

09

user analysis

This section unpacks the needs and profile of the existing inhabitants on site as the focus group for the users of the proposed intervention, to guide a needs-driven programmatic approach. The public programmes will aim to integrate various user groups, including the existing inhabitants, staff and students from the nearby university medical campus and hospitals, residents from adjacent areas, and parents and children from surrounding schools. However, the focus will be to address the needs of the existing inhabitants as a point of departure. Findings from research done in 2020 has also been included due to its relevance to the topic of homelessness in Tshwane and associated basic needs. In addition, these sources have been referred to for contextual research for this dissertation. However, to understand the nuances of the specific user group at Melgisedek, various stakeholders currently involved with the inhabitants have been interviewed. Due to their direct and frequent engagement over the years with the Melgisedek inhabitants, these stakeholders provide invaluable insight into their lives and circumstances. The stakeholders interviewed also include members of Melgisedek Community Outreach (MCO) – a self-organised group of local community members, health care workers from UP Health Sciences and a social worker from COSUP (Community Oriented Substance Use Programme).

[a]

TANGIBLE & INTANGIBLE NEEDS

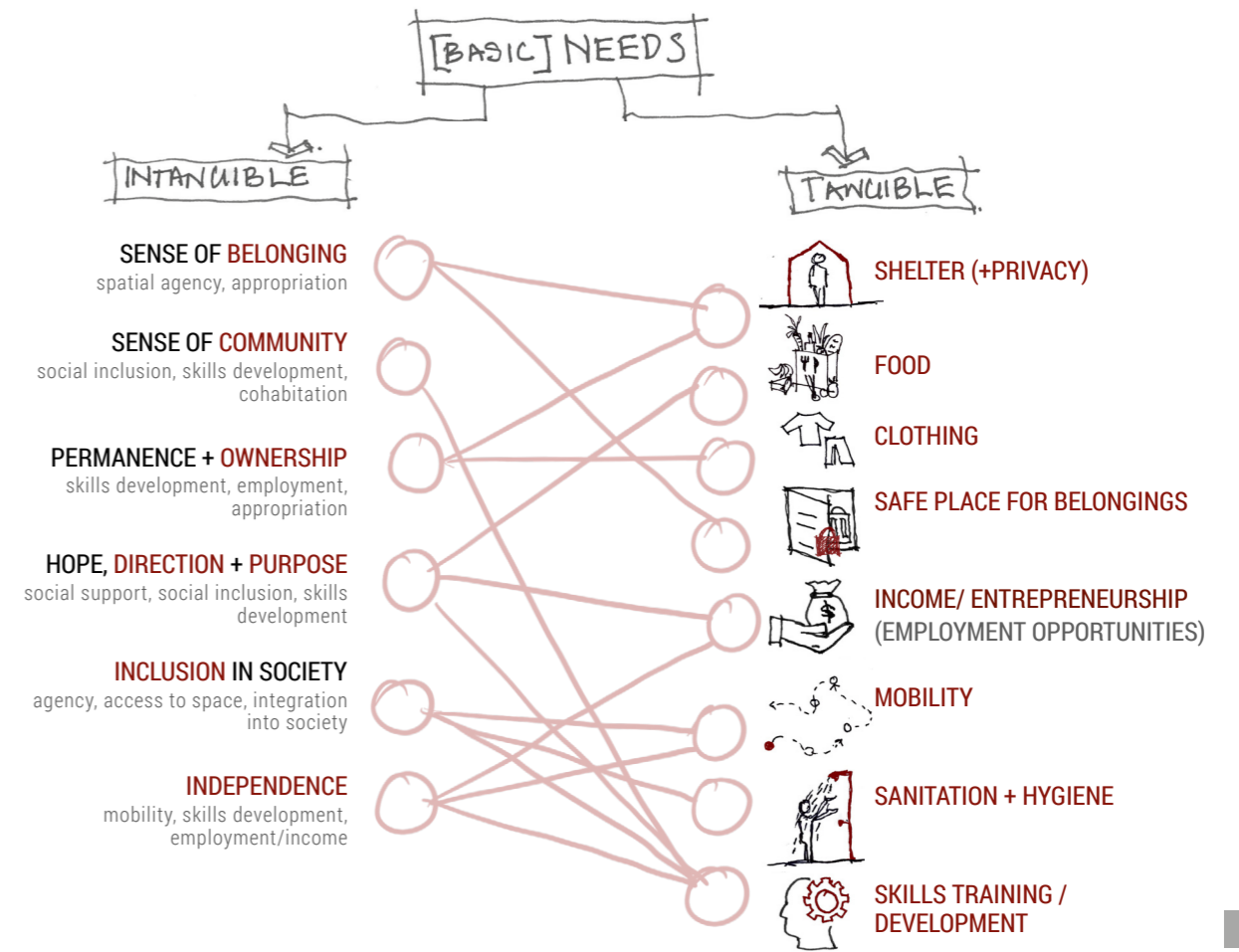
According to the literature (Cross et al. 2010: 11, De Beer & Vally 2017(2), Kriel, Tembe & Mashava 2017: 431-437, Ntakirutimana 2015, Tshwane Homelessness Forum 2015), the basic needs of the homeless can be summarised to consist of various interlinking tangible and intangible needs. Some of the most pertinent intangible needs include a sense of belonging, permanence, stability and ownership; a sense of safety, security and privacy; a sense of community and inclusion/participation in society; direction, hope and purpose; and independence to support oneself financially. These are linked to the tangible needs of access to shelter, food, clothing, mobility, sanitation and hygiene, health care, and skills training and development for income generation and opportunities for employment.

