

## The Geography of Homelessness

Posted by

Sunday, 24 September 2006 06:36 - Last Updated Sunday, 24 September 2006 06:36

---

### The Geography of Homelessness

**PEJ News** - Derek Book - It would be very hard to live on the streets in Canada now, at least from what I can see here in Victoria. Every nook and crannie of every street downtown has been gated, locked, or is patrolled by security guard companies. It seems that many business owners and municipalities are taking a more active role, cementing up sleeping spots, and using any creative method they can to prevent "undesirables" (what a word) from "polluting" the landscape.

[www.PEJ.org](http://www.PEJ.org)

### The Geography of Homelessness

#### Derek Book

PEJ News

September 24, 2006

It's not surprising. It's easy to understand the perception that street people loitering outside one's storefront has a negative impact on one's business. So if you walk down Douglas street at night, you will see all these subtle and not-so-subtle tactics at play: classical music blasting out of speakers at MacDonaldis, security guards whipping by in sophisticated vehicles--no doubt equipped with technology that rivals the local police department-- and the police moving people along. It's a frustrating situation, and it seems to be growing larger somehow.

Does the problem seem larger because of a larger street population? Cuts to social programs? Yes, and no. Partly, the problem is larger because of the gates and security technologies being employed.

## The Geography of Homelessness

Posted by

Sunday, 24 September 2006 06:36 - Last Updated Sunday, 24 September 2006 06:36

---

Think about it for a second: Back in the 1980's, a street sleeper could sneak into a back alleyway, curl up beside a garbage can, and nobody would be the wiser, except maybe the guy who takes the garbage out in the morning. The homeless were very hidden. I know, I was one of them. I could sleep in the corner of a parkade, or curl up behind the bushes at the local city hall. I could sleep on a random rooftop undisturbed for the whole night. Today, those options are gone. The homeless are woken up and moved on several times in a night, which leads to a crisis of sleep deprivation in a lot of cases. As the system gets better at locating and policing possible sleeping spots, people are left with no options. Take a look at this story from Fresno:

<http://www.fresnobee.com/local/story/12648847p-13351272c.html>

The story parallels our situation in Victoria: People being shuffled from one location to another, with not enough social resources to draw on. Every city in North America has been dealing with "tent cities," and forced evictions from "unsafe sleeping environments." People are running out of places to go. Check out the story below about the tent city in Toronto:

<http://www.tdrc.net/tc-hardll.htm>

Ironically, as the homeless get pushed out of more "secret" environments, they are becoming more visible to business owners, to the public, and to the media. As awareness of the homeless plight increases, the need for shelter is being made obvious. Because people are being forced to fall asleep on busy sidewalks during broad daylight out of exhaustion, the problem is right in front of us. This may be frustrating for those who are trying to "get rid" of the homeless, because the current strategy has merely sharpened the pencil on the issue. In Victoria, meetings are being held every week with city officials, police, social workers, and business owners to come up with fast solutions.

We need to be as creative with housing solutions as we are with loitering deterrents. The street population is incredibly diverse, and the housing solutions need to match this diversity. We need to keep the dialogue going. I will not say that pushing street people out into the public eye is a positive thing, in fact I think it's degrading and humiliating, but I think we in the helping industry should use this new visibility to highlight the need for

## The Geography of Homelessness

Posted by

Sunday, 24 September 2006 06:36 - Last Updated Sunday, 24 September 2006 06:36

---

affordable and comfortable housing.

I am a new member of PEJ, and I thought I would post here as well as on my blog, called [Formerly Homeless](#) , where I write about my experiences and ideas on the homeless issue.

**Derek Book**

[Formerly Homeless](#)