



Original Article

Beyond Formal Parks: Youth Preferences and Experiential Quality in Informal Public Spaces

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Abstract: Urban development encompasses not only physical infrastructure but also the social dynamics that shape everyday urban life, with public spaces playing a crucial role in supporting interaction and community activities. However, informal public spaces remain relatively underexplored in urban research, particularly regarding young people's preferences. This study aims to analyze youth preferences toward informal public spaces and identify the key factors influencing those preferences. A descriptive quantitative approach was employed in selected urban areas of Samarinda City, Indonesia. Data were collected through structured questionnaires from 150 university students aged 18 to 23 years who actively use informal public spaces. Youth preference was treated as the dependent variable, while accessibility, comfort, facilities, safety, location conditions, spatial flexibility, visual attractiveness, and place attachment were examined as independent variables. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression analysis. The results show that the regression model explains 53.6% of the variance in youth preferences. Visual attractiveness emerged as the strongest and statistically significant positive predictor, whereas location conditions demonstrated a significant negative effect. Other variables showed positive but statistically insignificant relationships, and comfort was excluded from the final model due to multicollinearity. These findings suggest that experiential and contextual qualities appear to play a more prominent role than purely functional attributes in shaping youth engagement with informal public spaces, highlighting the importance of aesthetic and environmental considerations in people-centered urban planning.

Keywords: Informal Public Spaces; Youth Preference; Visual Attractiveness; Urban Planning; Place Attachment.



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1. Introduction

Urban development encompasses more than physical structures and infrastructure; it also involves the social dynamics that shape everyday community life (Batty, 2021). Public spaces play a crucial role in

supporting daily routines, social interactions, and collective experiences within cities (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2023). Through repeated use and shared meanings, these spaces contribute to urban identity and foster a sense of belonging among residents (Relph, 2022). Consequently, public spaces are widely recognized in urban planning as essential components of socially sustainable and people-centered cities (UN-Habitat, 2022). Despite their importance, urban planning and academic research have predominantly focused on formal public spaces, such as parks, squares, and plazas, which are intentionally designed and regulated. In contrast, informal public spaces that emerge organically through everyday practices rather than formal planning have received comparatively less attention (Carmona & Tiesdell, 2021). These spaces are not explicitly designated for public use, yet they function as important sites for social interaction and community life.

Previous studies identify sidewalks, residual spaces, shopfronts, street corners, and areas around small commercial activities as typical examples of informal public spaces that support spontaneous social encounters (Mehta, 2021; Németh & Schmidt, 2021). Research has shown that informal public spaces often possess significant social value due to their flexibility, accessibility, and proximity to daily activities, allowing users to appropriate them according to their needs (Gehl, 2022; Franck & Stevens, 2021). Unlike formal spaces, which are governed by predefined rules and functions, informal spaces tend to accommodate diverse and evolving uses, making them particularly attractive for everyday social practices. Young people represent one of the most active user groups within urban environments and display distinct spatial behaviors shaped by social interaction, identity formation, and peer networks (Thomas & Bertolini, 2022).

Several studies suggest that youth tend to prefer spaces that allow for socializing, self-expression, and group activities with minimal formal regulation (Miles & Hall, 2021; Liu et al., 2022). Informal public spaces thus play a crucial role in supporting young people's daily social lives, serving as accessible and adaptable settings for meeting, gathering, and informal activities. This trend has become more pronounced in the post-pandemic context, as outdoor and informal spaces have gained importance for social interaction and everyday activities (Honey-Rosés et al., 2021). However, existing research on youth and public space has largely focused on formal or semi-formal environments, with limited empirical attention to youth preferences for informal public spaces, particularly in developing country contexts. Studies focusing on secondary cities and non-metropolitan urban areas remain especially scarce, despite the growing relevance of informal spaces in such settings (Putra & Setiawan, 2022; Rahman & Salim, 2023). This gap underscores the need for research examining how young people perceive, use, and choose informal public spaces in everyday urban contexts.

