

REVIEW ARTICLE

Investigating Emerging Patterns of Youth Participation in Urban Planning and Development

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ABSTRACT

The growing recognition of youth as essential stakeholders in urban planning has led to an expanding body of literature exploring their participation in development processes. However, a significant gap remains in understanding the emerging trends in youth participation, particularly from 2019 to 2024, especially regarding how their unique perspectives can influence urban governance and design. This thematic review aims to address this gap by systematically analysing literature from the SCOPUS and Web of Science (WoS) databases, focusing on creative placemaking and youth participation in urban development. Utilising a thematic review methodology, the research synthesises findings from various studies to identify key trends, challenges, and innovative practices that facilitate youth involvement in urban planning. The analysis reveals a growing shift from traditional consultative participation models toward more interactive and technology-mediated engagement approaches. The findings indicate that digital tools, such as augmented reality and participatory mapping, enhance youth engagement by providing platforms for expression and collaboration, facilitating participatory decision-making and co-creation processes in urban governance. The review also identifies persistent gaps in understanding how socio-economic background and geographic context shape youth participation patterns. This review contributes to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the importance of integrating youth voices into urban planning processes and fostering more inclusive and responsive urban environments. Future studies should further explore the implications of these findings for policy and practice, emphasising the need for sustained engagement strategies that empower youth in shaping their communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Youth engagement in urban planning and governance is increasingly recognised as crucial for fostering inclusive and sustainable cities. Often marginalised in decision-making processes, youth possess unique insights and perspectives that can significantly enhance urban development initiatives. This synthesis draws upon various studies highlighting the importance of youth participation in urban planning, the methods employed to facilitate this engagement, and the implications for urban governance. Research indicates that traditional urban planning often overlooks youth perspectives, prioritising economic and built environments over the lived experiences of community members, including adolescents (Mansfield et al., 2021). Engaging youth as active participants rather than passive consultees yields dual benefits: it empowers them while enriching urban planning with fresh perspectives that are less constrained by adult biases (Chinapaw et al., 2024; Mansfield et al., 2021). For instance, participatory methods such as creative mapping have proven to be practical tools in enabling youth to articulate their experiences and aspirations regarding urban spaces, challenging conventional perceptions of their societal roles (Bourke, 2024).

Moreover, integrating youth participation into urban planning is essential for addressing contemporary mental health and social equity challenges. Urban environments significantly affect youth well-being, and their participation can contribute to healthier, more supportive urban spaces (Baskin-Sommers et al., 2021; Buttazzoni et al., 2022). For example, the development of green spaces should consider the specific needs of youth, given their role in mental health and overall quality of life (Vogler et al., 2023). Additionally, participatory action research has demonstrated that youth participation in co-creating urban health policies leads to more equitable and community-centred outcomes (Collins et al., 2024). Innovative communication strategies, such as digital storytelling and participatory mapping, have proven effective in facilitating youth participation in urban planning (Abdullah Mohammed, 2024; Anderson et al., 2024). These methods not only empower youth to voice their concerns but also enhance their understanding of civic responsibilities and urban governance (Gerodimos, 2018).

Furthermore, establishing inclusive community practices fosters a sense of belonging and agency among youth, cultivating active and informed participants in democratic societies (Reiersølmoen et al., 2018; Swist et al., 2022). Finally, the active participation of youth in urban planning is not merely a matter of policy compliance but a fundamental aspect of creating inclusive, vibrant, and sustainable urban environments. By recognising and harnessing the potential of youth as critical agents of change, urban planners can develop more effective strategies that address the diverse needs of all community members. This approach enhances the quality of urban life and ensures that future generations are

equipped to engage meaningfully in civic life. Therefore, this paper aims to discover the youth participation issues in urban development and planning publications from the year 2019 to 2024 through the following research question:

What are the emerging trends in youth participation in urban development and planning issues in the literature from 2019 to 2024?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a thematic review methodology, providing a structured approach to synthesising literature on youth participation in urban planning. As illustrated in Figure 1, the methodology follows a five-stage process that begins with formulating a research question (RQ), which must be sufficiently broad and narrowly defined to ensure it aligns with the study’s objectives. Once the RQ is established, the second stage involves screening articles from at least two academic databases, employing Boolean operators, and selecting keywords relevant to the research question. The third stage, article filtering, applies inclusion and exclusion criteria to refine the list of studies, ensuring that only those directly relevant to the RQ and study objectives are retained. Following the filtering process, a cleaning stage is performed to organize and verify the accuracy of the selected articles using reference management tools, such as Mendeley, ensuring all metadata is correctly aligned with the research objectives.

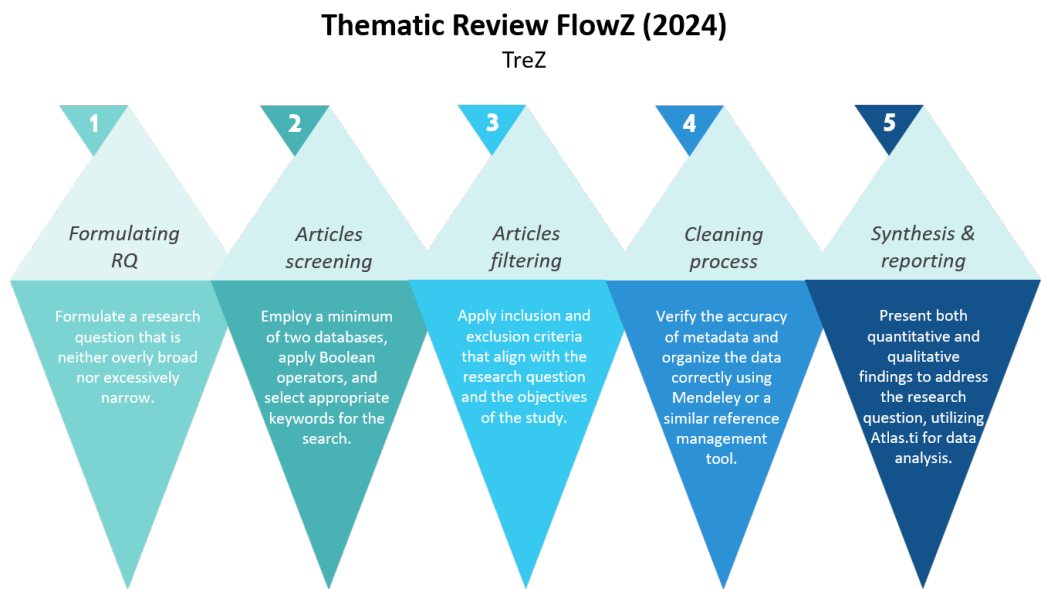


Figure 1. Thematic Review FlowZ (TreZ)

