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Freiler, Alix
Holden, Meg

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Homelessness in the Livable City: Public Space Regulation in Olympic City Vancouver's Poorest Neighborhood

Alix Freiler and Meg Holden

Simon Fraser University

This paper examines whether public space regulation changed around Vancouver's preparations to host the 2010 Winter Olympics, particularly in the poor neighborhood of the Downtown Eastside. We argue that Vancouver's desire to be competitive on the international stage has major effects on how public space is used and regulated. Any policy shift would have a disproportionate impact on the homeless, given that this demographic group is compelled to live their lives in public space. We find that changes have occurred, but the Olympics have acted as catalyst for such changes, not the sole driver. The spotlight provided by the Olympic Games has amplified a new round of power struggle between city government and the police department to set the policy agenda for tackling concentrated social problems. The outcome of this conflict will determine the future of public space regulation in post-Olympic Vancouver, and the extent to which a poor neighborhood and those who call it home can be included in a world class, livable city

Part 1: Introduction

According to the world cities thesis, the 1980s and 1990s saw growth in the global economy that was "driving cities to find an economic niche as a means to compete on the international stage (Burbank et al. 2002, 181). The notion of Olympic legacy is increasingly important to cities bidding for the right to host this mega-event. Mega- or hallmark events can be defined as: "major one-time or recurring events of limited duration, developed primarily to enhance the awareness, appeal and profitability of a tourism destination in the short and/or long term. Such events rely on uniqueness, status, or timely significance to create interest and attract attention (Ritchie as cited in Hall 1989, 263). City boosters attest that hosting the Olympic Games or other mega-events can fix critical infrastructure deficits, promote health, well-being, and environmental protection as well as inject cultural vibrancy, and create a fiscal surplus that can be used to close the gap between rich and poor (Andranovich et al. 2001; Lenskyj 2000; Hiller 2000). Skeptics, by contrast, see the risk of an Olympic host city legacy reaching far in the other direction, by diverting policy priorities from what is locally needed to development designed for the itinerant global capital class. The result privileges major physical infrastructure over social infrastructure and services, and ramps up policing and surveillance.

This research sought evidence of change in the regulation of public space in the City of Vancouver from 2003-2009.¹ This was the period during which the City won, planned, and executed the Winter Olympic Games. Following a brief comparison of two other Olympic host cities, we develop a case based on:

1. time series analysis of enforcement of existing legislation in the Downtown Eastside neighborhood, based upon police department data obtained via the Freedom of Information Act requests along with City, Vancouver Police Department (VPD), and Business Improvement Area (BIA) reports; and
2. 12 key informant interviews (conducted between April and July 2009) with policy makers, enforcers, and observers of public space and human rights in the DTES, supplemented by news media review.

The hypothesis that we present is that the case of Vancouver may demonstrate an attempt by some city leaders and advocates to craft a new world class city image that incorporates the different ideas about the place and status held by the most marginalized, and this new image is challenged by differing agendas and roles, particularly by the police department.

Vancouver Hosts 2010 Olympics

Vancouver, as the largest city to host the Winter Olympics to date, is a useful case study of the way that host city legacies work themselves out on the ground. While a substantial portion of Olympics-related urban studies literature is critical of the legacy

of host city development, other research points to the potential of the Olympics to help local governments focus, strengthen, and improve policies and actions (Newman 2007). In the lead-up to the 2010 Winter Olympics, the City of Vancouver, along with its boosters and ordinary citizens, experienced mounting anxiety about the eyes of the world sharpening their focus on its shores. Vancouver has grown accustomed to international attention coming in the form of proclamations of Most Livable City status from high profile sources such as the Economist Intelligence Unit (2011). This ranking is based on a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures in five categories: stability, healthcare, culture and environment, education, and infrastructure. Specific indicators include: prevalence of violent or petty crime, quality of public transport, and public education provision. Notably, the cost of housing is omitted. Preparations for hosting the Olympic Games increased the stakes of demonstrating the City's livability far and wide to spectators and visitors (Ferguson et al. 2011).

Downtown Eastside (DTES)

In his pre-Olympic documentary about Vancouver, journalist Dan Rather remarked that the City has a "landscape studded with snow-capped mountains, multimillion-dollar condos, cradling a downtown that's home to one of the worst urban blights in North America" (*The Vancouver Sun* 2008). With regard to the latter comment, he was referring to Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) neighborhood, Metro Vancouver's epicenter for social services, open drug use and addiction, and congregation of homeless people. Making matters more difficult is the DTES' location on the eastern edge of the

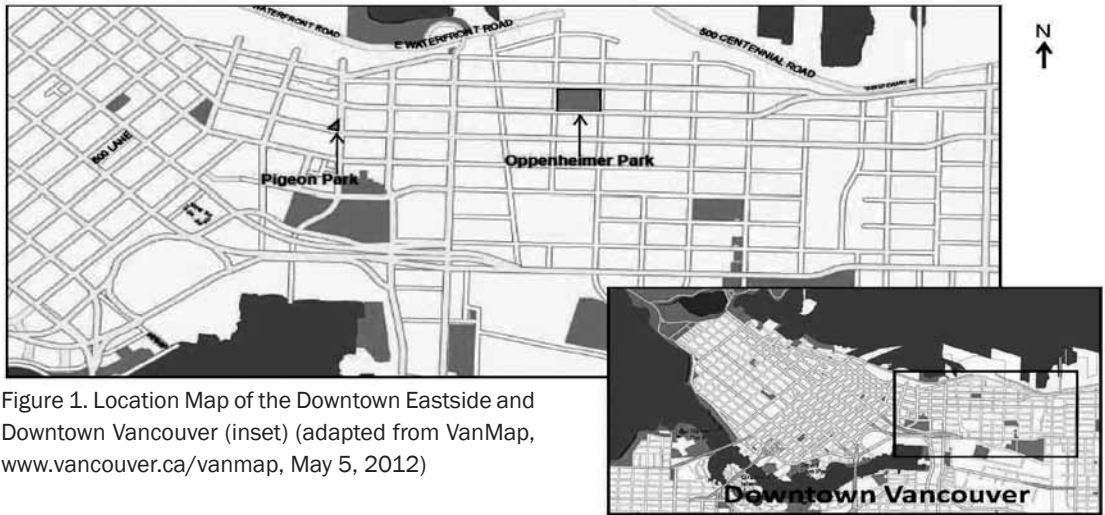


Figure 1. Location Map of the Downtown Eastside and Downtown Vancouver (inset) (adapted from VanMap, www.vancouver.ca/vanmap, May 5, 2012)

downtown peninsula, and proximity to large tourist areas such as Gastown, the cruise ship industry, and the Yaletown mixed-use neighborhood (see Figure 1). Although the DTES abuts the downtown core, the area persistently avoided gentrification for the first dozen years of downtown revitalization efforts since the 1991 Central Area Plan (Hutton 2004). This situation began to change in 2005 with the Woodward's district project, further discussed in the Downtown Eastside Demographics section. The DTES has the only remaining concentration of affordable housing for the poor in Vancouver.

Public Space Issues

In many Olympic host cities, new physical infrastructure is often a local Olympic legacy. The social infrastructure typically left behind by the Olympics

has been increased regulation of public space. In such cases, those who rely on public space the most – homeless people – are often banned from performing simple acts of daily living, excluding them from the few places in which they are autonomous (Stachel & Mitchell 2004; Waldron 1991). As a result, increased regulation of public spaces directly impacts the daily lives of a city's homeless population. It may also serve to move certain populations from one part of the city to another.