Accordingly, this study aims to identify the types of informal public spaces used by young people, the activities conducted within these spaces, and the key factors influencing their preferences. By providing empirical evidence from an Indonesian urban context, this research contributes to urban humanities and people-centered planning by highlighting the social and experiential dimensions of informal public spaces and their implications for more inclusive and flexible urban design strategies.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employs a descriptive, quantitative approach to examine young people's social preferences for informal public spaces in urban areas (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research was conducted in selected urban areas of Samarinda City that contain various forms of informal public spaces, such as active sidewalks, small-scale open spaces, and areas surrounding commercial activities. The research subjects were young people aged 18–23 years, represented by university students who actively engage in urban activities and have experience using informal public spaces. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement in urban social activities and prior use of informal public spaces, as this technique is appropriate for studies focusing on specific user groups (Etikan et al., 2016). A total of 150 respondents completed structured questionnaires. Young people's preferences for informal public spaces were treated as the dependent variable. The independent variables included accessibility, comfort, facilities, safety, location conditions, spatial flexibility, visual attractiveness, and place attachment, which were operationalized through perceptual indicators measured using a five-point Likert scale. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to describe respondents' characteristics and general preference tendencies, while multiple linear regression was applied to examine the influence of key spatial factors, particularly accessibility, comfort, facilities, and safety, on young people's preferences for using informal public spaces. The results are presented in tables and interpreted accordingly.

3. Results

This study involved 150 student respondents aged 18–23 years, representing urban youth who actively engage in academic, social, and recreational activities in Samarinda City. The respondents regularly utilize

urban areas for various everyday purposes, indicating consistent interaction with public and semi-public urban spaces.

3.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of respondents was analyzed using frequency and percentage distributions to provide a clear overview of their characteristics. The analysis focused on gender, age group, frequency of visits to informal public spaces, and the dominant activities conducted within them. The respondents represent urban youth characterized by high mobility and frequent interaction with informal public spaces, making them a relevant population for examining preferences toward such spaces in everyday urban contexts.

Table 1. Result of Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	68	45.3
	Female	82	54.7
Age Group (Years)	18	22	14.7
	19	28	18.7
	20	35	23.3
	21	31	20.7
	22	21	14.0
	23	13	8.60
	Daily	47	31.3
Frequency of Visiting Informal Public Spaces	Several times a week	56	37.3
	Once a week	29	19.3
	Occasionally	18	12.0
Main Activities in Informal Public Spaces	Socializing	61	40.7
	Relaxing	38	25.3
	Studying	21	14.0
	Waiting / Passing through	19	12.7
	Other	11	7.30

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 150 respondents involved in the study. Based on gender distribution, female respondents slightly outnumber male respondents, with 82 individuals (54.7%) compared to 68 males (45.3%). This relatively balanced composition indicates that the findings adequately reflect perspectives from both genders, although female participation is marginally higher. In terms of age distribution, the respondents are predominantly young adults aged 18-23. The largest proportion of respondents is 20-year-olds, accounting for 35 individuals (23.3%), followed by 21-year-olds with 31 respondents (20.7%) and 19-year-olds with 28 respondents (18.7%). Meanwhile, respondents aged 18 account for 14.7%, those aged 22 for 14.0%, and the smallest group is 23-year-olds at 8.6%. This distribution indicates that informal public spaces are primarily utilized by individuals in their early twenties, a demographic commonly associated with university students or young adults in transitional life stages.

Regarding visits to informal public spaces, most respondents reported frequent engagement. A total of 56 respondents (37.3%) visit several times a week, while 47 respondents (31.3%) visit daily. Additionally, 29 respondents (19.3%) visit once a week, and only 18 respondents (12.0%) visit occasionally. These results demonstrate that nearly two-thirds of respondents regularly use informal public spaces, suggesting that these spaces play an important role in their daily routines and social activities. Among the main activities conducted in informal public spaces, socializing is the dominant purpose, reported by 61 respondents (40.7%). This is followed by relaxing (38 respondents, 25.3%) and studying (21 respondents, 14.0%). Meanwhile, 19 respondents (12.7%) use the spaces for waiting or passing through, and 11 respondents (7.3%) engage in other activities. Overall, the findings highlight that informal public spaces primarily function as social and recreational environments that support interaction, relaxation, and, to a lesser extent, academic activities among young adults.

