Evie:

0:07

I've been lied to my whole life about homelessness. I was told the people you saw sleeping rough were there by choice, because they couldn't live by the rules of the many shelters waiting to take them in. I was told never to give money because it would just be used on drugs, and if anyone rejected an offer of food instead, they couldn't really be struggling. But most importantly, I was told that homelessness happens to other people; it couldn't possibly happen to me or anyone I know.

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This is untrue. There isn't a bed waiting for everyone who needs one. Food isn't the only thing that humans need to survive and thrive, and most of us are only a few misfortunes away from homelessness ourselves.

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So, what is hostile architecture? This term refers to urban design choices that are intended to discourage certain behaviors or people from public spaces. Not all, but many, disproportionately target people experiencing homelessness.

1:12

Some examples include skate stoppers that prevent skateboarding, but you can see they also make this surface uncomfortable to sit or lie down on. Some places have speakers that emit high-pitch sounds to discourage young people from congregating or loitering in an area. We also find sloped surfaces and obstacles to stop encampments forming.

1:38

But one of the more common interventions is armrests on public benches to stop people lying down. A more extreme example is anti-homeless ground spikes.

1:51

So, who do these interventions target? Many of them disproportionately target people experiencing homelessness, but they also make the city less comfortable and less inviting for many other groups, such as the elderly and people with disabilities, who may need more places to rest in public.

2:11

All of these individuals have as much right to use and enjoy public spaces as everyone else. So then why do we use hostile architecture? There's a hint in its other name: defensive urban design.

2:24

But we must ask ourselves, who or what are we defending against? City planners will often justify these interventions by saying they make the city safer or more productive. After all, not many people feel like shopping when they're confronted with visible homelessness.

2:41

But these public spaces are shared spaces; they are not just for paying customers.

2:48

So how is hostile architecture unjust? Essentially, hostile architecture tries to force the homelessness problem out of sight, out of mind. But when we force rough sleepers away from better-lit urban environments, we make their lives more difficult and dangerous.

3:06

When we force rough sleepers away from warmer environments, we leave them at higher risk of respiratory infections and other illnesses, on top of the health risks already associated with sleep deprivation and poor nutrition.

3:28

By failing to address the housing crisis, we not only fail the people that we see as homeless but also the many people we don't see. It is estimated that in Melbourne, for every rough sleeper, there are 21 other individuals experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.

3:46

Hostile architecture doesn't solve anything; it hurts the one and does nothing for the 21.

4:01

But what if—what if instead of focusing on excluding certain members of the population, we focused on designing our city to be more inclusive? What if we made a more compassionate choice?

4:14

What if instead of designing our city like a business, we started to treat it like a home? We know that increasing access to green spaces is good for people's physical health; they can exercise more, and it's good for their hearts.

4:24

We also know that it's good for people's mental health and social cohesion; people can socialize. Unlike hostile architecture, it actually does reduce crime rates.

4:35

Look at these community gardens. Aren't they stunning? Having more gardens, more green spaces, and more parks available actually fosters that sense of community and belonging, and it doesn't discriminate against the disadvantaged.

4:55

So where to from now? Hostile architecture cannot inspire people to seek out better accommodations if those accommodations do not exist. No one is suggesting that sleeping on a park bench is an ideal solution, but when hostile design choices take away that option, it is replaced with absolutely nothing.

5:13

Instead of focusing on whether someone can lie down on a park bench, maybe we need to start worrying about whether we have enough parks at all. Instead of trying to make the city less comfortable for some people, maybe we could focus on making it more comfortable for everyone.

5:30

Investing in public housing and greening our cities is better for everyone. This is how we can make a city a home. Thank you.