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Homeless conts (and surveys) in Milan

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The rac-CONTAMI project

- Three homeless counts and surveys of homeless people in Milan (2008, 2013 and 2018). Last count was carried in February 2018
- Same experience in Turin (2009) and Rome (2014)
- Organizers: university researchers supported by a nonprofit research organization (Fondazione Rodolfo Debenedetti – www.frdb.org)
- In collaboration with:
 - Bocconi University (spaces and training)
 - Municipality of Milan: endorsement, but no direct involvement
- Objectives of the project:
 1. Quantify the phenomenon (and monitor over time)
 2. Describe the homeless population
 3. Monitor the provision of services
 4. Collect micro data for academic empirical analysis



Methodology

- Target:
 1. Rough sleepers (individuals sleeping in streets, sidewalks, train stations, parks, etc.)
 2. Sheltered homeless
- Day 1: Count
 - Point-in-time count, S-Night approach (Streets and Shelters)
 - Simultaneous count during the night (to reduce double counting)
 - Collection of administrative data from shelters (public and private)
 - Full census: all city covered
 - Localization and collection of observable characteristics (in 2018, on-line form)
- Day 2: Survey in streets
 - Interviews: paper&pencil questionnaire in the past, on line questionnaire in 2018)
 - Sampling procedure: all population in streets
- Day 3: Survey in shelters
 - Sampling procedure: random sample proportional to shelter size, oversampling in small shelters
 - Adjustments in subsequent days

Methodology

- Why a survey?
 - With count, limited information (how many homeless, where, basic characteristics)
- Why a 3-day data collection?
 - Homeless population is very mobile, especially rough sleepers
 - Interviews must take place during or as soon as possible after the count
 - No sampling frame (no list of addresses, phone numbers, etc.)
 - Count provides it
 - Count and interviews are potentially feasible in one single night...
.... but need of many volunteers and organizationally very complex.
Three subsequent nights seemed a good compromise

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Logistics and organization

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Homeless count (and survey): key preparatory steps

- Meetings with municipality officers to illustrate project
- Survey of existing homeless services
- Meetings with local organizations working with homeless people and Civil Protection (to seek collaboration, spaces, inform and involve their volunteers)
 - Strong involvement of a sub-group of organizations
- Meeting with managers of homeless shelters (to illustrate project, ask for administrative data and access for interviews)
- Recruitment of volunteers (social media, university organizations, websites, mailing lists, etc.)
- Training of volunteers (15 training sessions, 550 participants)
- Training of a team of «managers» for local starting points during the count nights
- Preparation and transport of materials
 - Enumerator and interviewer kits (bag, guidelines, contact numbers, backup paper questionnaires, etc.)
- Teams formation: different composition every night (experts, non-expert, etc.)
- Staff involved: coordination team (2 senior researchers + 4 research assistants), 11 starting point managers, 2 transporters, 700 volunteers

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Homeless survey (day 2 and 3): logistics and organization

Street interviews (day 2):

- 6 starting points (close to areas with higher concentration of homeless people)
- 1 headquarters for coordination team
- Teams of interviewers with an initial list of 3 «objectives», based on information collected during the count
- Once first 3 objectives are exhausted, team contacts coordination via phone/SMS to ask new objectives
- Record of people not found and refusals
- In 2018, 205 interviews (refusal rate: 34%)

Shelter interviews (day 3):

- Groups of trained interviewers sent to shelters (team size depends on shelter dimension)
- In 2018, 689 interviews

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Homeless survey

- Long interview (about 45 minutes)
- Topics covered in the questionnaire:
 - Current situation (self reported reasons for homelessness, access to shelter)
 - Demographics
 - Current and last work experience, job search effort
 - Consumption and income
 - Access to services (soup kitchen, clothing, emergency and social services, employment services)
 - Social relations
 - Health
 - Expectations, trust, personal values, psychological well-being
- Monetary incentive for completed interviews (8 Euro voucher)

