC

- 0-.125 mi (2.5 minutes)
- .125-.25 mi (5 minutes)
- .25-.5 mi (10 minutes)
- .5-.75 mi (15 minutes)
- .75 -1 mi (20 minutes)



0 0.25 0.5 mi

Legend

- South Salt Lake Men's HRC
- Transportation
- Community Services
- + Healthcare
- Shopping
- Parks and Recreation
- △ Schools

- South Salt Lake Men's HRC
- 0-.125 mi (2.5 minutes)
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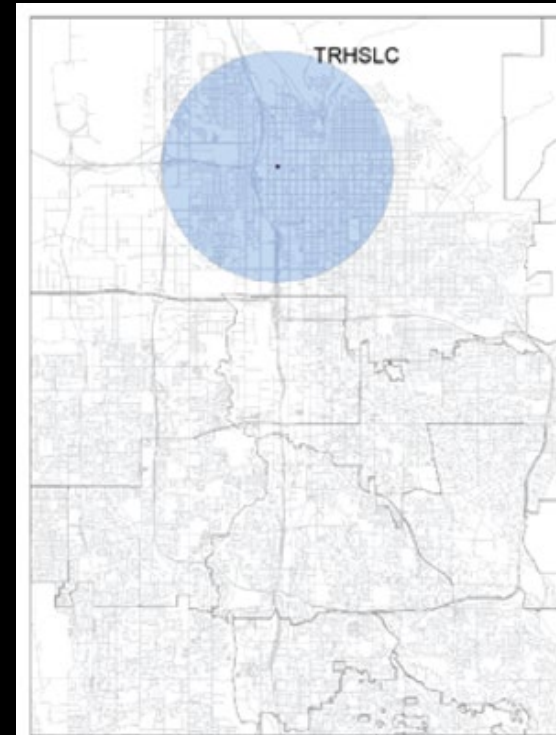
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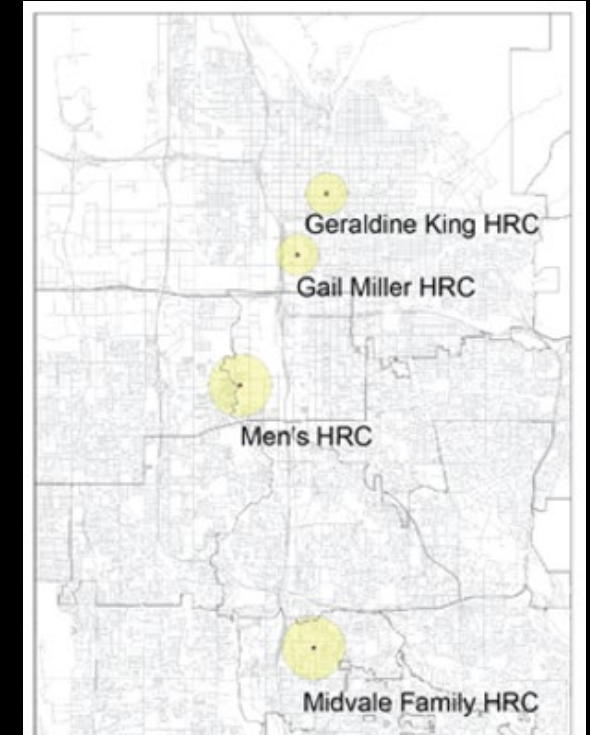
- Purpose:
 - To understand how the decentralization of homeless services has influenced transportation demand and mobility patterns for persons experiencing homelessness; and
 - To understand how transportation and mobility changes affect access to services and supports.
- Findings
 - Decentralized HRCs located distant from needed and desired services and resources
 - Client satisfaction with new HRC services increased
 - Client accessibility concerns with spatial access to daily needs (health care, grocery, workforce services, etc.)
 - Provider difficulties with providing transportation services



(Canham et al., 2022)



A. Pre-decentralization (TRHSLC)



C. Post-decentralization (HRCs)

Unsheltered homelessness on the Jordan River

Drivers of unsheltered homelessness and conservation along the Jordan River, Salt Lake County.
Jeff Rose, Rebecca Hardenbrook, Ang DeMarco. Utah Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

- Purpose:
 - To understand the needs, concerns, demographics, and locational rationales for people living in encampments along the Jordan River in Salt Lake County, Utah
- Methods
 - Short on-site, in-person survey questionnaires (n = 60)
 - Quantitative data
 - In-depth semi-structured interviews (n = 16)
 - Qualitative data



Abatement Experiences – SLCo

Survey Data – Descriptive Statistics

	n	0	1	Mean (SD)	Median	Min/Max
Age	60	-	-	47.1 (9.5)	43	26/61
Sex (0=F, 1=M)	60	19	41	-	-	-
TEH (Month)*	60	-	-	88.2 (113.4)	42	6/516
TEH on JRC (Month)*	60	-	-	21.9 (26.2)	7.5	0.5/360
Abatement (0=N, 1=Y)	60	7	53	-	-	-
Abatement Events	60	-	-	6.5 (12.7)	3.3	1/73

53 of 60 PEH surveyed experienced an abatement event

- Average of 6.5 abatements experienced

Interview Data – Descriptive Statistics

	n	0	1	Mean (SD)	Median	Min/Max
Age	16	-	-	47 (9)	46	35/62
Sex (0=F, 1=M)	16	7	9	-	-	-
TEH (Month)*	16	-	-	54 (46.7)	33	8/180
TEH on JRC (Month)*	16	-	-	14.9 (15)	9.5	2/60
Abatement	16	0	16	-	-	-