Throughout the interviews, various recurring themes arose regarding the inhabitants at Melgisedek and their needs, such as the existing cultural diversity, the length of stay at Melgisedek, forms of income, the most pertinent needs and issues, and the demographics of the inhabitants, relating to the previously mentioned homelessness categories (Hartshorn 1992).

[b]

COMMUNITY STRUCTURE & HABITATION

According to all interviewees (Interviewee A, Interviewee B, MCO 2021), there are currently approximately 400 inhabitants on site. However, instead of forming one cohesive community, Melgisedek boards many smaller sub-communities dispersed across various “zones” (Interviewee A, MCO 2021). Most of these communities are formed according to culture and nationality. Therefore, Melgisedek exhibits rich cultural diversity, but most inhabitants prefer to remain within the “bounds” of their own cultural group (MCO 2021). On site, inhabitants belong to a mix of African cultures, including Tanzanians, Nigerians, Kenyans, Ghanaians, Burundians, Congolese, Zimbabweans and South Africans (Interviewee A, Interviewee B, MCO 2021).



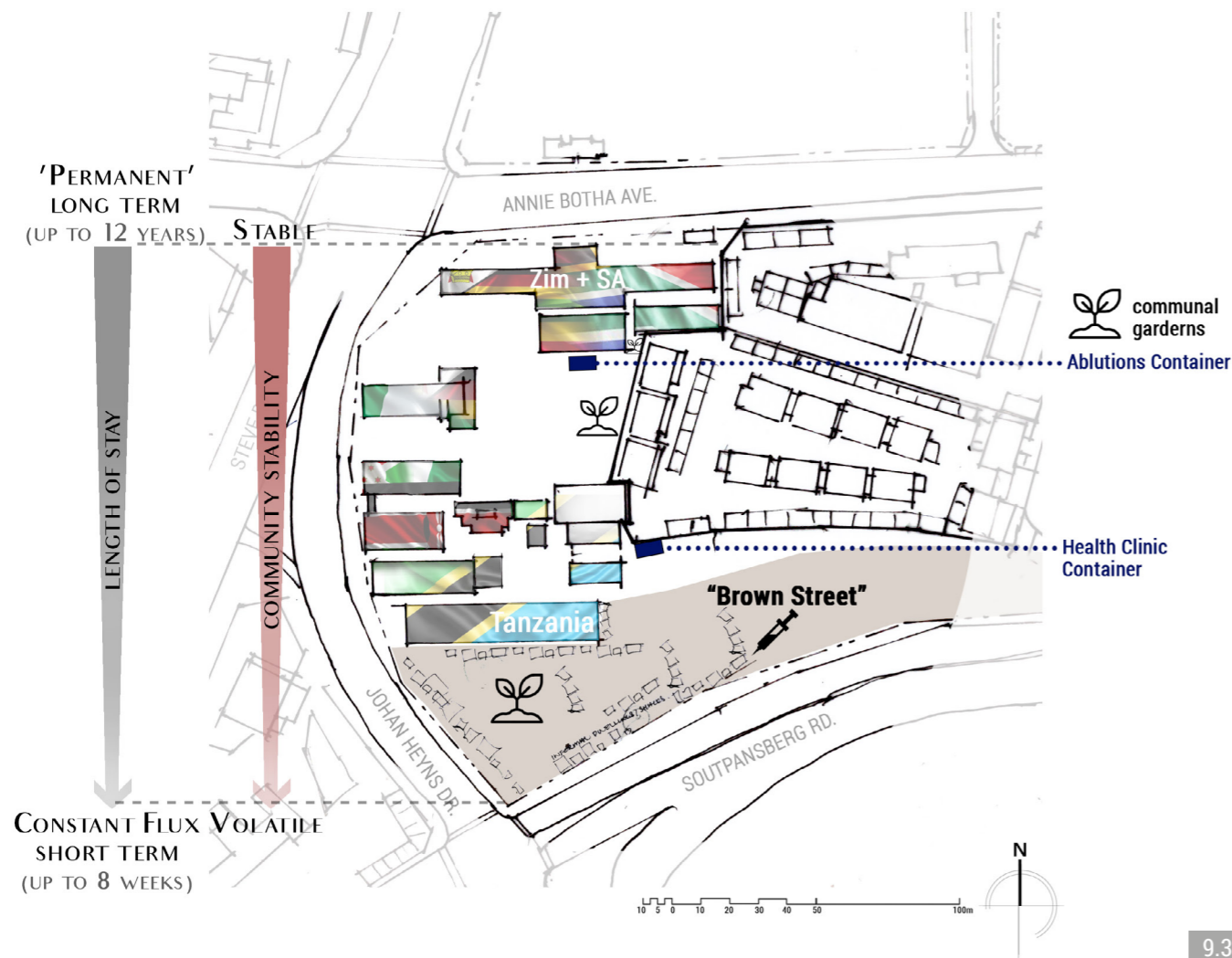
9.1.