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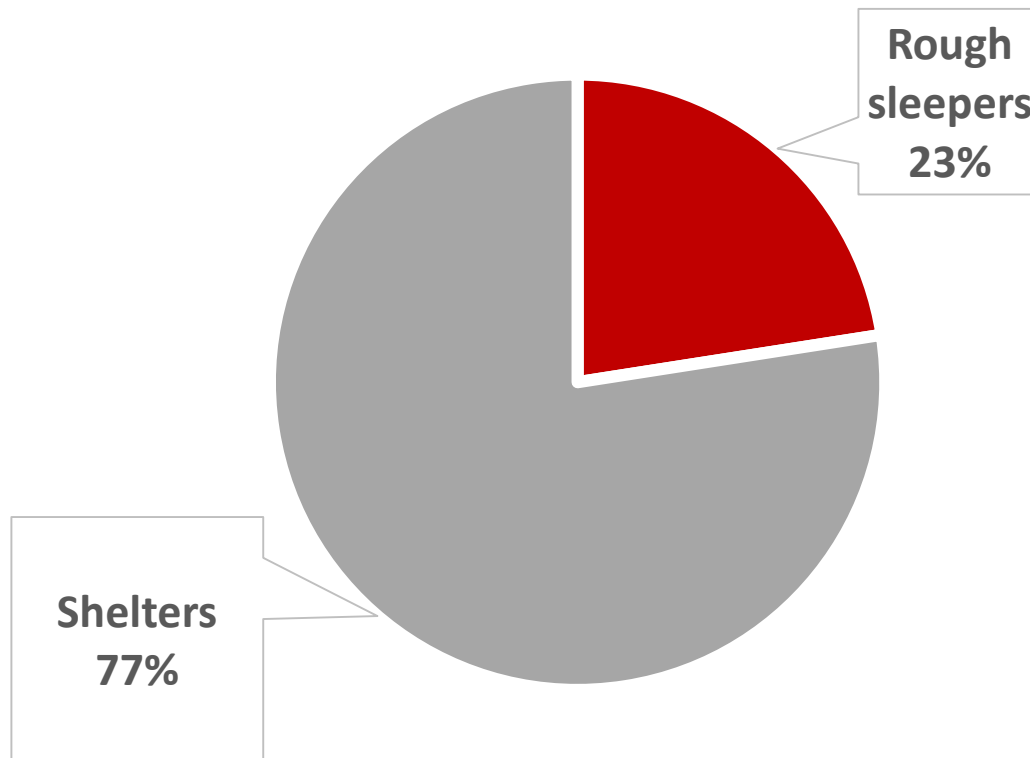
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Main results

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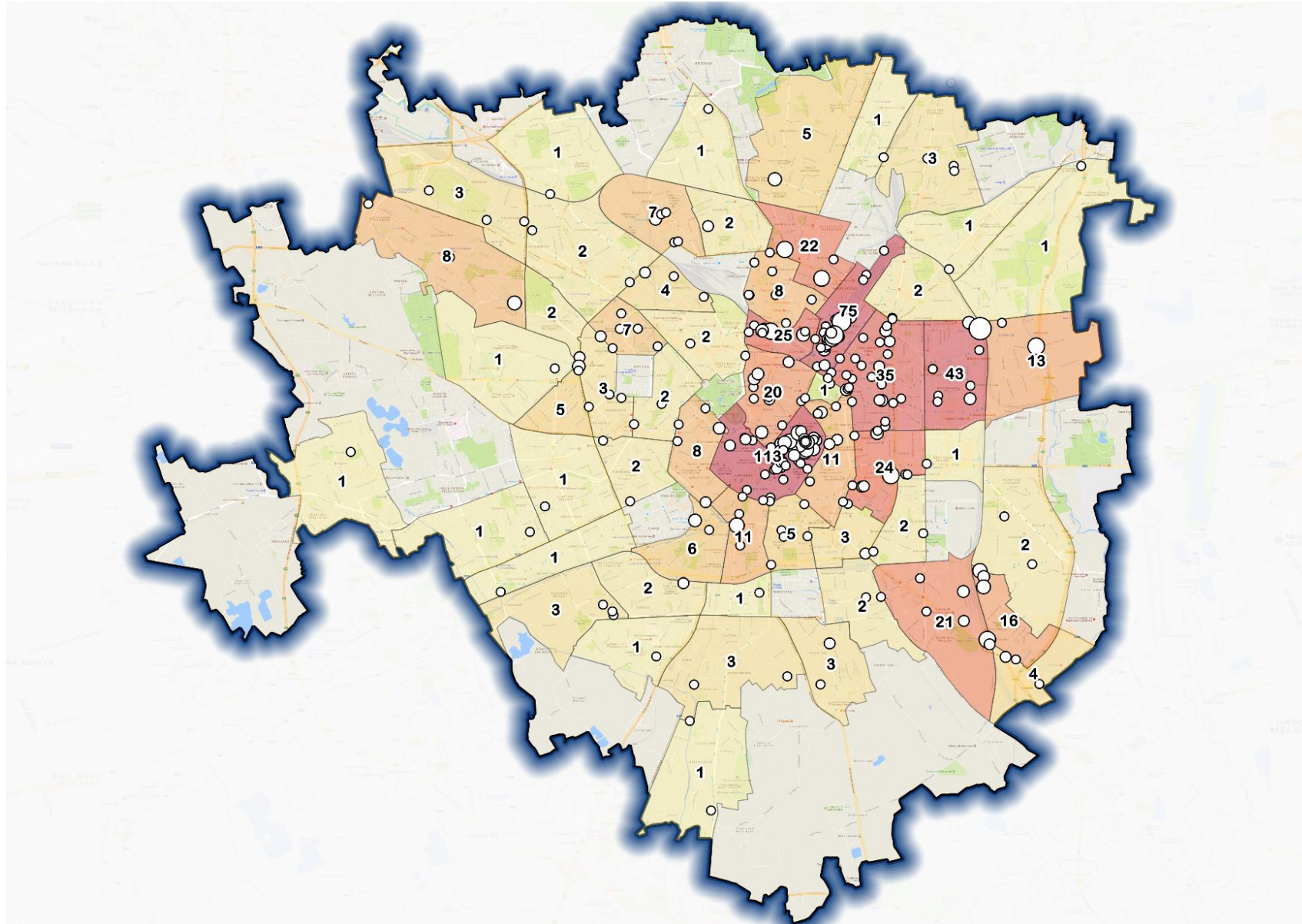
Homeless count: main results