3.2. Descriptive Statistics Analysis

Table 2. Result of Descriptive Statistics

Variable(s)	Code	Indicator(s)	Mean	Std Dev.
Youth Preference for Informal Public Spaces	Y	Level of preference for using informal public spaces	4.62	0.38
Accessibility	X1.1	Ease of access to informal public spaces	4.48	0.41
	X1.2	Proximity to daily activities	4.35	0.44
	X1.3	Availability of pedestrian pathways	4.12	0.52
	X1.4	Connectivity with surrounding urban functions	4.27	0.39
Comfort	X2.1	Comfort for sitting and relaxing	4.55	0.36
	X2.2	Comfort for social interaction	4.31	0.47
	X2.3	Low noise level of the surrounding environment	3.89	0.54
	X2.4	Overall spatial atmosphere	4.46	0.4
Facilities	X3.1	Availability of seating facilities	4.18	0.49
	X3.2	Availability of lighting	4.36	0.42
	X3.3	Ease of movement within the space	4.29	0.45
	X3.4	Presence of supporting elements (trees/shading)	4.58	0.34
Safety	X4.1	Sense of safety while using the space	4.41	0.43
	X4.2	Safety from traffic disturbances	3.97	0.51
	X4.3	Safety during afternoon or evening activities	4.22	0.46
	X4.3	activities	4.22	0.46
Location Conditions	X5.1	Vulnerability to flooding	3.76	0.55
	X5.2	Land condition	4.03	0.48
	X5.3	Topographical condition	3.91	0.5
Spatial Flexibility	X6.1	Ease of space adaptation for various activities	4.47	0.39
	X6.2	Absence of rigid usage regulations	4.33	0.44
Visual Attractiveness	X7.1	Visual appearance of the space	4.71	0.31
	X7.2	Quality of view	4.64	0.35
Place Attachment	X8.1	Feeling comfortable staying in the space	4.52	0.37
	X8.2	Willingness to revisit the space	4.60	0.33

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for all study variables, including the dependent variable and its associated independent variables. Overall, the mean scores across all variables range from 3.76 to 4.71, indicating that respondents generally agree with positive statements about informal public spaces. The relatively low standard deviation values, ranging from 0.31 to 0.55, suggest that responses are homogeneous, reflecting consistent perceptions among respondents. The dependent variable, Youth Preference for Informal Public Spaces, has a high mean of 4.62 and a standard deviation of 0.38. This indicates that respondents demonstrate a very strong preference for using informal public spaces. The low variability further implies that this preference is widely shared among the youth sample.

For the Accessibility dimension, all indicators show high mean values. Ease of access to informal public spaces scores 4.48 with a standard deviation of 0.41, suggesting that respondents perceive these spaces as easily reachable. Proximity to daily activities records a mean of 4.35 and a standard deviation of 0.44, indicating that the spaces are strategically located near routine activities. Availability of pedestrian pathways has a slightly lower mean of 4.12 and a standard deviation of 0.52, reflecting moderate variability in perceptions of walkability infrastructure. Connectivity with surrounding urban functions has a mean of 4.27

and a standard deviation of 0.39, indicating that respondents generally agree that these spaces are well integrated into the urban environment.

Within the Comfort dimension, comfort for sitting and relaxing has a high mean of 4.55 and a standard deviation of 0.36, indicating that the physical environment supports rest and leisure activities. Comfort for social interaction scores 4.31 with a standard deviation of 0.47, reinforcing the role of these spaces as social hubs. However, low noise level of the surrounding environment records a comparatively lower mean of 3.89 and a standard deviation of 0.54, indicating that noise may still be a concern in certain locations. Overall spatial atmosphere scores 4.46 with a standard deviation of 0.40, suggesting that respondents positively evaluate the general ambiance of the spaces. Regarding Facilities, the availability of seating facilities has a mean of 4.18 and a standard deviation of 0.49, while the availability of lighting has a mean of 4.36 with a standard deviation of 0.42. Ease of movement within the space scores 4.29 with a standard deviation of 0.45, indicating that circulation is generally convenient. The highest mean within this dimension is the presence of supporting elements such as trees or shading, with a mean of 4.58 and a standard deviation of 0.34. This suggests that natural elements are highly valued and strongly appreciated by respondents.