Policing

Aside from the cost of the facilities themselves, one of the largest costs involved in hosting the Games is for security. The legacy of policing and surveillance could also be substantial. Legislation that restricts panhandling, loitering and sleeping/camping

in public space, along with trends in enforcement, impacts the most vulnerable citizens disproportionately, as it is often the poorest residents who predominantly rely on public space. Legislation has proven to be a powerful tactic used by various levels of government to manage and reduce access to public space (Mitchell 2001; Mitchell and Staeheli 2006). Certain types of legislation, specifically those dealing with acceptable behavior in public spaces, illustrate how cities deal with issues of poverty and homelessness (National Law Center for Homelessness and Poverty 1996; Collins and Blomley 2003). Research in the management and monitoring of public space reveals a direct connection between the enforcement of such legislation and policing the homeless. Akkar (2005, 11), for example, notes that city police, by “monitoring and patrolling ... directly impose a significant control on the public space in order to eliminate the so-called undesirable groups.” Overall, cities are subject to different police forces each with their own enforcement priorities. In the specific context of Vancouver, it is important to note that the Vancouver Police Department is relatively autonomous from the City Council. The City Council’s influence on the VPD is limited to one seat on the Police Board and budgetary disclosure.

Homeless

Homelessness is a growing problem in the Vancouver region and many of the homeless are concentrated in the DTES. The Inner-City Inclusive Olympic Commitments created for Vancouver’s Olympic bid reiterated government’s approach of “revitalization without displacement” in the DTES, a special approach within the more general principle of “living

first” that has met with much success throughout the redevelopment of Vancouver’s downtown peninsula in the 1990s (Punter 2003). This “living first” strategy was to end homelessness in the DTES and in Vancouver as a whole by encouraging private sector housing development in the DTES *along with* building affordable housing city-wide. This effort, compounded by new provincial Safe Streets Act legislation and new City initiatives in public and private policing has had a disproportionate negative impact on the homeless population in the DTES. While the “annihilation of space by law” has not yet occurred in the DTES, this appears to be the trajectory. As market development is now proceeding quickly, the pace of affordable housing development does not meet the City’s explicit target of 800 new social housing units per year through 2015.

Overview

In this article, we begin with a summary of the City of Vancouver data and homelessness trends. This is followed by an overview of the DTES neighborhood. We continue with an introduction to the opportunity and risk represented for Vancouver’s DTES residents by the Winter 2010 Olympics, followed by a brief comparison of the outcomes for regulation of public space and policing the homeless to two other Olympic host cities, Atlanta and Sydney. Next, we present the findings of our research regarding changes to Vancouver’s public space and to both public and private policing policies, followed by the enforcement of these policies, leading up to the Olympics.

We argue that Vancouver's desire to be competitive on the international stage has had, and continues to have, major effects on how public space is used and regulated. The Olympics have acted as catalyst of these changes. Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, its poorest neighborhood and only neighborhood with a concentration of low-income housing, experienced a stricter regulation of public space in the years prior to the Olympics. This included new legislation and policy, notably the *Safe Streets Act* and Project Civil City, and heavier enforcement of laws relating to loitering and panhandling, as well as 'sweeps' conducted for parks renovations and other purposes. However, some of these trends toward criminalizing the poor and homeless in the Downtown Eastside were reversed, in a surprise twist, when a new mayor and council were elected in November 2008. This new City leadership has advanced a strategy of 'revitalization without displacement' in the Downtown Eastside and has discontinued public funding for controversial programs of public space regulation: Project Civil City and the Downtown Ambassadors. The Vancouver Police Department and City Council, in this way, compete to set the policy and enforcement agenda for tackling the concentrated social problems in the neighborhood. The Olympic Games has provided a spotlight on, and stimulus for, this power struggle. The outcome of the debate between city government and the police department will determine the future of public space regulation in post-Olympic Vancouver, as well as the extent to which a poor neighborhood and those who call it home can be integrated into the infrastructure and discourse of a world class, livable city.

Part 2: Vancouver and Downtown Eastside

Vancouver Demographics

The City of Vancouver, with a population of 603,500, is a waterfront-based, amenity-rich center of Pacific Rim shipping, immigration, and real estate investment. The City is situated within a metropolitan region of 2.313 million, making it Canada's third largest metropolitan area. Vancouver is ethnically diverse: 39.6% of the population region-wide consists of immigrants (51.2% in the City of Vancouver proper), with 43.8% speaking a language other than English as mother tongue (52.4% in the City of Vancouver proper) (Metro Vancouver 2006). The metropolitan area is young and growing, with an urban population growth rate of approximately 4%, and a metropolitan-wide growth rate of 9.3 %, from 2006-2011 (see Table 1).

The region has just under one million (949,565) homes, and the City has 286,742 homes, the average person per household ratio is just over 2 in each case. The data provide evidence of increased luxury condominium development in the downtown core (excluding the DTES). Downtown renters (compared to owners) dropped from 82.4% of the total residential population in 1996 to 57.7% in 2006, while the core's population jumped from 17,405 to 43,415 during that same time frame (City of Vancouver 2008b).

Median income is higher for the region as a whole (\$64,332 CDN, or approximately \$53,273 USD) than for the City of Vancouver (\$58,805 CDN or approximately \$48,696 USD). The City also has a higher low-income rate, 26.6%, than the region as a

	Metro Vancouver	City of Vancouver	Downtown Eastside
Population in 2011	2,313,328	603,502	17,000*
% Change in Population, 2006-11	9.3%	4.4%	2.1%
Total Private Dwellings in 2011	949,565	286,742	16,250*
Median Income in 2005	\$64,332 (\$53,273 USD)	\$58,805 (\$48,696 USD)	\$12,000* (\$9937 USD)
% Low Income in 2006	20.8 %	26.6 %	67 %*
% Unemployment in 2006	5.6 %	6 %	21 %*

Table 1. Comparative Statistics for Metro Vancouver, City of Vancouver, and Downtown Eastside Neighborhood (Statistics Canada 2007 and 2012; City of Vancouver 2012 for items marked *)

whole, where the rate is 20.8%. Unemployment in the City of Vancouver, at 6%, is comparable to that of the region as a whole, 5.6%.

Between 2002 and 2008, homelessness in the Vancouver region grew by 132%, from 1,121 to 2,650 people; this number stabilized between 2008 and 2011, when 2,660 people were counted (Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness & 3 Ways to Home 2008 and 2011).² Homelessness affects different population groups disproportionately, and in Vancouver the Aboriginal population is hardest hit, representing 27% of those counted in 2011 although they represent only about 2% of the general population in the region (Cardinal 2006). In the City of Vancouver proper, the homeless population grew 9% from a total 1,576 in 2008 to 1,715 in 2010 and stabilized at 1,605 in 2011 (City of Vancouver 2011). This means that

60% of homeless people region-wide are situated in the of Vancouver. Many of these people reside in the Downtown Eastside.

Downtown Eastside Demographics

Established even before Vancouver incorporated in 1886, the DTES is very densely populated with a large stock of old and historic multi-unit residential, commercial, office and industrial buildings. With a population of about 17,000 in a 16-block area, the neighborhood's demographics are older than the city average. Residents are primarily single men and women, immigrants, Chinese Canadians, and urban Aboriginal people.

In 2011, housing in the DTES consisted of 16,250 residential units, over 71% of which was low-income social housing (City of Vancouver 2012). This share is on the decline, as between 2003 and 2009 there was a net loss of 1,020 low-income units (Gillman 2009). In contrast, the market stock gained 860 units from 2005 to 2008, with 769 of those being condominiums. A highly visible recent effort to reach a compromise between the expansion of market-rate and affordable housing in the neighborhood is the 2005 Woodward's district, two residential towers with integrated office, commercial, and higher education uses built on the site of an historic department store central to the DTES. This project includes 200 units of nonmarket housing, built to accommodate a community of 6,000 residents, students, and workers (City of Vancouver 2007-2010) (see Figure 2).