Homeless people in Milan, 2018



- 2.608 homeless people in Milan (587 rough sleepers e 2.021 in shelters)
- Homeless people are 0,2% of total population (2 people every 1000 inhabitants)
- Total number stable with respect to 2013, slight increase of rough sleepers (from 19% to 23%)

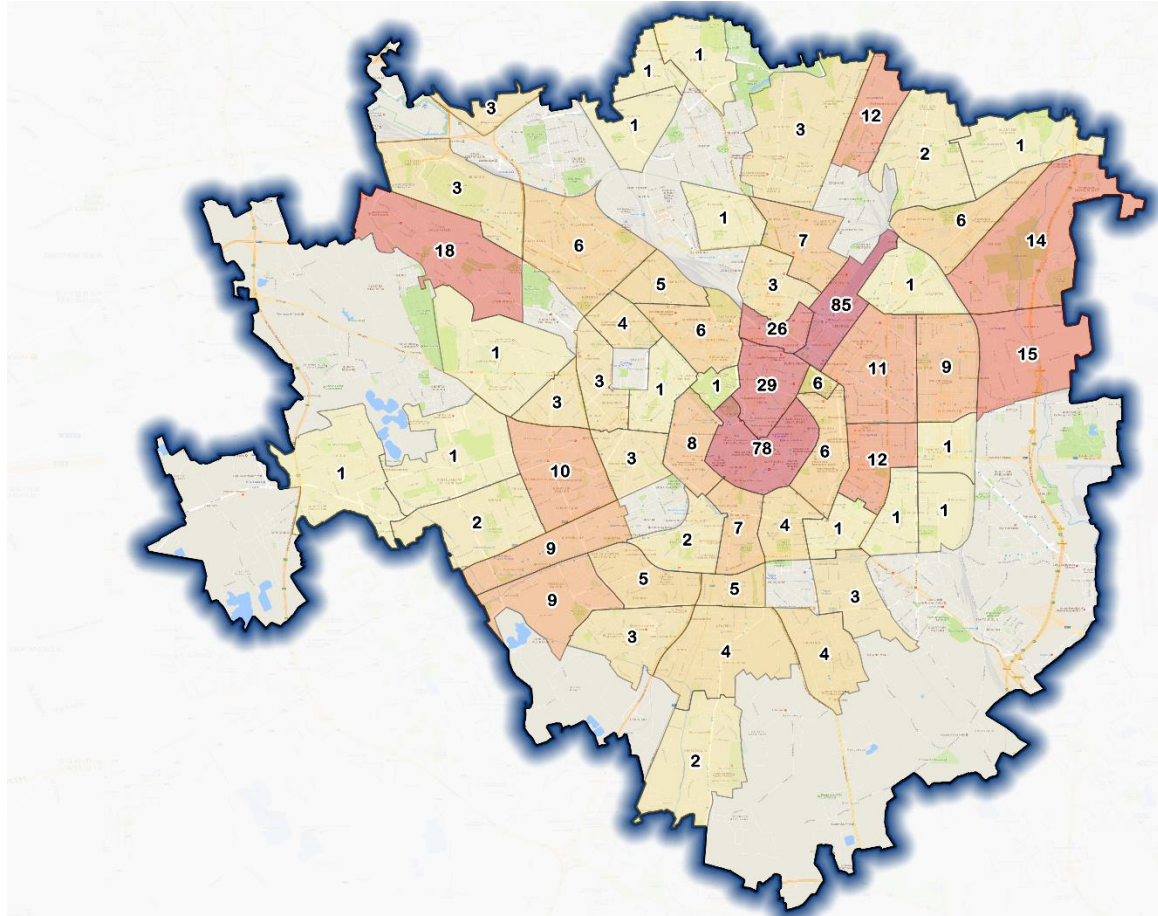
Homeless street count: spatial distribution