Finally, the synthesis and reporting stage involves thematic analysis using qualitative data analysis software, such as ATLAS.ti, to identify recurring themes and patterns in the literature. This step synthesises quantitative and qualitative findings to address the research question comprehensively. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), thematic analysis involves identifying patterns and generating themes through an iterative process of reading and coding the literature. The method, as described by Zairul (2017, 2020, 2021, 2022) and protected under registration number CRLY2023W02032 (Zairul, 2023), ensures that this process adheres to a rigorous and systematic approach. Thus, this thematic review technique provides a robust framework for synthesising literature and developing a coherent understanding of youth participation in urban development.

The search strategy for the thematic review paper on youth participation in urban development was systematically designed to capture relevant studies across two prominent academic databases: Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). The search strings were constructed using a combination of specific keywords and Boolean operators, tailored to ensure that the search results align with the research focus on youth participation in urban planning, urban design, and urban governance. For the Scopus database, the search string utilised the following key terms: “youth,” “young people,” and “adolescents” to represent the target demographic. These terms were combined with action-oriented keywords such as “participat*,” “engage*,” and “involve*” to capture various forms of participation or involvement in urban development. The urban context was encapsulated by including terms such as “urban planning,” “urban design,” and “urban governance,” ensuring that the search was aligned with the thematic focus on urban environments.

Several filters were applied to refine the search within Scopus. These included limiting the publication year to articles published between 2018 and 2025, and restricting the search to specific subject areas like Social Sciences (“SOCI”) and Architecture (“AR”). Additionally, the search was confined to English-language articles and further limited to final-stage publications categorised as articles. Open-access articles were also included, broadening the scope to ensure access to relevant studies without subscription barriers. This comprehensive filtering resulted in 21 relevant articles as stipulated in Table 1. A similar approach was employed in the Web of Science (WoS) database, with the same core keywords used to identify studies related to youth participation in urban contexts. The search terms were refined to capture a broader range of fields within urban studies, urban planning, architecture, and interdisciplinary social sciences. The search was limited to articles published between 2019 and 2024, ensuring that only recent studies were included. WoS also employed filters to select articles from open-access sources, limiting the search to English-language publications. The application of these filters yielded 26 relevant articles (Table 1).

Table 1
Search strings from Scopus and WoS

SCOPUS	TITLE-ABS-KEY ((“youth” OR “young people” OR “adolescents”) AND (“participat*” OR “engage*” OR “involve*”) AND (“urban planning” OR “urban design” OR “urban governance”)) AND PUBYEAR > 2018 AND PUBYEAR < 2025 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , “SOCI”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , “ar”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , “English”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , “j”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE , “final”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (OA , “all”))	21 results
WoS	Refine results for (“youth” OR “young people” OR “adolescents”) AND (“participat*” OR “engage*” OR “involve*”) AND (“urban planning” OR “urban design” OR “urban governance”) (All Fields) and 2019 or 2020 or 2021 or 2022 or 2023 or 2024 (Publication Years) and Article (Document Types) and All Open Access (Open Access) and English (Languages) and All Open Access (Open Access) and Article (Document Types) and Urban Studies or Regional Urban Planning or Architecture or Social Sciences Interdisciplinary (Web of Science Categories)	26 results

Overall, the search strategies for both databases were meticulously crafted to ensure that the results were aligned with the research question of youth participation in urban development. By utilising a combination of demographic-specific, action-related, and context-focused keywords, along with appropriate filters such as publication year, language, document type, and open access, the search process successfully identified a comprehensive set of studies to inform the thematic review. This systematic approach ensures that the selected literature covers various perspectives and insights relevant to the research scope.

This thematic review’s inclusion and exclusion process was conducted using the TreZ methodology, ensuring a systematic and rigorous approach. A total of 47 records were initially identified from the Scopus (n=21) and Web of Science (WoS) (n=26) databases. These records were subjected to a five-step filtration process comprising Triage, Refinement, Exclusion Criteria, Eligibility, and Zeroing-In to ensure relevance and quality. The inclusion criteria required that studies explicitly focus on youth participation, engagement, or involvement in urban planning, design, or governance. Only peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2018 and 2025 in Scopus and between 2019 and 2024 in WoS were considered, with a strict inclusion of English-language articles with complete metadata accessible in full text.