The median income, at \$12,000 CDN (under \$10,000 USD), is one-fifth that of the City as a whole. Almost 70% of residents are low income and most of those who work in the area live elsewhere (Vancouver Agreement, 2004). The unemployment rate is 21% which is almost four times more than the City of Vancouver.

The DTES neighborhood has earned monikers that include "Canada's poorest postal code" and "North America's largest open drug market" (Eby 2007). An estimated

4,700 DTES residents are injection drug users, 30-40% of them are HIV serotype positive, and over 90% are infected with Hepatitis C (Eby 2007). A strong proportion of the city's homeless population resides in the DTES. The DTES is also the primary place in the city where the homeless can find shelter. The City has adopted a number of interim housing strategies to combat homelessness; these include opening emergency Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT) shelters across the city in 2009 to allow people to sleep inside during the cold weather



Figure 2. Woodward's District, Downtown Eastside, Vancouver. Opened in 2005, the Woodward's district occupies a full city block with two towers of market and affordable housing, commercial, institutional (including City government and Simon Fraser University), and recreational space. The development is symbolic of the wager in the City's "revitalization without displacement" strategy in the DTES, but - ominously for the homeless - also marks the take-off point in rapid condominium development in the neighborhood (photo: John Goldsmith)

months (City of Vancouver 2010; Fowlie 2010) and, more recently, establishing a city emergency rent bank to fend off evictions (Ryan 2012). Recent increases in available shelter beds have driven a remarkable 48% decrease (from 811 to 421 individuals) in numbers of street homeless between 2008 and 2010, along with a concomitant increase of 69% in numbers of sheltered homeless.

Part 3: Vancouver as Olympic Host

The Olympic Games, often described as the most powerful and successful brand in the world, represent the hallmark of hallmark events. In addition to place promotion, such mega-events encourage improvements to local physical infrastructure, often including transportation systems and waterfront development (Black & Van Der Westhuizen 2004; Surborg et al. 2008). At the same time, as joint public and private body ventures, these mega-events are also associated with changes in policy priorities and management arrangements that tighten security and restrict permissible uses and behaviors in public space (Byers 1998; Flusty 2004).

While residents and activists have kept a close eye on the potential for increased policing and regulation of public space in the Downtown Eastside as part of Olympic preparations, the City's leaders and Olympic planners have tried to cast the social problems and public responses in the neighborhood as a unique part of Vancouver's Olympic brand. Lance Berelowitz, Editor in Chief of Vancouver's Olympic Bid Book, understood the opportunity to host the 2010 Winter Olympic Games as a chance to examine the urgent issues confronting urban develop-

ment in Vancouver at that point in time and to grow a "culture of excellence" in its ongoing competition in the league of the world's most livable cities. This expectation has certain implications in the realms of architecture, urban planning and design, in keeping with the now globally recognizable phenomenon of "Vancouverism" (Berelowitz 2005), namely "multiple-use, high density core areas; a transit focused and auto-restrained transportation system; exquisite urban design to echo a spectacular natural setting; and peaceful, multicultural population" (Harcourt et al 2007, 1). Less well-recognized, but also possible, is the inclusion of a particular Vancouverist approach to the question of how to include the City's poorest residents, and their visible presence within the City's public space and emerging urban culture.

The case of the 2010 Vancouver/Whistler Winter Olympic Games is useful for the study of social ramifications for the host city region. Public acceptability, positive legacies for Vancouver's least fortunate, inclusivity, and sustainability were all core themes from the Bid Stage through to the events themselves. The Vancouver Bid Committee distinguished itself from its competitors, proving the enthusiasm for the Games among the Vancouver public at large by holding a public plebiscite on the question of hosting the Games (Eby 2007). Early on in the preparation of its Olympic Bid, government staff at all levels, along with local community leaders, also formed a working group which produced a set of Inner-City Inclusive Olympic Commitments (Edelson 2011). The localized focus of their concern was inclusion of the Downtown Eastside neighborhood and its poor residents in the benefits Vancouver would accrue from hosting the Olympic Games. Does this mean that Vancouver has taken the opportunity of the Olympics to improve and secure the safety and cosmopoli-

tan nature of inclusive public spaces, or followed the more standard path toward further privatization and restrictions of the use of public space?

Legacies for Public Space in Atlanta and Sydney Olympic Games

Both Atlanta and Sydney, as Summer Olympics host cities, experienced changes in the regulation of public space prior to assuming hosting duties. The year following its bid win in 1990, the City of Atlanta passed a series of Quality of Life Ordinances. These included measures against ‘aggressive’ panhandling, including panhandling within 10 feet of an automatic teller machine, or transit stop; loitering; ‘camping’ in public; and ‘remaining’ in a parking lot without having a car (Beaty 1998; Lenskyj 2000; COHRE 2007). ‘Camping’ included “sleeping, lying down, residing, or storing personal property in any park or on any public sidewalk, and using any public space for living accommodations or camping unless one is specifically authorized to do so” (NLCHP 1996, 34). The year prior to the 1996 Games, enforcement of these new ordinances increased (COHRE 2007). In 1995 and 1996, 9,000 homeless people were issued arrest citations (COHRE 2007, 11). However, an injunction on the eve of the Games ordered the City to ‘cease and desist’ arresting homeless people without probable cause (COHRE 2007, 113). In its post-Games era, Atlanta continued to engage in policies and enforcement targeting homeless people (NLCHP 1996).

The situation was more stark in the case of the Sydney 2002 Olympics, where new state legislation was enacted including the Crimes Legislation (later named

Police and Public Safety) Act 1998; the Homebush Bay Operations Act and Regulation 1999; and the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority Act 1999 (COHRE 2007). Patricia McEniery and Amanda Cornwall (2000, 2) of the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) note that the Police and Public Safety Act (also known as the ‘move on’ power) provides that a police officer may give reasonable directions to a person in a public place if that person’s behavior or presence obstructs other people, constitutes harassment or intimidation of other people or is causing or likely to cause fear to another person. Implications of the Act were targeting those approached, specifically young people, street workers, and the homeless and Aboriginal people. The other pieces of legislation allowed police to remove people from specific public spaces if they were viewed as “causing annoyance or inconvenience or for indecent language” (COHRE 2007, 130). In addition, under the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority Act, people were prohibited from acts such as “attempting to collect money, using facilities for sleeping overnight or using a skateboard, or roller skates” in Sydney Harbour (COHRE 2007, 130). Although this public space legislation was Olympics-specific, of concern to activists in Sydney was the lack of an expiration date for the latter two pieces of legislation (McEniery and Cornwall 2000).

As host cities, both Atlanta and Sydney thus demonstrate the existence of a public space legacy for Olympic Games host cities which may have long-term effects. Until January 2009, one year prior to hosting the Games, Vancouver did appear to be following a similar trend as Atlanta and Sydney. Prior to hosting the Games, both Atlanta and Vancouver instituted private security called the Ambassador Force to patrol downtown (Beaty 1998; Lenskyj

2000; COHRE 2007). Sydney heavily enforced restrictions on ‘aggressive vending’, similar to Vancouver’s enforcement of illegal vending, in an attempt to reduce street disorder (Lenskyj 2000, 149).