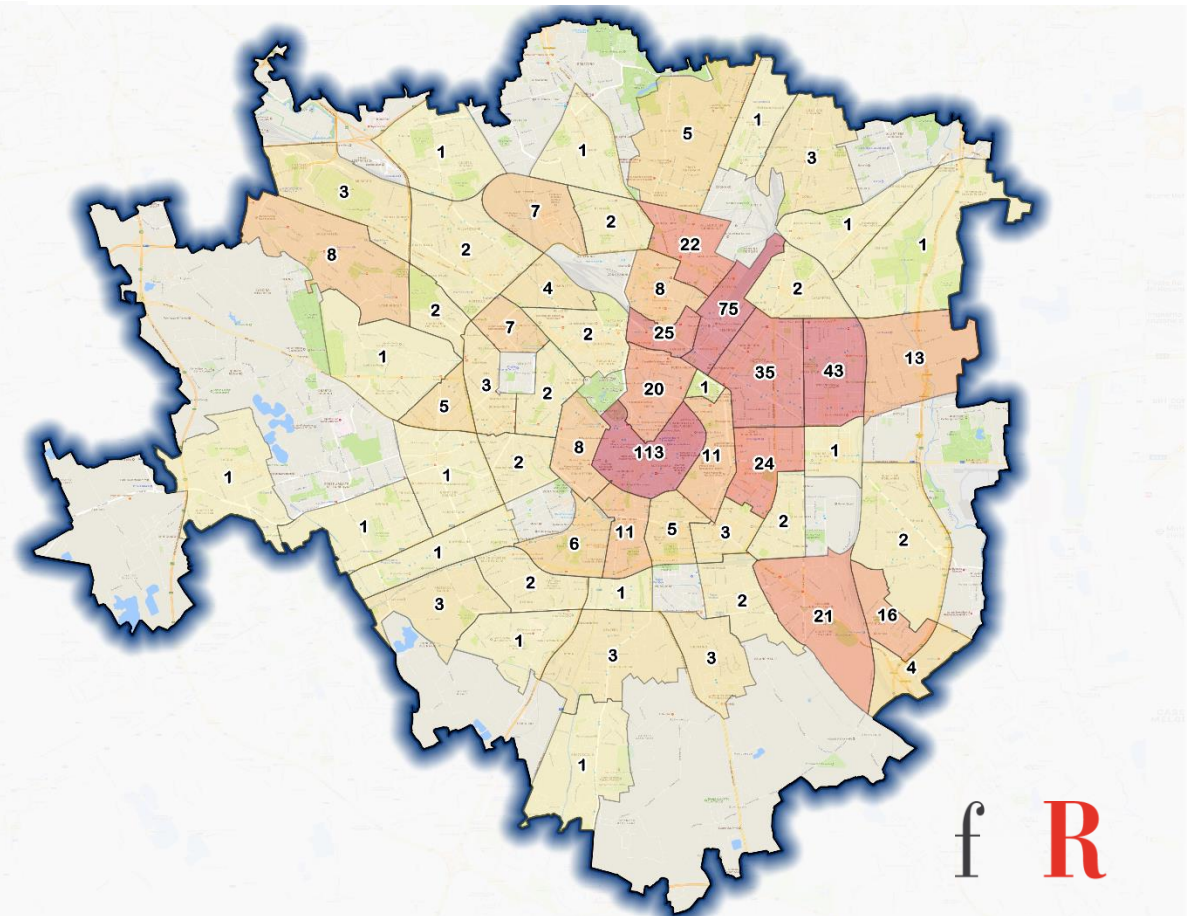
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Homeless street count: 2013 vs. 2018