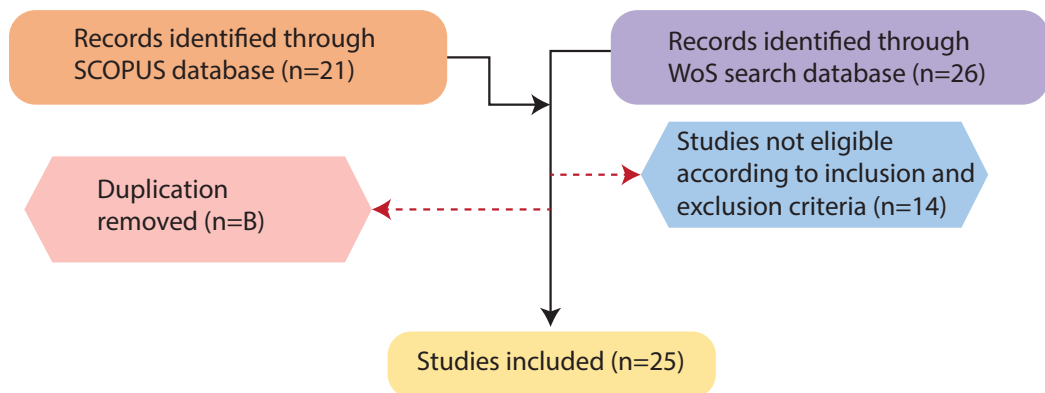


Figure 2. Inclusion and Exclusion criteria in the thematic review

During the exclusion phase, 14 articles were removed due to irrelevance to the thematic focus, incomplete metadata, or unavailability of full-text documents. Additionally, eight duplicate records between the databases were identified and removed. These exclusions ensured that only studies directly addressing youth participation in urban development were retained. Ultimately, 25 studies remained after filtration, meeting all predefined inclusion criteria. This methodical approach, rooted in the TreZ methodology, ensured that the selected studies provided a robust and focused foundation for the thematic review, aligning with the research objectives and maintaining high academic standards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The integration of youth participation in urban planning has emerged as a critical area of research, reflecting a broader recognition of the importance of engaging young people in the decision-making processes that shape their environments. This section presents the studies' findings, highlighting key trends and emerging themes regarding youth engagement in urban development. The results are organised around three primary themes: Youth Engagement in Climate Action and Sustainability (Theme 1), Technological and Participatory Tools for Urban Planning (Theme 2), and Social Inclusion and Well-being in Urban Spaces (Theme 3), as illustrated in Figure 3. The first theme underscores the vital role that youth play in climate action initiatives, particularly in the context of urban planning. As cities grapple with the challenges posed by climate change, the involvement of youth in sustainability efforts is beneficial and essential for fostering resilient communities. The findings reveal the youth's barriers to participating in these initiatives and the strategies to enhance their engagement.

The second theme focuses on the innovative technologies and participatory tools developed to facilitate youth involvement in urban planning. Digital platforms, such as serious games and interactive design tools, have shown promise in empowering youth to voice their ideas and contribute meaningfully to the planning process. This section

discusses how these tools can bridge the gap between youth and urban planners, fostering a collaborative approach to city development. Finally, the third theme addresses the significance of creating inclusive urban spaces that promote the well-being of youth. The research highlights the relationship between urban design, social inclusion, and youth health, emphasising the need for planners to consider adolescents’ unique needs and perspectives in their work. By fostering environments that support social interaction and physical activity, urban planners can contribute to the overall well-being of youth in their communities.

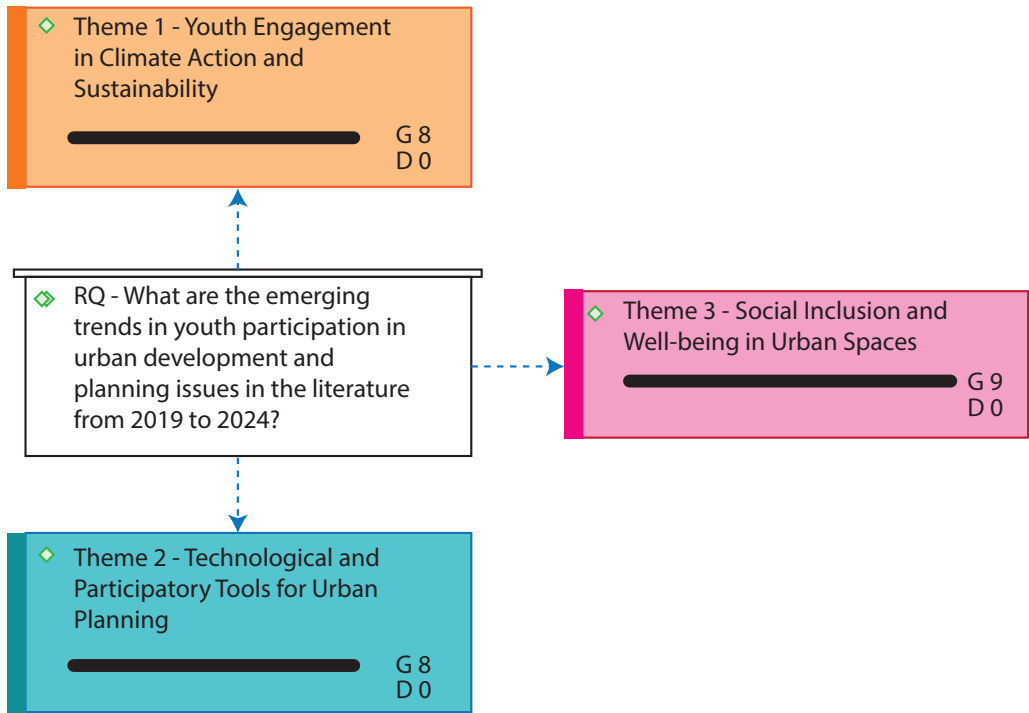


Figure 3. Overall themes to answer the research question

The geographical dispersion of youth participation studies in urban planning, as illustrated in Figure 4, demonstrates a concentration of research in specific regions. The geographical distribution of the reviewed studies indicates that most studies have been conducted in the United States (three studies), followed by Australia and Brazil, each contributing two studies. Additionally, a single study originates from the United Arab Emirates. This distribution suggests that research on youth engagement in urban planning is primarily concentrated in developed countries, particularly the United States, which has the highest representation. The presence of studies from Australia and Brazil reflects an interest in youth participation in both developed and developing regions. However, the limited representation from other parts of the world, particularly Africa, Asia (outside the UAE), and the Global South, indicates a significant gap in the global research landscape.

This imbalance limits the generalisability of current knowledge and highlights the need for broader geographical representation in future studies to better understand diverse patterns of youth participation in urban planning and development.