Part 4: Public Space

Decisions in public and private spheres contribute to the regulation of public space in a variety of ways. Policy may specifically encourage the enforcement of certain by-laws or allocate funding to bodies, such as public police or private security that regulate public space. In this article, we focus on policy decisions from several influential municipal actors that enable the enforcement of public space: City of Vancouver, Business Improvement Associations (BIAs)³, and the Vancouver Police Department (VPD). We will discuss the effects of enforcing anti-homeless legislation, specifically in terms of the actions of private security, administered by the BIA, and public police.

With city cores as the centers of commodity, the downtown image, in particular, as a ‘clean and safe’ environment has become more important (Mitchell & Staeheli 2006). While downtown revitalization strategies in cities such as Vancouver have certainly reinvigorated downtowns, they have also led to uneven social and geographical development both between and within cities (Brenner & Theodore 2002). The result has been “spatial centralization of capital in some places at the expense of others” (N. Smith 1996, 79). Evidence for this in Vancouver is noticeable when comparing the heritage neighborhood of Gastown to the adjacent DTES (see Figures 3 and 4). A City of Vancouver mandate in the 1970s demarcating Gastown as a heritage district prevented the DTES from accessing preservation and beautification-related resources and investments (H. A. Smith 2003). Gastown is an important tourist hub, while the DTES is the centre for social services and various types of ‘street disorder’ (Barnes & Hutton 2009, 1248).



Figure 4. Streetscape, Gastown (neighboring Downtown Eastside), Vancouver, where heritage preservation as well as a bustling tourist industry driven by proximity to the cruise ship terminal have contributed to neighborhood vitality (photo: John Goldsmith).

Privatization of Public Space

Another aspect of the privatization of public space is the increasing role of real estate in creating places of consumption and leisure (Sassen 1991; N. Smith 2002). Private developers are investing in downtowns with the intention of profiting from a surge in downtown property values, creating a co-dependent relationship between public and private bodies. Mitchell and Staeheli (2006, 150) note that the “improvements in public space have a relational benefit to the value of surrounding private property.” City policies and amenities attract new private investment but, in turn, may raise private property values (Mitchell & Staeheli 2006). The impact this has on public space is tremendous, as private interests such as property developers and businesses play a role in defining and setting boundaries around the design, use, and regulation of public space.

Finally, the privatization of public space has led to a ‘presumptive right of exclusion’ on the part of local and adjacent property owners (Staeheli & Mitchell 2004, 151). Mitchell (2001, 305) argues that in the image-oriented city, politicians have turned to a ‘legal remedy’ to clean the streets of inappropriate behavior, resulting in ‘the annihilation of space by law.’ With private interests a driving force of urban regeneration, there have been two notable effects on urban spaces: Public space has been privatized and thus subject to increased regulation; and, at the same time, laws treat public space as they do private space, such that it is more regulated.

Police in the DTES were particularly stringent in enforcing regulations related to street vending in 2009. Vancouver Police Department Deputy Chief Warren Lemcke (2009) attributed the crackdown

on street vending to safety reasons. He claims that many people sell goods that are unsafe for people to buy, such as meat and weapons. He argued that the police department was simply helping to clean up the area from low-level street disorder. Vancouver City Council, for its part, changed its priorities related to the regulation of public space in this period: in 2006, Mayor Sam Sullivan initiated Project Civil City (discussed below in Part 5) which aligned perfectly with the expressed strategy of the VPD. However, in 2008, the newly elected Mayor Robertson and newly elected council scrapped PCC, replacing this policy direction with a different approach.

Parks

Cities regulate actions in public spaces but they may also close certain public spaces altogether in order to avoid specifying inappropriate activities. Restricted park hours, for example, are used to keep people out of parks at night thereby prohibiting a variety of actions, such as loitering and sleeping. This has an enormous impact on the homeless population, especially in cities with limited shelter spaces, because parks provide enough space for people to erect shelter without obstructing pedestrian or vehicular passage.

Parks play an important role in the DTES. They are places of socialization and congregation and also are used for repose. Lemcke indicated that police usually approach people sleeping in parks and on sidewalks to ensure that they are alive and safe but do not ticket or move people along unless they put up shelter. However, there have been incidents in which large-scale enforcement has taken place. Residents

and activists referred to a ‘sweep’ of Oppenheimer Park in 2008. Prior to the sweep, a growing group of up to 30 people frequently slept in the park, many with temporary shelter, such as a tarp or tent (Track 2009). In August 2009, the police department forced people out of the park. Lemcke stated that this was done for health and safety reasons (Anonymous 2009; Kerr 2009; Lemcke 2009).

Statistics obtained from the City Prosecutor’s Office indicate that from 2003 to 2008 there was an increase in park violations and/or enforcement from 4 to 9 incidents, illustrated in Figure 8. Tickets represent all park violations and not necessarily infractions dealing with sleeping, temporary shelter, or staying in a park after closing hours. Interviewees noted that enforcement became stricter in two specific parks, Oppenheimer and Pigeon parks, in preparation for renovation. Eby (2009) notes that park renovations themselves represent a certain kind of public space regulation. He notes that Pigeon Park renovations could have been implemented in stages, in a way that could have preserved part of the park for public use. Instead, the City renovated the park in one fell swoop, forcing many DTES residents into alleys and sidewalks across the street, creating more of an appearance of disorder (Anonymous 2009; Eby 2009).

Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association (DVBIA)

Launched in 1998 by the DVBIA, the Downtown Ambassadors are a private security force patrolling the downtown. According to the DVBIA website, they “provide an effective street presence, monitor-

ing and deterring criminal activities in parking facilities and other areas accessible to the public.” They also provide tourists with information and directions (Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association 2007). Privately hired by the BIA, the Downtown Ambassadors have been controversial in Vancouver, as their job entails patrolling public spaces. Security guards have very little legal authority but hold ‘presumed authority’ because of their uniforms (Bennett et al. 2008, 15). Like any other citizen, they may conduct citizens’ arrests if they witness a crime under the Criminal Code of Canada (Bennett et al. 2008).

Between 2002-2003 and 2004-2005, there was an increase in panhandlers and squeegee people approached by Ambassadors, from 18,942 to 34,622 (DVBIA 2003, 2004, 2005). However, in 2005-2006, the figure fell to 19,358 “incidents” involving a variety of people, including vendors, squeegee people, panhandling, and “street person nuisances” (DVBIA 2006). In 2007, the DVBIA increased its levy, in part to address safety and security, and “reduced aggressive street behavior from 4,000 to 350 incidents per month through the Downtown Ambassadors and Loss Prevention programs” (DVBIA 2008a). The DVBIA statistics show the effectiveness of the Downtown Ambassadors: the number of people approached and the number of people needed to be approached decreased. This decrease in “aggressive street behavior” also coincides with an increase in ticketing for Safe Streets Act and Section 70A of Vancouver’s Street and Traffic By-law.

Safety and security were consistently listed as priorities for the DVBIA. In addition to safety and security priorities, the organization’s 2003-2004 annual report listed Advocacy as a strategic priority. The

DVBIA defined advocacy as “acting as a single voice on issues of legislation, regional policy and plans, crime and government relations” (DVBIA 2004, 1). In 2005, safety and security priorities led to the initiation of two new programs, Guardian Eye and StreetCheck. Guardian Eye placed security cameras in areas of high crime, while StreetCheck provided the Downtown Ambassadors with technology to map criminal activity in order to share information with police (DVBIA 2005). In 2008, the DVBIA expanded the Downtown Ambassadors from 16 to 24 patrollers and 16 to 24 hours of service, seven-days-a-week, as a result of money provided by the City (DVBIA 2008b). As of January 2011, there were 32 Ambassadors working in the downtown area, patrolling 16 hours per day (DVBIA 2011).