9.2.

Fig. 9.1. Top right: Basic intangible and tangible needs and how they are intertwined. Diagrams by author (2020), Honours 2020 Q4, based on local research on homelessness (Cross et al. 2010:11, De Beer & Vally 2017, Tshwane Homelessness Forum 2015).

Fig. 9.2. Bottom right: Photograph of 'Ghanian and Tanzanian' area on site taken by Author (2021)



9.3.

Map of site indicating distribution of inhabitants according to community stability, length of stay and sub-communities of various African cultures. Also shown are the positions of communal gardens and the area with informal shacks known as "Brown Street" (Author 2021).

Another unique aspect of the site's distribution of inhabitants is the varied length of stay. Moving from the northern buildings, which house more "stable communities" of residents who have lived there for up to 12 years (Interviewee A 2021), to the southern part of site, the volatility of community increases while the length of stay decreases (Interviewee A 2021, MCO 2021). Among the "permanent" residents, there is a room ownership system that is respected by the various communities (MCO 2021). The rooms are "purchased" for about R1000 from residents wanting to move out, and once someone has bought the room "legitimately", this ownership is recognised and respected by the other inhabitants (MCO 2021). On the southern-most section of the site, a separate community of predominantly substance users have established informal dwelling structures or "shacks" since the 2018 taxi conflict, when many informal dwellers were chased out of Bloed Street and Brown Street in the inner-city (Interviewee A, Interviewee B, MCO 2021). This area on site is referred to by inhabitants and stakeholders as "Brown Street", referencing the street they used to reside in previously, as well as the characteristic plains of brown dirt surrounding the shacks in



9.4.

Photograph of informal dwellings at "Brown Street" (Author 2021).

this area (MCO 2021). According to MCO (2021), Melgisedek is "like a train station" – aside from those who reside there "permanently", there is a constant flux of inhabitants. Some reside there during the week for work and go home (outside of the city) on weekends (Interviewee B 2021, MCO 2021). Some stay for a few weeks and leave once they have secured a job. Others visit the site in the day to buy food, cigarettes and alcohol sold at the "spaza shops" or to purchase drugs from dealers who reside on site. Therefore, any social support or intervention introduced at Melgisedek will likely also affect other users who frequently visit the site but don't

necessarily live there.

Among these various sub-communities, there is a varied demographic of men, women, elderly, families and individuals, all of whom correlate with the aforementioned categories of homelessness (Hartshorn 1992, Tshwane Homelessness Forum 2015). Among these are individuals who seek work in the city and have distant homes to which they return on weekends. Similarly, some couples and small families reside at Melgisedek in search for income or employment in the city but are unable to access affordable housing (Interviewee A and B 2021). Both of these groups fall under the economic homelessness category. Additionally, there are inhabitants who are substance users addicted to various opioids or "pensioners" (elderly folk) struggling with health issues that render them unemployed or are unable to work. These individuals are categorised under chronic homelessness (Interviewee A 2021, Tshwane Homelessness Forum 2015: 5). The site also houses single mothers and their children, who have fled abusive relationships or have been abandoned by their partners/fathers (Interviewee A 2021). These women are often unable to find a stable income due to their responsibility to look after their children during the day. Many immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers reside on site as they are often unable to access the required legal permits to access alternative housing, shelters, formal employment, etc. (MCO 2021). These two groups fall under the situational homelessness category. Finally, because all these inhabitants seek shelter in the existing buildings or informal dwellings at Melgisedek, they would be considered as "near homeless" due to their unstable housing and tenure (Ntakirutimana 2015: 14).