The geographical bias observed in the current literature indicates the need for broader studies across diverse urban contexts, especially in regions where youth participation could be crucial in addressing unique urban challenges. This uneven distribution raises concerns about the generalizability of findings and calls for future research to explore youth participation in underrepresented regions to ensure a more inclusive understanding of how youth contribute to urban planning and development globally.

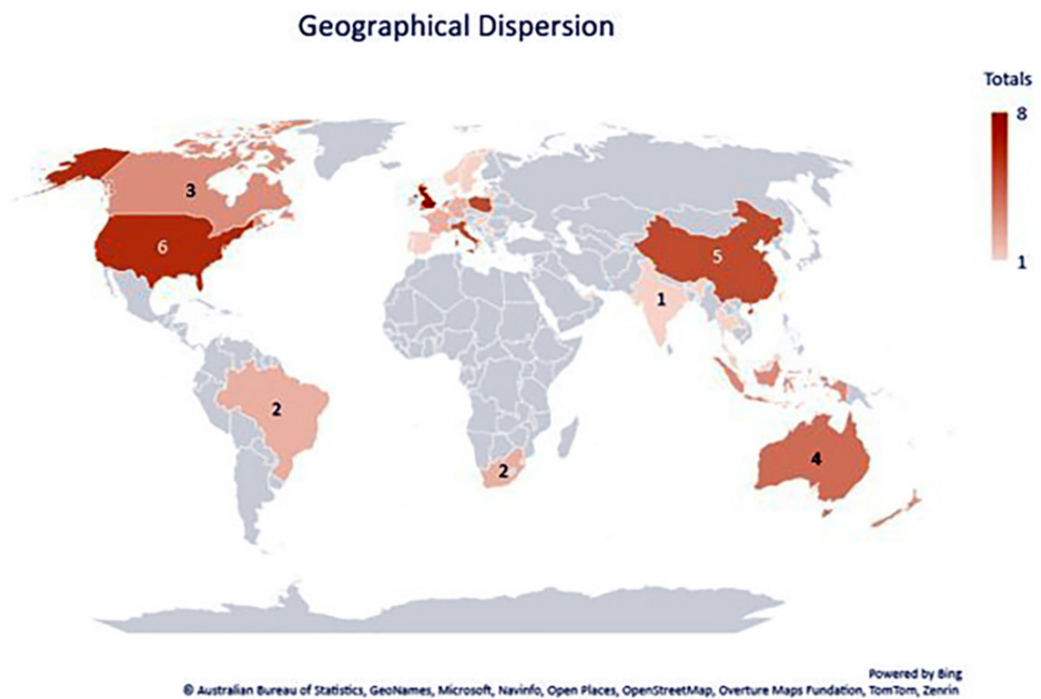


Figure 4. Geographical Dispersion of youth participation in urban planning studies (2019-2024)

Table 2 highlights the thematic categorisation of selected studies, showing how each paper contributes to the identified themes of Youth Engagement in Climate Action and Sustainability, Technological and Participatory Tools for Urban Planning, and Social Inclusion and Well-being in Urban Spaces. This classification reveals a strong emphasis on youth involvement in climate action and sustainability, as evidenced by studies such as Zimba et al. (2021), Hugel and Davies (2022), and J. Zhang et al. (2020). These

studies underscore the increasing role of youth in addressing environmental challenges within urban spaces, particularly through grassroots movements and community-led initiatives. The alignment of these papers suggests a growing body of work focusing on the environmental dimension of urban development, where youth are positioned as active agents of change.

In contrast, the theme of Technological and Participatory Tools for Urban Planning is represented by a different set of studies, such as Hagen et al. (2024), de Andrade et al. (2020), and Shtebunaev et al. (2023). These works emphasise the use of innovative technologies, such as Minecraft or smart city tools, as a means of involving youth in urban planning processes. The presence of digital tools in this category indicates that technological engagement is seen as an effective strategy for making complex urban planning more accessible to younger generations. This contrasts with the environmental focus of the previous theme, showing a diversification in how youth participation is facilitated.

The theme of Social Inclusion and Well-being in Urban Spaces is also well-represented, with studies like Elmubarak et al. (2023), Wales et al. (2024), and Kalnina and Stokmane (2022) exploring the impact of public spaces on youth well-being. These studies collectively highlight the importance of inclusive urban design in fostering positive social and physical outcomes for young people. The relationship between these papers suggests a consensus on the need for urban spaces that cater to the diverse needs of youth, particularly in terms of accessibility and inclusivity.

Table 2
Author vs theme

	Theme 1: Youth Engagement in Climate Action and Sustainability	Theme 2: Technological and Participatory Tools for Urban Planning	Theme 3: Social Inclusion and Well-being in Urban Spaces
(Zimba et al., 2021)	/	-	-
(Hügel & Davies, 2022)	/	-	-
(Hagen et al., 2024)	-	/	-
(Gearin & Hurt, 2024)	-	-	/
(Elmubarak et al., 2023)	-	-	/
(de Andrade et al., 2020)	-	/	-
(Kalnina & Stokmane, 2022)	-	-	/
(Shtebunaev et al., 2023)	-	/	-

	Theme 1: Youth Engagement in Climate Action and Sustainability	Theme 2: Technological and Participatory Tools for Urban Planning	Theme 3: Social Inclusion and Well-being in Urban Spaces
(Wales et al., 2024)	-	-	/
(J. Zhang et al., 2020)	/	-	-
(Y. Zhang, Ikiz Kaya, van Wesemael, & Colenbrander, 2024)	/	-	-
(Ziaesaeidi, Flanders Cushing, Washington, & Buys, 2023)	-	-	/
(Gruber, 2021)	/	-	-
(Jaalama et al., 2021)	-	/	-
(Nigg et al., 2024)	-	-	/
(Rachele, Burn, Burke, & Alisic, 2024)	-	-	/
(Mager & Wagner, 2022)	/	-	-
(Anderson et al., 2024)	-	-	/
(González-González, Cordera, Stead, & Nogués, 2023)	-	/	-
(Eldridge & Roberts, 2022)	-	-	/
(Hanssen, 2019)	/	-	-
(Diehl & Chan, 2021)	-	/	-
(Lim, Wilson, Grohs, & Pingel, 2022)	-	/	-
(Poplin, de Andrade, & de Sena, 2023)	-	/	-
(Zeadat, 2023)	/	-	-