With BIA security surrounding the DTES and heavy police enforcement of downtown beaches and parks, DTES residents are essentially contained within the neighborhood. Residents contributing to street disorder are controlled to the extent that they may hold drugs but may not jaywalk, panhandle, or vend on the street. The priority area of the DTES is patrolled more than any other area in the City, leaving police available for smaller infractions as well as larger ones.

Part 5: Policing

Unlike “street-level bureaucrats,” like police officers, who directly enforce laws, the City of Vancouver initiates policy and provides funding in a way that either encourages or discourages enforcement. Two particular policies have played an important role in the regulation of space in downtown Vancouver: the

initiation of Project Civil City in 2006 and public funding and expansion of the Downtown Ambassadors in 2007. They have been identified by those interviewed as indicators of shifting priorities on the part of the City. Changing VPD funding also demonstrates the City’s new agenda which will be discussed in the next section.

Funding

Funding for police was a City priority throughout the period of 2003-2008. The Vancouver Police Department received between 20.7% and 21.9% of the City’s total operating budget. Engineering Services is the only department comprising more of the budget than VPD.⁴ In fact, as Figure 5 demonstrates, the VPD is the only department with more than a 1% increase relative to the total budget during this time.

Within the VPD, funding priorities by district were examined to provide a sense of relative enforcement capacity. Figure 6 depicts the funding by district as a percentage of the VPD’s total budget. Districts 1 and 2, covering the downtown and DTES, make up a higher percentage (14.3% - 17.2%) of the VPD’s budget than Districts 3 and 4, the other neighborhoods of Vancouver (10.7%-12.5%).

Figure 7 demonstrates that, while the overall VPD budget increased by 35.1% from 2003 to 2008, funding for District 1 and 2 (the downtown peninsula and DTES) increased at a rate of 40.6%, more than double that for Districts 3 and 4 (18.8%).

Within the budget, there is also a breakdown of money allocated to sworn officers as opposed to

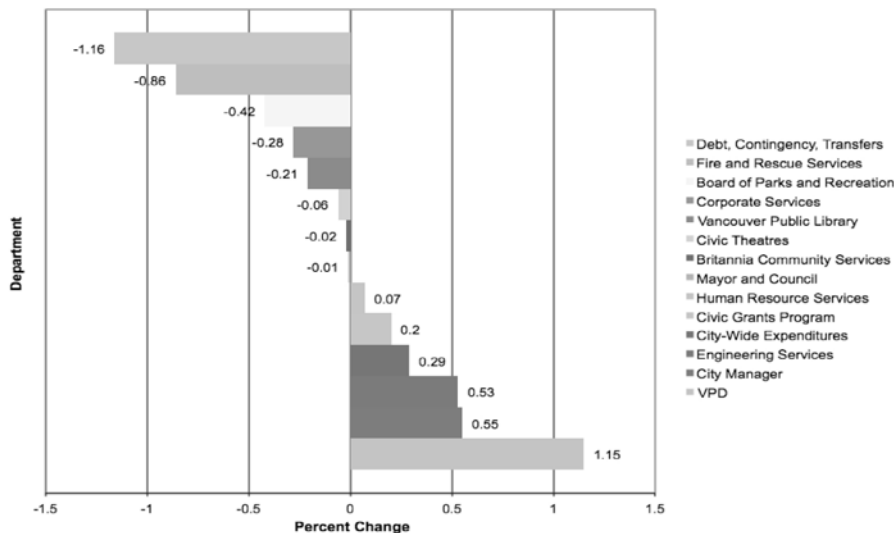


Figure 5. Change in Spending by Department Relative to Total Budget (2003-2008) (City of Vancouver, Budget 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008)

civilian VPD employees. Between 2003 and 2008, VPD police officers increased from 1,124 to 1,327 positions, an 18.1% increase. Based on the breakdown of funding increases by area, Districts 1 and 2 are clearly priorities.

Project Civil City

The prime example of the shared approach by the Vancouver Police Department and City Council during the mayoralty of Sam Sullivan is Project Civil City (PCC). This policing strategy was initiated by Mayor Sullivan on December 12, 2006, modeled

on a 1994 New York City police strategy enacted by Rudolph Giuliani and Police Chief William J. Bratton, which used a “broken windows” style of police enforcement (Giuliani & Bratton 1994). The theory argues that the appearance of a neighborhood or city is related to its crime rate. A city with graffiti and broken windows will have more crime because it is uncared for to begin with (Wilson & Kelling 2003). Therefore, to have a major impact on crime, enforcement must focus on the smaller physical ailments of a city, such as panhandling, graffiti, and prostitution, often referred to as ‘street disorder’ (Wortley et al. 2008). “Residents of Vancouver,” the motion states, “deserve the right to enjoy public and private space free from being victims of crime and disorder”.

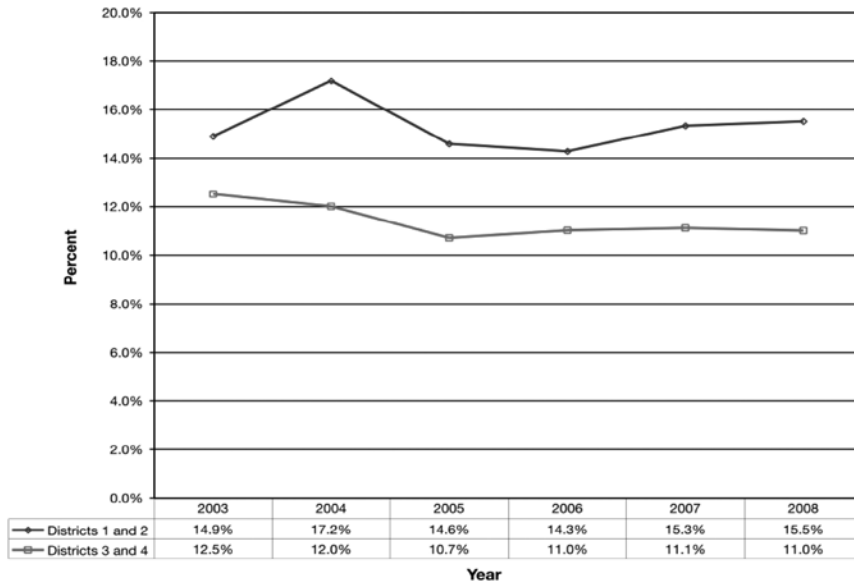


Figure 6. Funding by VPD District, Percent of Total VPD Budget (2003-2008) (City of Vancouver, Budget 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008)

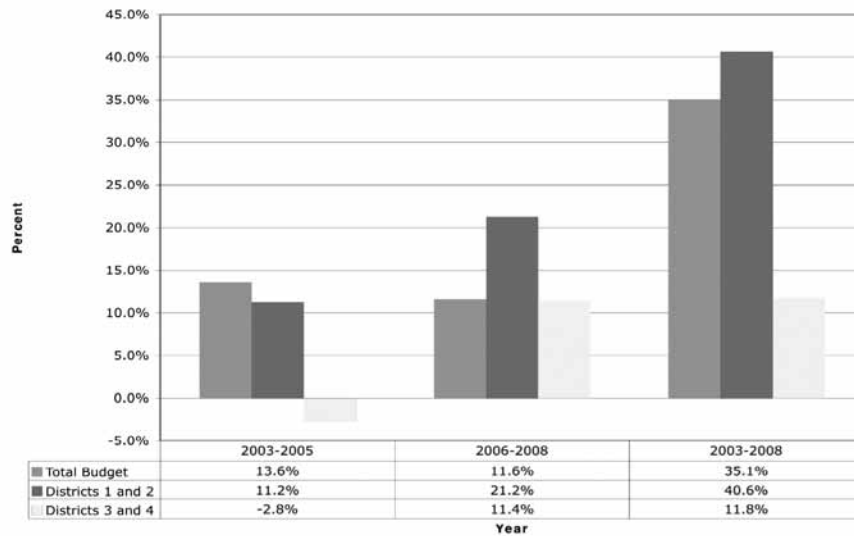


Figure 7. Change in Spending by VPD District (City of Vancouver, Budget 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008)