2013 Street count



2018 Street count



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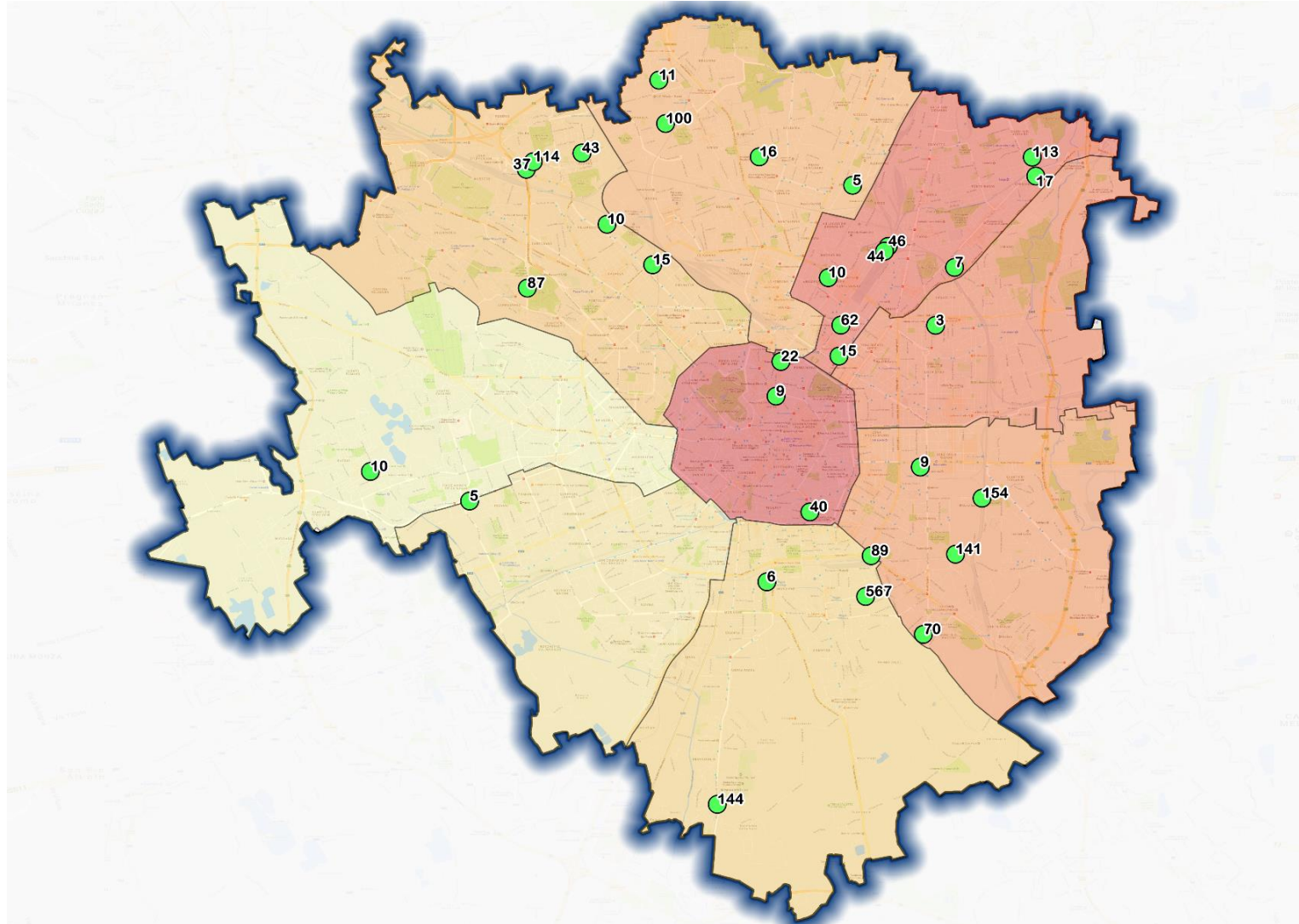
Homeless street count: detection context