All PEH interviewed experienced an abatement event

*Self Reported

Drivers of PEH Encampments along JRC: Survey Data

Ranked Statements – Likert Scale (1-5)

Driver	Mean (STD)
Stewardship	4.83 (0.56)
JRC is home	3.42 (1.62)
Safety	3.26 (1.57)
Seclusion	3.22 (1.62)
Avoid Authority	2.62 (1.65)

Yes or No Questions

Reason	Frequency	Percent
Community	24	40%
Safety	19	32%
Last Resort	15	25%
Thriving	15	25%
Forced	10	17%
Resources	6	10%
Nature	7	12%

- Strong reported sense of stewardship and community along the JRC
- PEH are not moving to the river to avoid interactions with authority figures
- Feeling like the JRC is a “last resort” or feeling “forced” towards the JRC was not strongly identified

Drivers of PEH Encampments along JRC: Interview Data

Question: Why did you chose to live along the Jordan River?

- Three key narratives emerged:

Narrative	Percent
Community and Safety	50%
Forced by Abatement Events	38%
Nature and Seclusion	12%

- Interview Narratives:

"The energy of the people who live here was welcoming, and we share resources like food. I feel safe here."

"I didn't choose to live by the river, it was the only place left to go."

"I chose the river because I love the trail and the river. It is so beautiful and quiet here."

Drivers of PEH Encampments along JRC: Interview Data

Question: If you were forced to move, where would you go?

- Two key narratives emerged:

Narrative	Percent
Move to another portion of the JRC	62.5%
There is nowhere else to go	37.5%

- Interview Narratives:

"I was just displaced today. We never know where we are going. We will probably move down the trail a bit and then come back."

"I wouldn't even know. Probably back up to North Temple by the river. There is nowhere else."

"I'd probably move further along the river somewhere. I am comfortable here. Since I've lived here, I've already had to move three times. Each time, I have just moved to another spot on the river. I guess I'll keep doing that."

Implications: Political and urban ecologies of homelessness along the JRC

- Concern for the “conservation and recreational preservation” of the JRC greenspace
- Unsheltered homelessness is deemed “unsafe” in urban landscape
- Increase abatement and dislocation events
- Decreased number of beds available – increased encampments
- Very few viable alternatives for PEH – continued unsheltered homelessness along the JRC

Environmental justice on the Jordan River corridor?

- Cycle of dislocation and disruption of PEH
- Increased vulnerability and exposure to weather events and pollution
- Substantial mental and emotional discomfort and trauma, characterized by ongoing anxieties about future dislocations

“I have been forced to move more times than I can count. If I had the ability to keep my tent up and leave it for the day without the stress of not knowing whether the police will take it, I could get a job. I could work and save money and try to find an apartment or a motel to stay in. I could change my circumstances. But that is not an option. This tent and these things are all that I have, I can’t risk losing them. I won’t survive if I lose them. How am I expected to plan for the future if I am constantly stressed about my current situation?”

Drivers of Unsheltered Homelessness and Conservation along the Jordan River,
Salt Lake County, Utah

Prepared by:
Jeff Rose, Ph.D. (Principal Investigator)
Rebecca Hardenbrook (Graduate Researcher)
Angelina DeMarco (Graduate Researcher)

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Salt Lake City, Utah



A research report delivered to the Jordan River Commission – March, 2022



*Drivers of unsheltered
homelessness and
conservation along the
Jordan River, Salt Lake
County, Utah*



Future research?

- Implementation of a “hub” in Salt Lake City for unsheltered PEH? (NSF)
 - Support and social services
 - Basic needs provision
 - Nutritious food
 - Laundry
 - Cell phone charging
 - Community building
 - Health outcomes?
- Transportation needs associated with decentralized HRCs in the Salt Lake Valley? (NITC)
- Experiences of homelessness along the George Washington Memorial Parkway? (NPS)



Spaces of homelessness?

Spatial
displacement

Discursive
displacement

health, legal, social, cultural marginalization

- Overrepresentation of racial minorities, LGBTQ+, Indigenous people, veterans, criminal history, etc.
- Destabilization of the traditional homeless subject
- Homelessness is a classic wicked problem:
 - Incomplete, contradictory, changing requirements
 - Multiple stakeholders/opinions involved
 - Interconnectedness/interdependency with other problems
 - Unlikelihood of simple solutions
- Homelessness needs complex, evolving, and multidisciplinary approaches that integrate research with community partners and policy makers.



Spaces of homelessness, spaces of justice?

- Spaces of justice = public space?
 - Particular types of public space
 - Is this conceptualization of public space necessarily anti-capitalist? anti-racist? anti-colonial?

Thanks to collaborators

- Local PEH research partners and participants
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 - Dr. Sarah Canham (Social Work and City and Metropolitan Planning)
 - Shannon Jones (Nutrition)
 - Rebecca Hardenbrook (Mathematics)
 - Angelina DeMarco (Anthropology)
 - Milo Neild (Parks, Recreation, and Tourism)
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 - Sarah Strang (The Road Home)
 - Tim Brown (Jordan River Nature Center)
 - Laurie Hopkins (Shelter the Homeless)
 - Soren Simonsen (Jordan River Commission)
 - Sue Ativalu (Volunteers of America Utah)
 - Morgan Faulkner (Utah Department of Natural Resources)



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