In the Safety dimension, sense of safety while using the space records a mean of 4.41 and a standard deviation of 0.43, indicating that respondents generally feel secure. Safety during afternoon or evening activities scores 4.22 with a standard deviation of 0.46, suggesting relatively positive perceptions of security beyond daytime use. However, safety from traffic disturbances shows a lower mean of 3.97 and a standard deviation of 0.51, implying that traffic-related risks remain a moderate concern. For Location Conditions, vulnerability to flooding has the lowest mean among all indicators at 3.76 with a standard deviation of 0.55, indicating some uncertainty or perceived risk regarding environmental resilience. Land condition records a mean of 4.03 and a standard deviation of 0.48, while topographical condition scores 3.91 with a standard deviation of 0.50. These results suggest that physical site characteristics are generally perceived positively but not as strongly as other dimensions.

The Spatial Flexibility dimension shows strong results, with ease of space adaptation for various activities scoring 4.47 and a standard deviation of 0.39. Absence of rigid usage regulations records a mean of 4.33 and a standard deviation of 0.44. These findings indicate that respondents appreciate flexible spaces that allow multiple forms of engagement without strict restrictions. Visual Attractiveness achieves the highest overall evaluations. The visual appearance of the space records the highest mean of 4.71 with a standard deviation of 0.31, while the quality of view scores 4.64 with a standard deviation of 0.35. These results highlight that aesthetic factors play a crucial role in shaping youth preference for informal public spaces.

Finally, Place Attachment also demonstrates strong positive responses. Feeling comfortable staying in the space has a mean of 4.52 and a standard deviation of 0.37, while willingness to revisit the space has a mean of 4.60 and a standard deviation of 0.33. These findings suggest that positive spatial experiences foster emotional connection and repeat visitation among youth. In general, the descriptive statistics indicate that youth perceptions of informal public spaces are highly favorable across accessibility, comfort, facilities, safety, environmental conditions, flexibility, visual attractiveness, and place attachment. Among these dimensions, visual attractiveness and natural supporting elements emerge as the strongest attributes, while environmental risks and noise levels represent relatively weaker aspects that may require further improvement.

3.3. Correlation among studied variables

Table 3. Result of Correlation Matrix

Variable(s)	Y	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8
Y Youth Preference	1.000								
X1 Accessibility	0.720	1.000							
X2 Comfort	0.680	0.630	1.000						
X3 Facilities	0.640	0.670	0.710	1.000					
X4 Safety	0.700	0.690	0.660	0.720	1.000				
X5 Location Conditions	0.550	0.580	0.520	0.570	0.600	1.000			
X6 Spatial Flexibility	0.660	0.610	0.640	0.690	0.650	0.540	1.000		

Variable(s)	Y	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8
X7 Visual Attractiveness	0.810	0.730	0.750	0.740	0.770	0.590	0.720	1.000	
X8 Place Attachment	0.740	0.650	0.700	0.680	0.710	0.560	0.670	0.780	1.000

Table 3 presents the correlation matrix among Youth Preference (Y) and the eight independent variables, namely Accessibility (X1), Comfort (X2), Facilities (X3), Safety (X4), Location Conditions (X5), Spatial Flexibility (X6), Visual Attractiveness (X7), and Place Attachment (X8). Overall, all correlation coefficients are positive, indicating that improvements in each independent variable are associated with higher levels of youth preference for informal public spaces. The strength of correlations ranges from moderate to very strong, suggesting meaningful relationships among the constructs. The correlation between Youth Preference and Accessibility ($r = 0.720$) indicates a strong positive relationship, suggesting that greater accessibility and better connectivity significantly enhance youth interest in using informal public spaces. Similarly, comfort ($r = 0.680$) shows a strong positive association, highlighting the importance of physical and psychological comfort in shaping user preference. Facilities ($r = 0.640$) also demonstrate a strong relationship with Youth Preference, suggesting that adequate infrastructure and supporting elements contribute positively to users' overall evaluation.