[c]

IMMEDIATE & MOST PERTINENT NEEDS

According to the interviewees (Interviewee A, Interviewee B, MCO 2021), the most pertinent needs of the Melgisedek inhabitants are related to immediate, basic and daily amenities, such as sanitation, hygiene and food security. Many people spend their days in search for means to meet these daily needs, unable to focus on longer term steps to improve their circumstances (Interviewee B). Interviewee B (2021) states that these needs must be addressed first as they are likely to affect other psychosocial and physical needs. "The people need something now" (Interviewee B 2021), therefore longer-term solutions, although necessary, should be considered as subsequent interventions.



Economic Homelessness



Chronic Homelessness



Situational Homelessness



"Near" Homelessness

According to Interviewee B (2021), the container of ablutions that was donated to the site in 2019 was very well received by the community, although these are not nearly enough for the number of inhabitants.

The ability to practise daily personal hygiene affects not only the health of the occupants but also their dignity, self-confidence and empowerment to take ownership of the steps towards social inclusion, independence and employment (Interviewee B 2021). The inhabitants feel that if they were able to practise personal hygiene more easily, they would have more self-confidence to approach prospective employers and social service facilities who might otherwise discriminate against them (Interviewee B 2021).

Another basic, immediate need is food security. There have been many cases of malnutrition in the past few years at Melgisedek (Bac 2020, Interviewee A 2021). In response, a number of communal vegetable gardens have emerged on site, mostly with the help of seedling and equipment donations from the local community and churches (Interviewee A). A number of keen inhabitants tend to these gardens and their growing success, enjoying produce like spinach, tomatoes, onions, maize, carrots, etc. (MCO 2021).

For many, primary health care is an immediate need. In 2018, COSUP from UP established a health clinic on site to address immediate, smaller health issues and refer more serious emergency cases to the nearby hospitals (Interviewee A 2021). The substance users are able to access methadone treatment for opioid withdrawal and other addiction-related health issues; however, there is a need for more consistent psychological counselling and family reintegration services for these and other inhabitants (Interviewee A and B 2021).

The lack of and inability to access legal documentation is a far-reaching issue at Melgisedek (Interviewee A 2021, MCO 2021). According to Interviewee A and MCO (2021), the majority of the inhabitants do not have legal documentation such as IDs and permits. Many of the South African citizens' IDs have either been lost or stolen, and most of the non-South African inhabitants have either never had legal permits or their permits have expired. Without an ID or work permit, the inhabitants are unable to access most support services such as social housing, primary health care, education, social grants, shelters, formal employment and bank services (Ntakirutimana 2015: 88). The inhabitants are mostly unable to renew these legal documents due to the inability to afford the application fees or transport to the relevant facilities, as well as an inability to take leave stand

in queues at the relevant municipal departments (MCO 2021). Furthermore, many struggle to apply for the reissue of documentation due to the lack of a legal physical address (MCO 2021, Ntakirutimana 2015: 88).apply for the reissue of documentation due to the lack of a legal physical address (MCO 2021, Ntakirutimana 2015: 88).

Lastly, due to many of them being unable to access formal income without legal documents, the inhabitants often resort to informal, and sometimes illegal, forms of income (MCO 2021). While the main source of income on site is from the informal trade between inhabitants and "outsiders" (Interviewee B 2021), most inhabitants complete piecemeal or work as recyclers ("trolley pushers"), car guards, security guards, cleaners and gardeners for the nearby hospitals and residential areas (Interviewee A, Interviewee B, MCO 2021). Most of the illegal forms of income come from drug dealing and prostitution, which take place predominantly on the southern part of the site in the less stable communities (Interviewee B 2021, MCO 2021).

In conclusion, the key information gathered from the interactions with stakeholders are: the various sub-communities on site; the immediate daily needs that are crucial to address as a first step; the various psychosocial and physical support services that are needed; and the lack of and inability to access legal documentation that has a ripple effect on securing other steps towards improved circumstances. It is also clear that the circumstances and needs of the inhabitants at Melgisedek are interlinked, varied and complex. Thus, a multi-scalar and integrated psychosocial, physical and economic approach that is sensitive to these complexities is required.



9.5. The ablution container on site donated by local community members and churches in 2019 (Author 2021).



9.6. The largest of the three communal gardens on site (Author 2021).



9.7. The COSUP (Community Oriented Substance Use Programme) Health clinic on site (Author 2021).