A critical observation across these themes is the interconnection between technological tools and social inclusion. For instance, the works of Lim et al. (2022) and de Andrade et al. (2020) demonstrate how participatory digital platforms can enhance social inclusion by giving marginalised youth a voice in urban planning processes. This intersection suggests that while technology is often categorised separately, it is vital in promoting inclusivity and equity in urban development. Overall, the relationship between these papers indicates a multifaceted approach to youth participation in urban development, where environmental sustainability, technological innovation, and social inclusion are interrelated. Future research should explore how these themes can be integrated more holistically, ensuring that youth engagement in urban planning addresses both the ecological and social dimensions of urban life.

Theme 1: Youth Engagement in Climate Action and Sustainability

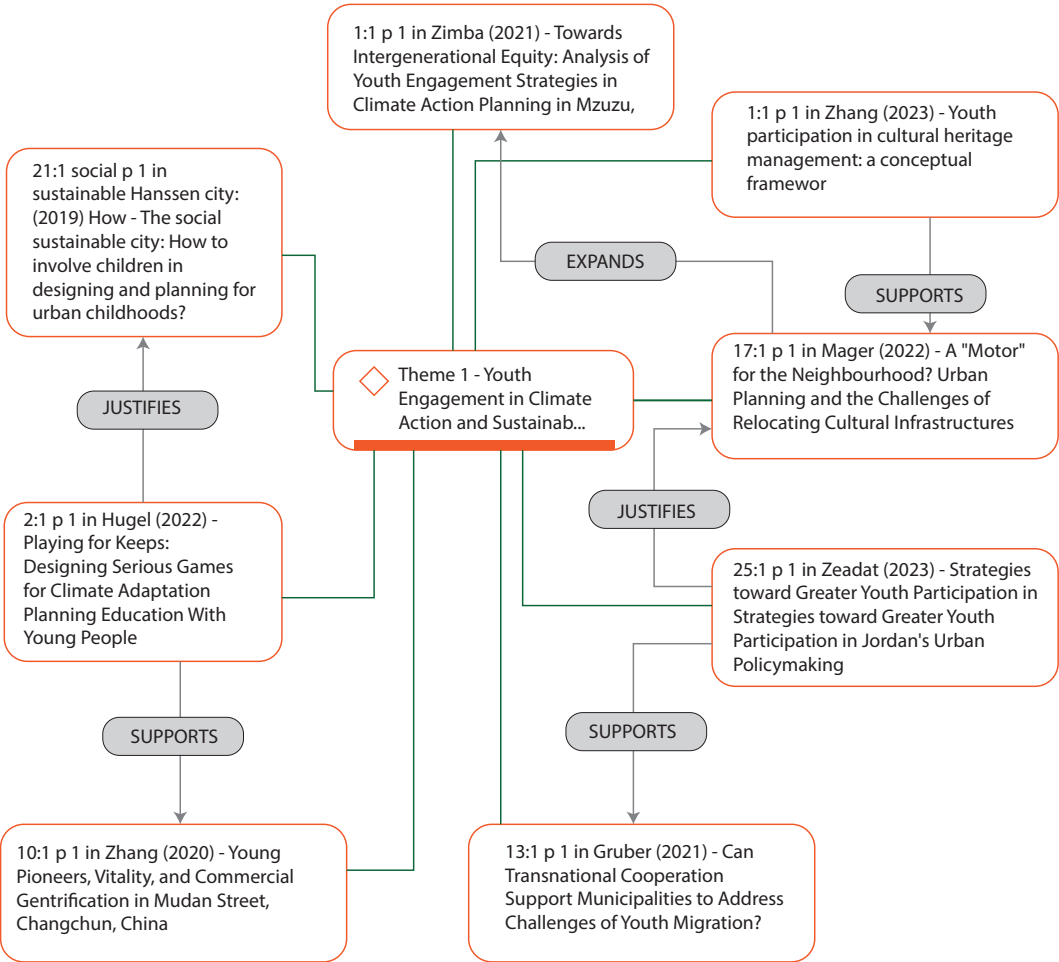


Figure 5. Youth Engagement in Climate Action and Sustainability (Theme 1)

The theme of Youth Engagement in Climate Action and Sustainability has evolved significantly over time, reflecting an increasing awareness of their contributions to urban resilience and environmental governance (Figure 5). Initially, discussions on youth engagement in urban planning focused on their marginalised position in decision-making processes, with limited recognition of their potential to influence sustainability policies. Hanssen (2019) was among the early scholars who highlighted the importance of incorporating children and youth into urban design processes, emphasising that their engagement is essential for fostering socially and environmentally sustainable cities. His study laid the groundwork for later research by demonstrating that youth-inclusive urban planning leads to more adaptive and inclusive communities.

As climate challenges intensified, studies began to explore the intersection between youth participation and sustainability governance. Zimba et al. (2021) advanced the discussion by introducing the concept of intergenerational equity and analysing how youth-led climate initiatives shape urban adaptation strategies. Their study found that youth participation in climate action is not only beneficial but necessary to ensure sustainability policies address the needs of both present and future generations. This perspective was further supported by Gruber (2021), who examined the role of transnational cooperation in amplifying youth engagement. His findings suggest that when local youth initiatives are integrated into global sustainability discussions, they contribute to more equitable and impactful climate policies..

With growing recognition of youth as key stakeholders in sustainability, research expanded to explore innovative engagement methods. Hugel and Davies (2022) introduced the concept of serious games as a tool for climate adaptation education, demonstrating that interactive and digital platforms enhance youth participation by making complex environmental issues more accessible. Their study illustrated that gamification strategies empower young people to actively contribute to climate planning rather than remain passive recipients of policy decisions. Similarly, J. Zhang et al. (2020) explored how youth involvement in cultural heritage management contributes to environmental sustainability, revealing that preserving cultural landscapes fosters more ecologically responsible urban development.