Street count 2018	People	%
Streets	417	71%
Train stations	80	14%
Hospital	8	1%
Bus 90/91	33	6%
Vehicles*	49	8%
Total	587	100%

(): car, camper, van or caravan. When it is not possible to estimate the exact number of occupants, the vehicles are counted as 1 person. Vehicles must be occupied and show evident signs of habitation.*

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Homeless count: shelters in Milan



- 32 homeless shelters (green circles in the map)
- Values represent the number of hosted people on the count night
- Shelters non always located in areas with higher presence of rough sleepers...

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Homeless shelters: main results

Shelters	Nr. of shelters	Hosted people	Average length of stay (days)	% free beds on count night	Homeless with residence address
<i>Size</i>					
< 21 beds	12	85	372	23%	95%
21-50 beds	6	147	131	16%	59%
50-100 beds	8	441	155	26%	54%
100-500 beds	5	666	389	7%	67%
> 500 beds	1	567	469	10%	52%
Mean size	73				
Min size	4				
Max size	632				
Total	32	1906*			

(*) 3 shelters refused to send information (with 115 beds)

Homeless count: demographics

Characteristics	Steets		Shelters	
	2018	2013	2018	2013
Women	6%	9%	17%	14%
Immigrants	n/a	83%	73%	76%
Less than 35 years	32%	25%	32%	39%

- Based on observation
- In 2018, 6% of women among rough sleepers, 17% in shelters
- 1/3 of homeless people below 35 years of age

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Interviews: demographics and current status

Characteristics	Streets	Shelters
<i>Education</i>		
No formal education, primary education	29%	24%
Primary education – general (<i>scuola media</i>)	33%	36%
Secondary education - vocational (max 3 years)	14%	13%
Secondary education (5 years)	19%	17%
Tertiary education	6%	10%
<i>Immigrants</i>		
EU	28%	13%
Extra EU	44%	59%
<i>First episode homelessness</i>		
2017-2018	38%	37%
2013-2016	30%	37%
Before 2013	32%	25%
<i>Currently working</i>	12%	21%

Note: preliminary results, unweighted averages

Interviews: access to services

Questions	Shelters	Streets
<i>Over the last month, did you have difficulty...</i>		
... eating?	30%	49%
... finding clothes?	26%	47%
... taking care of personal hygiene?	18%	39%
... finding drugs (<i>if self-reported ill</i>) ?	11%	17%
... keeping safe personal belongings?	24%	47%
<i>Never heard about the Help Center for homeless</i>	27%	51%
<i>No meetings with social worker in the last 6 months</i>	47%	83%
<i>No contacts with PES in the last 6 months</i>	72%	84%
<i>No residence address</i>	32%	58%

Note: preliminary results, unweighted averages

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Future work and conclusions

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Dissemination of results and future work

- First results disseminated 4 weeks after the count
 - Good press coverage
 - Difficult relationship with municipality government
- We are currently elaborating results from interviews and connecting them with information from the count (*work in progress*)
 - Sample weight
 - Reasons behind the localization of people
- (Possibly) follow up interviews through phone
 - Longitudinal information
- Public presentation in Milan before winter
- Under discussion: more frequent counts with a stronger involvement of municipality of Milan?
 - Pros and cons...

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Data collection for policy

- Not only an academic exercise...
- Provide quality information to public officials and service providers
 - Complete overview, not local or distorted → may help in reaching new areas of the city, invest resources on new or better services
- Policy evaluation
 - Evidence on take up / knowledge of existing services
 - Provide indicators on quality/provision of services
 - More effective if regular data collections (before/after changes)
 - It can induce public officials to improve service provision or better inform potential beneficiaries
- Increase public awareness
 - Many volunteers get directly in touch with homelessness for the first time
 - Collaborating homeless organizations get in touch with potential volunteers
 - Media coverage is typically high → a way to engage the general public

Thank you!

For further information:

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