The motion acknowledges Canada's rising homeless problem as a contributing factor to increased street disorder and notes the importance of PCC in mitigating the consequences of homelessness without replacing municipal and provincial policies aimed at ending homelessness (City of Vancouver 2006b). Below are highlights of PCC:

- The overall goal of PCC was to reduce public disorder. This included a goal of a 50% reduction in the open drug market, homelessness, aggressive panhandling, and disorderly behavior by 2010 (Office of the Mayor 2006). Mayor Sullivan suggested using existing City employees, such as parking enforcement and sanitation engineers, as “eyes and ears” on the street and “part of a new public order enforcement continuum” (Office of the Mayor 2006, 8). Both public police and private security were considered important actors in getting street disorder under control. Specific suggestions relating to public disorder included: Expanding the Downtown Ambassadors, a private security service provided by the DVVIA;
- Increasing the number of by-law enforcement officers and prosecutors; increasing street presence of police officers;
- Fast-tracking a simplified ticketing system, known as Municipal Ticket Information;
- Reviewing by-law fines and ensuring they “deter public disorder”; and
- Studying options for a “no sit, no lie” by-law.

The following statements, from Sullivan's introductory letter to citizens, establish the link between PCC and the Olympics:

We have a tremendous opportunity to use the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games as a catalyst to solve the public disorder problems that affect our city.

What kind of city do you want the world to find in 2010? (Office of the Mayor 2006, 5)

The project was funded, in part, by \$1 million of the \$20 million Olympic Legacy Fund. Project Civil City was named by those interviewed as marking an important change in the ways police and private security approach people in public space in Vancouver. In fall 2008, the new left-of-center council, led by Mayor Gregor Robertson, reversed many PCC initiatives. However, in an interview, Deputy Chief Lemcke, the VPD officer responsible for police activity in the DTES, suggested that this reversal would not change the VPD's approach towards enforcement.

Proactive Policing

This section examines VPD strategy and enforcement in the downtown with a particular focus on the DTES. The VPD released a four-year Strategic Plan in 2003, listing as an objective “to improve livability by reducing street disorder ... (number of panhandlers, squeegee people, etc.)” (Wiebe 2005, 24) as one of its five priorities (Demers & Griffiths 2007). Another important element of the 2004-2008 Strategic Plan was an increase in sworn police officers and civilian staff, with 33 of a total 50 new

officers sent downtown (Demers & Griffiths 2007). Another product of the Strategic Plan was an effort in “proactive policing”, which led to a pilot project for patrolling, named the Beat Enforcement Team, focusing on the DTES. There are, therefore, more police officers patrolling the DTES, per block, than other areas of the downtown (Lemcke 2009). Gastown, for example, will typically have 1 or 2 patrolers, whereas the DTES will have 10 to 14 patrolers per shift.

The 2009 draft business plan became an issue of debate in Vancouver. Among the targets set were: a 20% increase in by-law tickets, a 10% increase in Safe Streets Act tickets, a “minimum of 4 street checks per BET (Beat Enforcement Team) member per block”, and the elimination of “street vending in the BET catchment area” (Organizational Planning Unit 2009). The VPD also encouraged requesting warrants for “chronic by-law offenders” (Vancouver Police Board 2009). According to Deputy Chief Lemcke, pressure from the public and accusations of setting quotas led to a revision of the business plan and reversal of key street disorder objectives, which eliminated ticketing targets for by-laws and the Safe Streets Act, and BET street-check targets (Lemcke 2009; Vancouver Police Board 2009).

Enforcement in the downtown core and DTES has changed since 2003. The overall focus in the DTES has shifted from drug enforcement to street disorder, reflected in VPD reports (Eby 2009). Lemcke (2009) attributed these changes to the implementation of the Safe Streets Act, a 2008 officer training on how to use the Act, as well as a 2006 visit to New York City during which he saw “broken windows” policing in effect. Most agree that there has been a crackdown on by-law offences, such as spitting, pan-

handling, and jaywalking.

Annual reports indicate that VPD policy is focusing more on preserving livability than it has in years past. In 2008, Lemcke changed the police approach to drug enforcement in the DTES to make beats more efficient and reduce paperwork. Presently, police simply confiscate the drugs without charging a person for possession. On the one hand, this new approach creates a safe zone for drugs to the extent that people do not have to worry about being charged. On the other hand, police are circumventing the legal process by taking matters into their own hands. It also means that one may be written up for jaywalking or aggressive panhandling, which are by-laws, but not drug possession, which is a criminal offence.

Along with changing drug enforcement, Lemcke has used other techniques to enforce street disorder infractions more efficiently. The number of tickets handed out in the DTES has increased in the past six years as well. In 2007, there was an increase in Safe Streets Act tickets and panhandling/obstructive solicitation by-law tickets. The closure of parks for renovation has led to the relocation of activities. In December 2008, due to a budgetary surplus, Lemcke placed all 14 officers on the beat in the DTES. Over the course of the month, officers wrote 1,264 tickets in the DTES, 892 for by-law infractions and 372 for provincial statute infractions (Howell 2009).

As Figures 8 and 9 demonstrate, ticketing for all infractions rose significantly from 2003 to 2007. In particular, tickets handed out between 2006 and 2007 for Safe Streets Act, panhandling/obstructive solicitation, and loitering violations increased dramatically, coinciding with the launch of Project

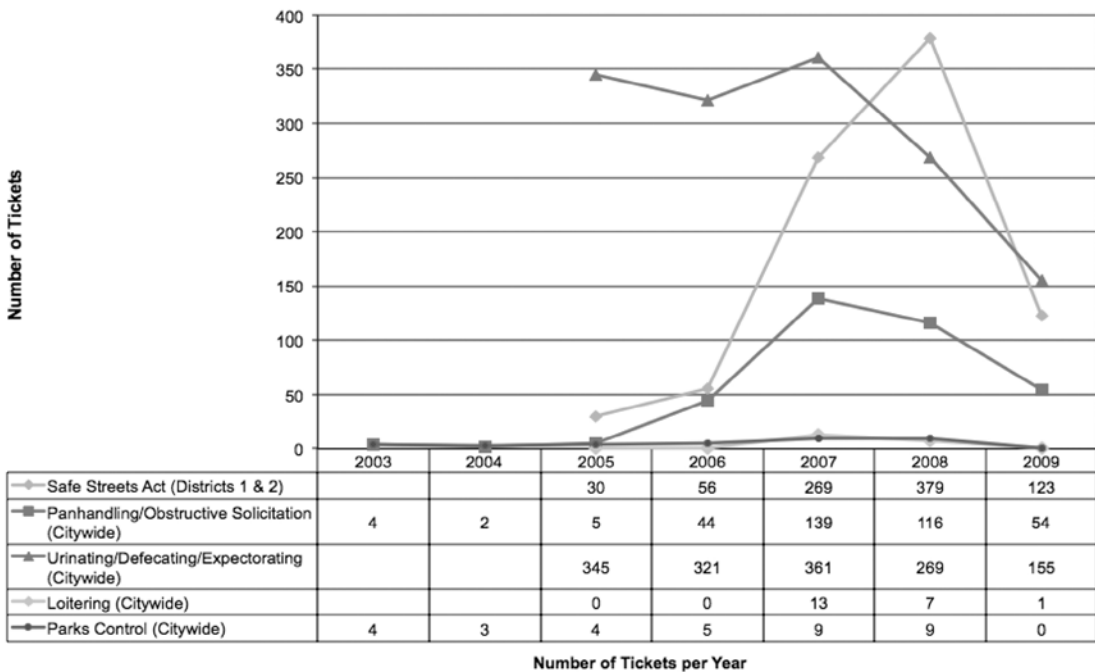


Figure 8. Tickets for By-laws and Provincial Legislation (Freedom of information requests from the City of Vancouver [September 10, 2010; File no. 04-1000-20-2010-261] and the Vancouver Police Department [October 13, 2010; Unit Reference 10-2247A])