Beyond digital tools and cultural sustainability, local youth-led initiatives have significantly shaped urban climate adaptation strategies. Mager and Wagner (2022) emphasised the effectiveness of community-driven sustainability projects, finding that youth participation at the neighbourhood level leads to more context-specific and impactful climate solutions. However, despite these positive developments, Zeadat (2023) identifies persistent institutional barriers that hinder youth from participating meaningfully in formal climate governance frameworks. Their study highlights the need for policy-driven mechanisms that integrate youth perspectives into decision-making processes at the municipal and national levels. Collectively, these studies underscore that youth engagement in climate action is a multidimensional approach, spanning grassroots activism, digital participation, cultural heritage preservation, and transnational collaboration. While participatory tools such as serious games and digital mapping have successfully empowered youth, challenges remain in ensuring their contributions lead to long-term policy impact. Future research should focus on institutionalising youth participation in climate governance, expanding digital engagement tools, and evaluating the sustainability of youth-led initiatives. By addressing these gaps, urban planners and policymakers can create climate-responsive cities that are not only designed for youth but shaped by their active involvement.

Theme 2: Technological and Participatory Tools for Urban Planning

The theme of Technological and Participatory Tools for Urban Planning examines the evolving role of digital innovations and interactive platforms in enhancing youth participation in urban design processes (Figure 6). Initially, research on youth engagement in urban planning focused on traditional consultation methods, which often failed to capture young people’s dynamic perspectives. However, as digital technologies advanced, scholars began exploring how participatory tools could bridge the gap between youth and urban governance. De Andrade et al. (2020) was among the first to investigate the potential of gaming platforms, particularly Minecraft, as an urban planning tool. Their study demonstrated that interactive digital environments provide an accessible and engaging way for youth to visualise and contribute to city design, fostering a deeper connection between young people and their built environments.

Building on this foundation, Poplin et al. (2023) expanded the discussion by integrating serious geo games and gamified storytelling into participatory planning. Their research highlights how digital games enhance youth engagement and create opportunities for co-creation, where young people actively shape urban spaces rather than merely providing feedback. Furthermore, Shtebunaev et al. (2023) investigated youth perceptions of smart cities, revealing that teenagers value technological integration and digital accessibility in urban design. Their study was later continued by González-González et al. (2023), who introduced backcasting and Q-methodology to explore how youth envision driverless cities. Together, these studies suggest that youth interact with technology and actively contribute to reimagining urban futures through participatory digital platforms.

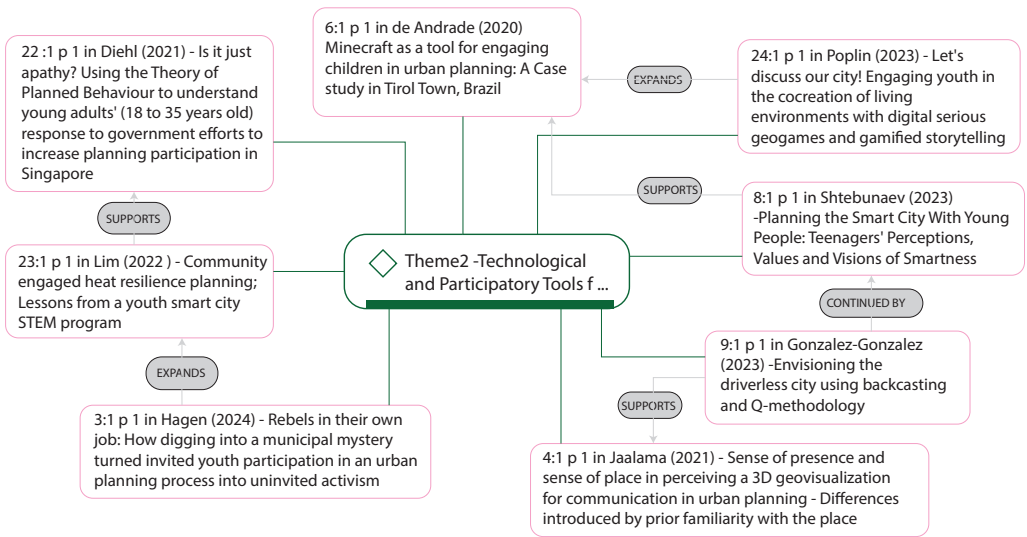


Figure 6. Technological and Participatory Tools for Urban Planning (Theme 2)

Beyond gaming and visualisation tools, research has also explored the psychological and spatial dimensions of youth engagement in technological urban planning. Jaalama et al. (2021) examined how 3D geovisualisation tools influence young people's sense of presence and place in urban settings. Their findings indicate that familiarity with a space impacts how effectively youth engage with digital planning tools, underscoring the need for localised and context-aware digital participation strategies. Similarly, Diehl and Chan (2021) applied the Theory of Planned Behaviour to investigate Singapore's youth apathy toward government-led planning efforts. Their study reveals that while technological platforms can enhance engagement, behavioural factors such as perceptions of efficacy and agency must be addressed to ensure meaningful participation.

As research in this area progressed, scholars examined the intersection between technological tools and youth-led activism. Lim et al. (2022) introduced the concept of community-engaged heat resilience planning, where youth participated in smart city STEM programs to address climate adaptation challenges. This study demonstrated that digital tools facilitate participation and empower youth to engage in problem-solving for urban resilience. Expanding on this, Hagen et al. (2024) explored how a municipal planning initiative unintentionally transformed invited youth participation into uninvited activism. Their findings suggest that when youth have the right technological tools and knowledge, they can challenge existing planning paradigms and advocate for more inclusive urban policies.