Safety ($r = 0.700$) exhibits a strong correlation with Youth Preference, emphasizing that a sense of security is a critical determinant of space utilization. Meanwhile, Location Conditions ($r = 0.550$) show a moderate positive correlation, indicating that environmental and physical site characteristics influence preference, although not as strongly as other dimensions. Spatial Flexibility ($r = 0.660$) shows a strong relationship, indicating that adaptable spaces that accommodate diverse activities increase youth engagement. The strongest correlation with Youth Preference is found in Visual Attractiveness ($r = 0.810$), indicating a very strong positive relationship. This suggests that aesthetic quality and visual appeal are the most influential factors driving youth preference for informal public spaces. Place Attachment ($r = 0.740$) also demonstrates a strong correlation, implying that emotional bonds and the desire to revisit significantly enhance preference levels.

Examining intercorrelations among independent variables reveals generally strong positive associations. For instance, Facilities and Safety are strongly correlated ($r = 0.720$), while Visual Attractiveness is highly correlated with Safety ($r = 0.770$), Comfort ($r = 0.750$), and Facilities ($r = 0.740$). Place Attachment also shows strong associations with Visual Attractiveness ($r = 0.780$) and Safety ($r = 0.710$). These findings indicate that the dimensions are interconnected, with improvements in one aspect potentially influencing others. Importantly, although correlations are strong, none exceed 0.90, suggesting that multicollinearity is unlikely to be a serious concern. Overall, the correlation matrix confirms that all proposed variables are positively related to youth preference, with Visual Attractiveness, Place Attachment, Accessibility, and Safety emerging as the most influential correlates.

3.4. Hypothesis Testing

Following the descriptive and correlation analyses, the indicator scores were aggregated by averaging them to generate composite values for each variable. These composite scores were subsequently used in the inferential analysis. Multiple linear regression analysis was employed to examine the simultaneous effects of accessibility, facilities, safety, location conditions, spatial flexibility, visual attractiveness, and place attachment on young generations' preferences for informal public spaces. This approach allows for the identification of the relative contribution and statistical significance of each independent variable while controlling for the others. The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of Hypothesis Testing

Variable(s)	Coefficient (B)	Std. Error	t-stat	Sig.
Constant	2.597	0.513	5.066	0.000
Accessibility	0.092	0.056	1.649	0.101
Facilities	0.084	0.061	1.378	0.170
Safety	-0.039	0.060	-0.651	0.516
Location	-0.174	0.073	-2.389	0.018
Flexibility	0.008	0.030	0.253	0.800
Attractiveness	0.402	0.051	7.922	0.000

Variable(s)	Coefficient (B)	Std. Error	t-stat	Sig.
Place Attachment	0.001	0.043	0.028	0.978

Table 4 presents the results of the hypothesis testing using multiple regression analysis to examine the influence of Accessibility, Facilities, Safety, Location Conditions, Spatial Flexibility, Visual Attractiveness, and Place Attachment on Youth Preference for Informal Public Spaces. The regression equation shows a constant value of 2.597 with a significance level of 0.000, indicating that when all independent variables are held constant, the baseline level of youth preference remains positive and statistically significant. This suggests that, even without the explanatory variables, there is an inherent tendency among youth to prefer informal public spaces. Among the independent variables, Visual Attractiveness demonstrates the strongest and most significant effect on Youth Preference, with a regression coefficient of 0.402, a t-value of 7.922, and a significance level of 0.000. This indicates that for every one-unit increase in perceived attractiveness, youth preference increases by 0.402 units, holding other variables constant. The highly significant p-value confirms that Visual Attractiveness is the most influential predictor in the model.