Civil City in 2006. Between 2006 and 2007, city-wide panhandling/obstructive solicitation charges jumped from 44 to 139 tickets (see Figures 8 and 9). Safe Streets Act tickets rose 380%, from 56 to 269 (District 1 and 2), in the same time period. Interestingly, enforcement of the Safe Streets Act (2004) in the downtown and DTES showed a steady rise, while panhandling/obstructive solicitation dipped in 2008 to 116 tickets citywide, as illustrated in Figure 9. Of particular note is the decrease in ticketing for all offences in 2009 (See Figure 8); a de-

crease of 68% for Safe Streets Act, and 53% for panhandling/obstructive solicitation violations. Most likely, this decrease was due to the more left-leaning mayor and City Council elected in November 2008 that reversed some public space regulations in favor of more inclusive policies.

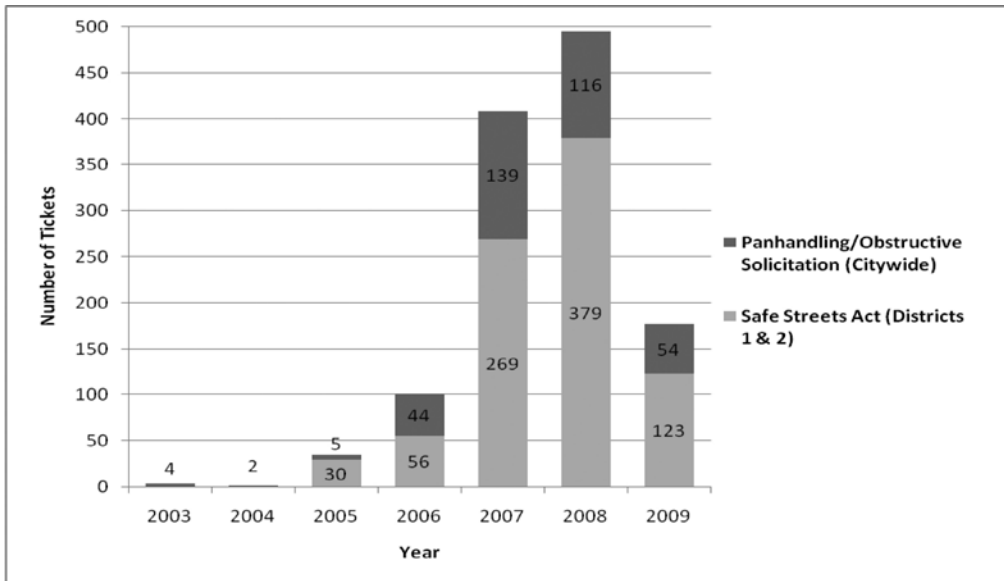


Figure 9. Tickets for Panhandling/Obstructive Solicitation (Citywide) and Safe Streets Act Violations (Districts 1 and 2, downtown and DTES) (2003-2009) (Freedom of information request from the City of Vancouver [September 10, 2010; File no. 04-1000-20-2010-261] and the Vancouver Policy Department [October 13, 2010; Unit Reference 10-2247A])

Downtown Ambassador Expansion

As noted above, the expansion of the Downtown Ambassador Program was one means offered by Project Civil City to decrease street disorder. Prior to 2007, the Downtown Ambassadors patrolled only the DVBIA district. On December 13, 2007, as part of Project Civil City, City Council agreed in principle to support the expansion of the Downtown Ambassadors program, in a close 6-4 vote (Bennett et al. 2008). The agreement included an allocation of \$872,000 of public money towards the Down-

town Ambassadors Program to facilitate the expansion. The initial contract allocated \$237,000 to the DVBIA for 24-hour, 7-days-a-week security in the downtown area and \$635,000 towards expansion to areas outside the downtown core (Kassay & Vaisbord 2008, 9).⁵

As a requirement for funding, City staff was asked to draft a report on the merits and purpose of the Downtown Ambassadors (Bennett et al. 2008). The subsequent report noted that Ambassadors were recording data on the number of sleepers, busk-

ers, panhandlers, transients, drug dealers/users, and people with “mental health issues” in the downtown core (Taylor & Vaisbord 2008, 5). Taking stock of and making contact with panhandlers, sleepers, and transients implies the Downtown Ambassadors’ role in the downtown core concerns this specific population rather than the safety of the general public.

Ambassadors were also consulted on what they considered the biggest challenges in the downtown core. Ambassadors replied that the most serious challenges were homeless people sleeping on streets. In January 2009, the new City Council decided to cease funding this program (City of Vancouver 2009).

Enabling Private Security Enforcement

Private security spending overall rose from 2003 to 2009. Interviewees noted that private security agents and activities increased. Several people noted the importance of the Safe Streets Act (2004) in creating ‘presumed’ authority. Laura Track (June 2 2009), lawyer for Pivot Legal Society, remarked:

My sense is that private security guards and DT Ambassadors should not be enforcing the Safe Streets Act when, of course, they don't have the authority at all. For example, private security guards, especially in the central business district, move people along by telling them they are not allowed to sit within one meter of a business.

We are not able to locate any legislation indicating this is a regulation. Darcie Bennett, researcher for Pivot Legal Society, stated, “public police are in the business of crime prevention. Private security is in the business of relocation” (Bennett, May 11 2009). This impacts the DTES as it is often a de facto

neighborhood of relocation from the downtown. Also contributing to the issue of relocation is the development in 2004 of a Strathcona BIA security force that now patrols the neighborhood bordering the DTES to the east (Eby, May 5 2009). The consequence of this may be the containment of the homeless, panhandlers, and squeegeers to the DTES and out of BIA regulated areas. Those interviewed did not suggest that the change in private security was a direct impact of the Olympics. However, Bennett (personal communication 2009) remarks that the Olympics are intended to create a tourist market in Vancouver and with tourism comes a greater demand for private security.

Part 6: Findings

The Olympics Effect on Public Space in Vancouver

This paper examined whether the regulation of public space changed from Vancouver’s award of the right to host the Winter Olympics in 2003 to the opening of the event itself in early 2010. Vancouver has experienced changes in the legislation and enforcement of public space since winning its Olympic bid. However, in studies of a potential “Olympics effect,” the problem of the counterfactual challenges any possible conclusions we might draw from this. That is, it is difficult to gauge whether observed changes have occurred because of the Olympics or simply as part of a broader trend. Often the hypothesized causal link joining Olympics preparations and increased legislation and enforcement fails to respect the multitude of drivers behind cities’ regulation of public space.