Finally, the papers within Theme 2 collectively emphasise that technological and participatory tools are reshaping how youth engage with urban planning. While digital platforms such as Minecraft, serious geogames, and 3D visualisation tools have successfully enhanced youth engagement, challenges remain in ensuring accessibility, agency, and long-term integration into formal planning frameworks. Future research should focus on scaling participatory technologies, institutionalising digital engagement strategies, and addressing behavioural barriers that limit youth participation. By advancing these areas, urban planners can leverage technology not only as a tool for engagement but also as a mechanism for empowering youth to actively shape their cities' future.

Theme 3: Social Inclusion and Well-being in Urban Spaces

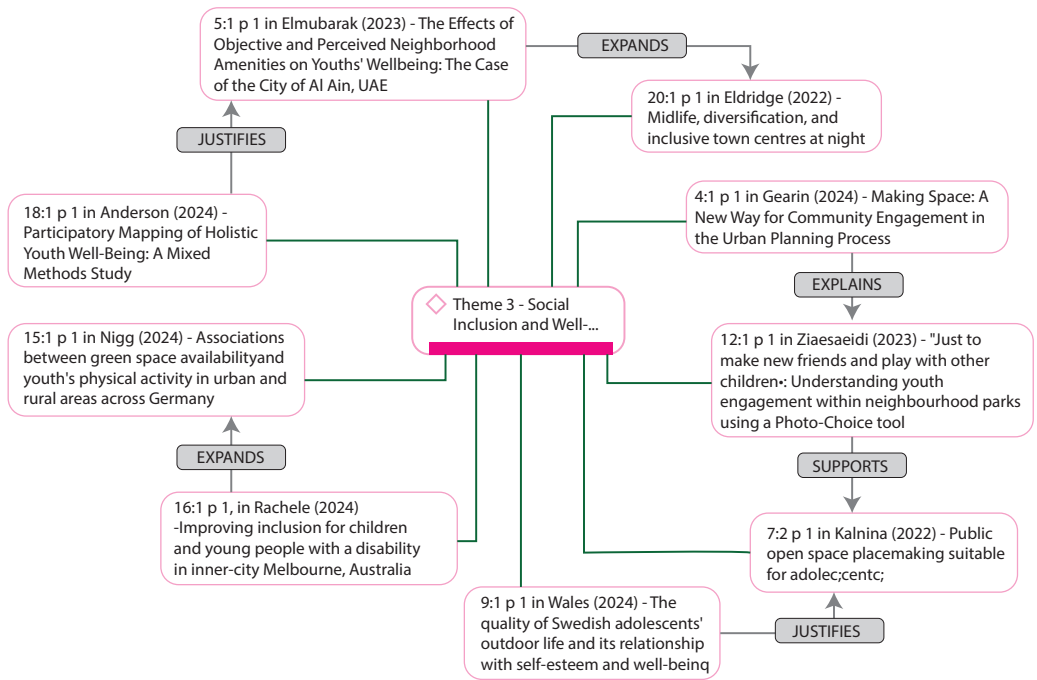


Figure 7. Social inclusion and well-being in urban spaces (Theme 3)

The theme of Social Inclusion and Well-being in Urban Spaces explores how urban design, green spaces, and community infrastructure contribute to youth inclusion, social engagement, and overall well-being. Early studies emphasised the importance of intentional placemaking in fostering inclusive urban environments for adolescents. Kalnina and Stokmane (2022) were among the first to examine public open space placemaking, arguing that urban spaces should be designed to meet the specific social and recreational needs of youth. Their study highlighted that when public spaces are not youth-friendly, youth often feel excluded, reducing social interaction and community engagement. Building on this, Eldridge and Roberts (2022) explored the concept of diversified urban centres, particularly examining how cities can be more inclusive for youth beyond school hours. Their research on town centre diversification at night revealed that many urban spaces fail to provide safe and engaging environments for youth after dark, limiting their ability to participate in social and recreational activities. These foundational studies established a framework for understanding how urban design directly affects youth social inclusion, calling for more adaptive and youth-focused urban planning strategies.

As the field progressed, scholars began focusing on the role of green spaces in youth well-being. Ziaesaeidi et al. (2023) investigated how adolescents engage with neighbourhood parks, using a Photo-Choice tool to analyse how urban green spaces

facilitate friendship formation and community bonding. His findings reinforced the idea that parks and open spaces serve as critical gathering points for youth, promoting both physical and social well-being. Similarly, Nigg et al. (2024) conducted a large-scale study in Germany, demonstrating a strong relationship between green space availability and youth physical activity levels. His research aligns with Wales et al. (2024), who examined the quality of Swedish adolescents' outdoor life and found a significant correlation between spending time outdoors and improved self-esteem. Together, these studies underscore the argument that green spaces are not merely aesthetic features but essential components of youth development and urban well-being.

Beyond the physical environment, research has also explored participatory engagement strategies that allow youth to shape their communities actively. Gearin and Hurt (2024) introduced a community engagement model, demonstrating that when youth are actively involved in urban planning discussions, they develop a stronger sense of belonging and civic responsibility. Their findings are further supported by Anderson (2024), who used a participatory mapping approach to assess youth well-being in urban spaces. His study highlighted that youth benefit from inclusive environments and offers valuable insights that urban planners should incorporate into decision-making processes. Another critical aspect of youth well-being in urban environments is the impact of neighbourhood amenities. Elmubarak et al. (2023) explored how both objective and perceived urban infrastructure influence youth well-being in Al Ain, UAE. Their study found that even when physical infrastructure is present, perceptions of accessibility and safety significantly affect whether youth feel comfortable and engaged in urban spaces. These findings reinforce the argument that youth-friendly urban planning must go beyond providing infrastructure to also consider social perceptions and accessibility issues.

