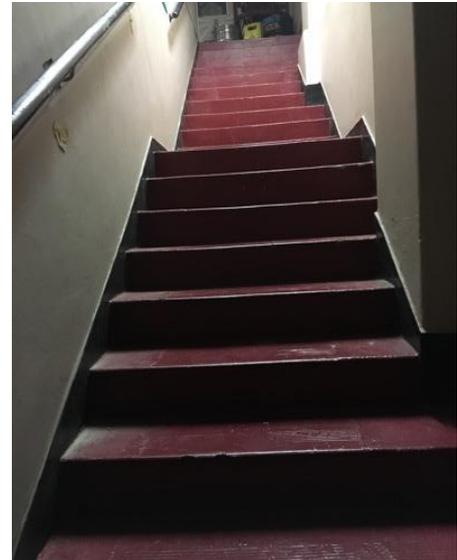


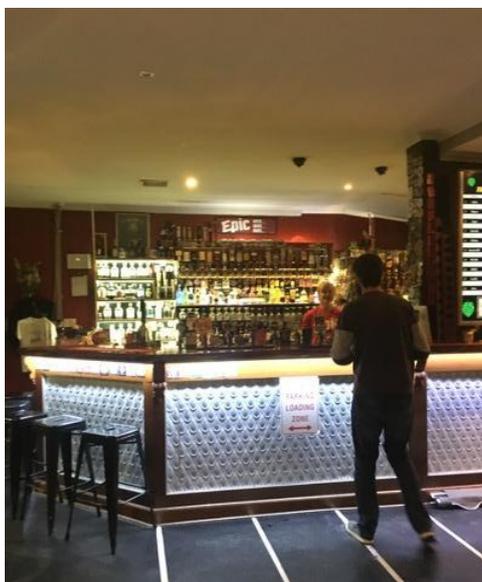
## The Forager's Drop

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I performed my research in the space of 'The Forager's Drop', a local bar in Mitcham in the Eastern Suburbs of Melbourne. The bar is located in the main group of shops in Mitcham and is barely recognisable from the street level. From the footpath, the only visible sign of the establishment's existence is a set of old double glass doors. Once through the doors a red painted concrete staircase takes you up to the second level where the bar is located above retail shops below. Once at the top of the staircase you are forced to turn left where you face the wooden bar about eight meters away. This open space is where people meander around, looking at the drinks menu and meeting others before ordering and dispersing to their chosen spaces within the bar. To the left of the bar is a pool table, an area of communal benches and a space of old 'vintage' couches. This area is bordered by windows with a second floor view out onto the main road. On the right when facing the bar is a door leading to an outdoor area with tables set up, but it is an area most commonly used for smoking cigarettes.



**Figure 1.** The red painted staircase.



**Figure 2.** The Bar at Forager's Drop.

I went to the bar on three separate occasions, the first was a weekday in the afternoon. The second and third visits were on Friday late afternoon/nights. After observing and taking notes, I realised the most effective way to perform a study on how people shared this particular space was going to be by comparing practices between the quiet atmosphere during the day and the busy, rowdy atmosphere on a Friday night. Two sets of people frequent the bar, the 'local' and the 'visitor'. As these two groups use the space differently, inspiration was drawn from the chapter 'Bridge: Distant Neighbors' in Emily Mckee's *Dwelling in Conflict*.

The bar is the central shared space in the venue, people from different

groups mix and communicate here. After ordering their drink they head towards one of five spaces to settle in:

- pool table area
- outside/smoking area
- couch area
- communal benches
- bench along the window



**Figure 3.** The vintage couch area.

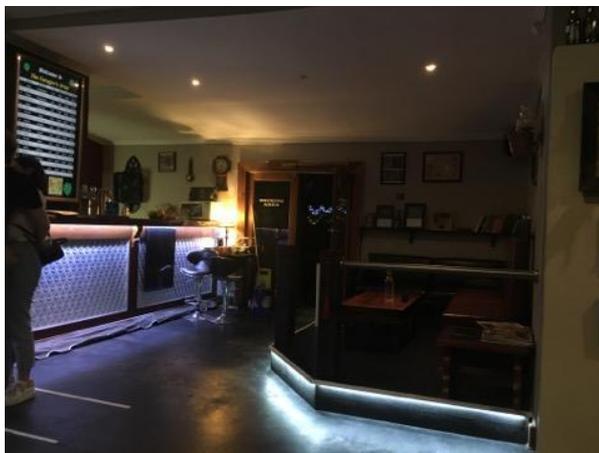
Each of these spaces play a different role, all of these spaces are available to all patrons, however, some of these spaces require a certain level of 'localness' to use them. I use this term 'localness' to describe local faces, individuals who don't necessarily know each other or each other's names but they recognise each other as being local. 'Localness' implies that one lives local to the area or within an imagined radius or walking distance from

the venue. This is not true, however, as many 'locals' are far from local, traveling great distances to spend time in a unique place. 'Localness' is like a VIP pass in the bar allowing access to all areas. Through observation it appears there are levels within 'localness', some locals are allowed permission to use the space behind the bar to charge phones or keep belongings such as handbags/shopping bags etc. they can access their belongings behind the bar at any time which gives off a feeling of importance and gives the perception of importance to those who are not granted this access.

During the day, the space is used much differently in comparison to the late afternoon/evening. It is this transition time when the bar starts to fill with patrons and when the concept of 'localness' becomes apparent. The majority of daytime patrons use the bar as a quiet space where they can sit in thought over a beer, spend time on their phone or even set their laptop up on a table and work. Background music and chatter of other patrons creates a warm accepting atmosphere where one can engage in conversation or choose to not participate. During the day, personal space has an imaginary barrier that other patrons do not tend to obstruct, unless the person comes up to the bar where free talk and questions etc are accepted. 'Localness' exists during the day but it is subtle, once the transition begins and the bar space starts filling with people, the imaginary boundaries are challenged, and it is around this time the emergence of 'localness' becomes obvious.



**Figure 4.** *The Bar.*



**Figure 5.** *The doors to outdoor area.*

People who want to be alone are pushed from the space. I watched one guy who had lost the spot his couch that he had been sitting on for quite some time - when he got up and left his seat to get another drink from the bar, his seat was taken by a group of four local patrons. He then sat at the end of the communal bench where it was obvious he was not comfortable. As the tipsy drinkers at the other end of the bench laughed and told stories, they pushed on the bench making it rock back and forth. His beer would slop around in the glass, and his arms that were resting on the table were being moved unwillingly. His body language showed he was uncomfortable and he finished his beer quickly and then left.

At around 7 o'clock people who are using the space to reflect in their own thoughts or relax on their phone are excluded from the space. Alcohol encourages the bar to turn into a rowdy environment. People talk loudly to be heard over others who are also talking loudly. The imaginary barriers are transformed from a personal space to a local versus visitor space. The locals congregate around the pool table and commandeer the space between the pool table and bar giving them access to the bar tenders and a quicker service. Locals who smoke gather outside commandeering the table closest to the door and almost filtering those who want access to the outside area. Although it seems drunkenness and alcohol allow locals and local spaces to become approachable after a certain time, this is also the area where conflict occurs. Visitors to the bar are squeezed to the space in between the two groups of locals. This performs two functions. Firstly, it makes outcast visitors uncomfortable and persuades them to eventually leave. Secondly, the bar does not employ any security, however the 'localness' mentality bands patrons together helping staff remove anyone who is deemed socially unfit for the bar.

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**Figure 6.** *The communal benches and windows looking over street.*