Impact of the Olympics on the Downtown Eastside

By and large, the City of Vancouver and Province of British Columbia acted in concert with the police department to tighten the regulation of public space in their initial preparations for the Olympics, and this had disproportionate impacts on the Downtown Eastside. First, legislation like the *Safe Streets Act* along with programs such as Project Civil City and the Downtown Ambassadors Program indicate a focus on the ‘broken windows’ crime prevention school of thought. Vancouver residents witnessed municipal and police enforcement of policies aimed at curbing street disorder, as funding for policing increased steadily and enforcement prioritized the Downtown Eastside. With private security increasingly moving people into the DTES and a strong police presence within the neighborhood, daily activities associated with homelessness and poverty, e.g. panhandling, vending, and sleeping, are becoming more difficult to perform anywhere. This problem becomes more apparent when staple venues of public life, such as Pigeon Park and Victory Square, two important DTES parks, are removed from regular use by revitalization activities, leaving residents to ‘loiter’ in alleys and on sidewalks.

In the meantime, the face of the Downtown Eastside is changing. Although the neighborhood was notably excluded from the redevelopment of downtown Vancouver in the 1990s and early 2000s, this respite from the forces of gentrification has now ended. Market condominium housing development is occurring rapidly in the DTES. New low-income housing is being built, but 70% of this development is outside the DTES, as part of the City’s explicit strategy of “revitalization without displacement”

for the Downtown Eastside, which is supported by all levels of government (City of Vancouver 2011; Edelson 2011). The spinoff effects of these developments include what low-income residents perceive as “barricades of high end shops, boutiques, fancy restaurants, art galleries, and doggie clothing stores [that] line the streets where there used to be stores and services that catered to low-income people,” as well as rent increases in existing low-income hotels beyond what is affordable to residents receiving social assistance (Drury & Swanson 2012, 1). The City’s 2011 Low-Income Housing Survey showed that only 27% of private Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units were renting within the \$375 monthly shelter component of Income Assistance (for individuals) (City of Vancouver 2012).

Public Space and the Homeless

A secondary intent of this research was to investigate evidence of an emergent Vancouver-specific style of addressing severe poverty within its prominent downtown public spaces. Vancouver’s ‘revitalization without displacement’ strategy for the Downtown Eastside expresses an intent to treat the root causes of ‘disorder’, i.e. helping the homeless instead of targeting them for minor legal infractions. More specifically, for the City’s planners, this means increasing market housing while securing and improving the affordable housing stock. Across Vancouver, the City and other partners have slated 19 building sites for affordable housing development, and nine of these were delivered by 2011. Government acquisition of 23 private SRO buildings in the City and new construction of affordable housing by the Province at an unprecedented scale imply a change at the provincial

level as well (Barnes & Hutton 2009; City of Vancouver 2012). At the same time, the nearly 4,000 remaining privately held SRO rooms and their at-risk residents remain vulnerable (BC Housing 2009; Blomley et al. 2011). It remains an open question whether the strategy of ‘revitalization without displacement’ will result in anything other than gentrification for the DTES and the dispersion of the homeless.

City Council Versus the Police Department: Diverging Agendas and a Struggle for Power

This case study of Vancouver’s experience demonstrates that there is also a need to focus on the individual actors responsible for controlling public space. When Project Civil City was launched, it appeared as if Vancouver was headed down a path similar to previous Olympic host cities in using the Games as a “catalyst to solve the public disorder problems that affect” the City (Office of the Mayor 2006, 5). However, the mayor and council elected in November 2008 acted quickly to establish a platform that differentiated itself from the ‘quality of life’ approach to regulating public space that defined the lead up to Vancouver’s Olympics. They are pushing a new platform that wagers that the most livable city can also be inclusive of the poor. The City reversed Project Civil City, defunded the Downtown Ambassadors, and established a key priority to “end street homelessness by 2015.” Together with the Provincial government and non-profit sector, they have turned around a decade-long trend of disinvestment in social and rental housing. At the same time, the VPD has expressed an attitude of maintaining

a street disorder based approach to policing in the Downtown Eastside, and it remains to be seen how, if at all, the Vancouver Police Department will adjust its approach to homelessness and ‘public disorder’ in accord with these shifts in City policy.

The complex relationships among key regulators of public space make pinning a causal effect on one source difficult. Public police have an important role in the regulation of public space, as they have the ability to choose how people may use public spaces (Proudfoot 2006). While the City and Province have changed their policy position toward housing and homelessness since the end of 2008, this may have little impact on the regulation of public space in the downtown and DTES. Reinforcing VPD autonomy, Deputy Chief Lemcke implies that approaches for policing the DTES remain the same today as prior to the 2008 municipal election. Therefore, while the political priorities of individual actors are one of the primary factors in the regulation of public space, the priorities of key power figures are not always commensurable.

Conclusion

Vancouver offers some surprise twists to the dominant storyline of typical contemporary Olympic host cities, as far as the regulation of public space and treatment of homeless and marginal individuals is concerned. Unlike the case in Atlanta, Downtown Ambassadors were present in Vancouver prior to Olympics Games planning, suggesting that the regular course of policy transfer might be at play as much as the impetus of the Olympic Games. And, since being elected in November 2008, the current

left-leaning City Council has reversed decisions that made Vancouver appear destined to follow the path trodden by Atlanta and Sydney. In the larger context, we can see the hosting of mega-events as part and parcel of the strategy being pursued by aspiring cities, which may fast track and provide external impetus and justification for pre-existing political agendas. They are also symbolic of a trend in North American cities to plan for the attraction of consumers, both residents and tourists, and particularly to downtowns. The result is a ripple effect in which cities strive to become visually attractive, while trying to cope with their most disadvantaged populations.

In this respect, Vancouver is no exception. It is apparent that legislation and policing, both public and private, have evolved in an attempt to balance Vancouver's changing demographics with its longstanding lowest income neighborhood. There have been some successes: while housing and homelessness observers predicted that homeless rates would triple in the City of Vancouver from 2007-2010 (Eby 2007), homeless rates have in fact stabilized, rates of street homelessness have been cut in half, and significant new investments in affordable and low-income housing have materialized. However, homelessness remains a growing issue in Vancouver. Regardless of the exact cause of more stringent rules and enforcement of public space, the fact remains that those without shelter rely on public space for daily life routines. An inclusive and truly public space in the City of Vancouver cannot be conceptualized without first addressing the housing needs of its homeless population.

Alix Freiler (Masters in Urban Studies, Simon Fraser University) is Research Coordinator at the Centre for Research on Inner City Health in Toronto, Canada.

Dr. Meg Holden (PhD in Public and Urban Policy, New School for Social Research) is Associate Professor of Urban Studies and Geography at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada.

Lead Photograph

Figure 3. Pigeon Park, Downtown Eastside Vancouver, is traditionally an important gathering place for the local homeless population to meet and socialize, but critically, is also a place to conduct essential life activities that most people do in private space, like sleeping. Use of this park was interrupted by "park renovations" in 2009 (photo: John Goldsmith).

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Notes

¹ The 2010 Winter Olympics opened February 12, 2010. All ticketing statistics are given until the end of 2009.

² Statistics are based on a single-day count. Volunteers spend 24 hours interviewing and observing people who may be homeless. It is possible that some people may be counted twice and the count does not include the "hidden" homeless population, e.g. homeless people who do not sleep outside.

³ Business Improvement Associations are equivalent to U.S. Business Improvement Districts and can play an important role in the governance of public spaces. Their goal is to make the business area more attractive to consumers and other businesses. A special levy, placed upon every business within the area, is used to make the neighbourhood more aesthetically pleasing (Steel & Symes 2005).

⁴ Under the Canadian federal system, cities do not have jurisdiction over housing, health care, or education. The federal government has a police force (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) and several provinces also run their own police forces. However, any city with its own police force must also fund it.

⁵ Recommendations were made to initiate a Guardian program in various Business Improvement Associations not yet large enough for an Ambassadors Program. Guardian security is a system in which, "Like Ambassadors, patrol personnel are paid but they do not have the same level of training as fully-professional