In conclusion, the studies within Theme 3 emphasise that urban spaces must be intentionally designed to support youth inclusion, social engagement, and well-being. While placemaking, green spaces, and participatory planning have proven effective strategies, challenges remain in ensuring that all youth, particularly marginalised groups, have equitable access to urban spaces. Future research should focus on institutionalising youth perspectives in municipal planning, expanding access to recreational spaces, and assessing the long-term benefits of inclusive urban design. By prioritising these elements, urban planners can create cities that not only accommodate youth but also actively empower them as key contributors to urban development.

DISCUSSION

The thematic review of youth participation in urban planning and development reveals significant insights into the evolving role of young people as stakeholders in shaping their urban environments. There is a growing recognition of the importance of integrating

youth perspectives into urban governance and design processes. This shift is particularly relevant in contemporary challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and rapid urbanisation, which necessitate innovative and inclusive approaches to urban planning. The findings from this review indicate that digital tools, including augmented reality and participatory mapping, are instrumental in enhancing youth engagement in urban planning. These technologies provide platforms for young people to express their ideas, collaborate with peers, and actively participate in decision-making processes. By leveraging these tools, urban planners can create more inclusive environments that reflect the needs and aspirations of youth, ultimately leading to more sustainable and responsive urban development.

However, despite the progress made in recognising youth as vital stakeholders, significant gaps remain in understanding the emerging patterns of youth engagement in urban planning. The findings from this study emphasise that there is a need for further exploration of how unique youth perspectives can influence urban governance and design, particularly in the context of creative placemaking. The synthesis of the three identified themes demonstrates that youth participation in urban planning is evolving beyond conventional consultation approaches towards more collaborative and action-oriented practices. Rather than being viewed solely as beneficiaries of urban development, youth are increasingly recognised as active contributors who influence sustainability initiatives, digital innovation, and socially inclusive urban environments. This transition reflects a broader movement towards participatory planning processes, where youth engagement becomes an integral component of urban decision-making rather than being limited to one-off consultation exercises.

The findings further indicate that meaningful youth participation depends on the interaction of multiple enabling factors. Climate action initiatives create opportunities for youth to contribute to environmental resilience, participatory technologies facilitate communication and collaborative planning, while inclusive public spaces encourage long-term civic engagement and social interaction. Collectively, these findings suggest that effective youth participation requires a combination of supportive governance, accessible participatory mechanisms, and inclusive urban environments rather than isolated engagement activities.

The review also highlights the growing relevance of creative placemaking as an approach for strengthening youth participation in urban planning. Across the reviewed studies, creative placemaking is reflected through collaborative activities that enable youth to actively participate in shaping public spaces, strengthening community engagement, and encouraging shared responsibility for urban environments. Participatory technologies, neighbourhood initiatives, and community-based activities collectively demonstrate

how placemaking can support more inclusive, responsive, and people-centred urban development. Consequently, youth participation should be understood not merely as a consultation exercise but as an ongoing collaborative process that contributes to more sustainable urban planning outcomes.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This gap presents an opportunity for future research to systematically analyse the trends and challenges faced by youth in urban planning from 2019 to 2024, focusing on the innovative practices that facilitate their involvement. Future studies should also consider the implications of these findings for policy and practice, particularly in relation to sustained engagement strategies that empower young people to actively shape their communities. This includes providing access to digital tools and fostering an inclusive culture that values youth contributions to urban planning processes.

Additionally, research should explore the intersectionality of youth engagement, examining how socio-economic status, education, and geographic location influence young people's ability to participate in urban governance. In conclusion, integrating youth voices into urban planning is crucial for creating vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable urban environments. By addressing the existing gaps in the literature and focusing on innovative engagement strategies, future research can contribute to a deeper understanding of youth participation in urban development, ultimately leading to more equitable and responsive urban policies. The ongoing dialogue surrounding youth engagement in urban planning will be vital in shaping the cities of tomorrow, ensuring that they are designed for young people and with their active participation.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

This study contributes significantly to understanding youth participation in urban planning and development, particularly in emerging trends from 2019 to 2024. By systematically analysing literature from reputable databases such as SCOPUS and WoS, the research sheds light on the evolving role of youth as vital stakeholders in urban governance. One of the primary contributions of this study is its identification of key trends, challenges, and innovative practices that facilitate youth involvement in urban planning processes. This is particularly relevant given the increasing recognition of the importance of youth perspectives in shaping sustainable and inclusive urban environments. The thematic review methodology employed in this study allows for a comprehensive synthesis of findings from various studies, highlighting the effectiveness of digital tools such as augmented reality and participatory mapping in enhancing youth engagement. These tools provide platforms for young people to express their ideas, collaborate with peers, and actively participate in decision-making processes.

The study demonstrates how technology can empower youth and contribute to the discourse on innovative engagement strategies that urban planners and policymakers can adopt. Furthermore, this research addresses a significant gap in the existing literature regarding the unique perspectives of youth and their influence on urban governance and design. By focusing on creative placemaking and youth participation, the study emphasises the need for urban environments that are responsive to the needs and aspirations of young people. This focus enriches the academic discourse and offers practical insights for urban planning practices, advocating for more inclusive approaches prioritising youth voices. The contribution of this study extends beyond theoretical synthesis by providing insights that may inform policy and practice in urban planning. By highlighting the importance of integrating youth perspectives into urban governance, the research encourages the development of sustained engagement strategies that strengthen youth participation in shaping their communities.

Such strengthened participation is associated with fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among youth, contributing to more vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable urban environments. In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing knowledge of youth participation in urban planning by identifying emerging trends and innovative practices that enhance engagement. It underscores the importance of integrating youth voices into urban governance and supports the advancement of inclusive strategies that enable youth to play an active role in shaping their urban futures. Future research should continue to explore the implications of these findings, ensuring that youth voices remain central to the discourse on urban development and planning.

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DECLARATION

The author declares that digital tools were used to support the preparation of this paper. Grammarly was utilised to assist with grammatical accuracy and language refinement. ChatGPT (version 4.0) was used for structural suggestions and language editing support. ATLAS.ti software was employed for qualitative data management and thematic coding. All interpretations, analyses, and conclusions presented in this paper are solely the author's original work.

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