Location Conditions show a statistically significant but negative effect on Youth Preference, with a coefficient of -0.174 , a t-value of -2.389 , and a significance level of 0.018. This result indicates that poorer or more problematic location conditions, such as vulnerability to flooding or unfavorable topography, significantly reduce youth preference. The negative coefficient suggests that environmental risks or physical constraints diminish the appeal of informal public spaces. In contrast, Accessibility has a positive coefficient of 0.092 but is not statistically significant at the 5 percent level (p-value = 0.101). Although accessibility contributes positively to preference, its effect is not strong enough to be considered significant in the presence of other variables. Similarly, Facilities show a positive coefficient of 0.084 with a p-value of 0.170, suggesting that while facilities may enhance preference, their effect is not statistically significant in this model.

Safety records a negative coefficient of -0.039 (p-value = 0.516), indicating no significant influence on youth preference. Spatial Flexibility also shows a very small positive coefficient of 0.008 and a high p-value of 0.800, suggesting that flexibility does not significantly predict preference in this regression model. Place Attachment has an almost negligible coefficient of 0.001 and a p-value of 0.978, indicating no statistically significant effect. Thus, the hypothesis testing results reveal that among the examined variables, only Visual Attractiveness has a strong, positive, and statistically significant influence on Youth Preference, while Location Conditions have a significant negative effect. The remaining variables, Accessibility, Facilities, Safety, Spatial Flexibility, and Place Attachment, do not show significant effects in the presence of other predictors. These findings suggest that aesthetic quality plays a dominant role in shaping youth preference for informal public spaces, whereas unfavorable environmental conditions can significantly undermine such preferences.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that visual attractiveness is the most influential factor shaping young people's preferences for informal public spaces. The strong, statistically significant effect of this variable indicates that visually appealing environments and positive spatial atmospheres substantially enhance youths' willingness to use and revisit these spaces. Aesthetic quality, including visual coherence, scenic views, greenery, and overall environmental appeal, appears to create a strong experiential impact that resonates with young users. This result is consistent with earlier foundational works emphasizing the importance of visual quality and experiential perception in shaping public life. For example, Whyte (1980) highlighted that people are naturally drawn to spaces that are visually engaging and offer enjoyable spatial experiences, while Gehl (2011) emphasized that high-quality urban design encourages prolonged stay and repeated use. The present findings reinforce these arguments by demonstrating that aesthetic dimensions are not merely complementary features but rather central determinants of youth engagement with informal public spaces.

In contrast, location conditions exhibit a statistically significant negative effect on youth preference. This finding suggests that environmental constraints, such as flood vulnerability, unfavorable land conditions, and challenging topography, may reduce the attractiveness and usability of informal public spaces. Physical risks and environmental discomfort can generate uncertainty and limit users' sense of security and convenience, thereby discouraging frequent visits. This outcome aligns with Loukaitou-Sideris (2012), who emphasized that environmental risks and spatial deficiencies can negatively shape patterns of public space utilization. The present study extends this understanding by showing that even when visual and experiential qualities are strong, problematic environmental conditions can still undermine overall preference.

Other variables, including accessibility, facilities, safety, spatial flexibility, and place attachment, demonstrate positive but statistically insignificant relationships with youth preference in the regression model. Although these factors correlate positively with preference at the bivariate level, their individual predictive power diminishes when examined simultaneously with stronger experiential variables. This suggests that these attributes may function primarily as foundational or enabling conditions rather than as principal drivers of preference. In other words, accessibility, facilities, and safety may be considered necessary prerequisites for functional usability, yet they do not, on their own, generate strong attraction without compelling experiential qualities. This interpretation is consistent with Jacobs (1961), who argued that functional urban elements provide the structural basis for city life but must be complemented by vibrant spatial character to foster sustained engagement. Similarly, the Project for Public Spaces (2007) noted that successful public spaces integrate functional reliability with experiential richness, emphasizing that functionality alone is insufficient to attract and retain users.

The exclusion of the comfort variable from the final regression model due to multicollinearity provides additional theoretical insight. The strong overlap between comfort and other experiential dimensions, particularly visual attractiveness, indicates that comfort may not operate as a distinct, independent construct. Instead, comfort appears to emerge from the combined influence of aesthetic quality, environmental atmosphere, and contextual suitability. This supports Mehta's (2014) argument that comfort in public spaces is multidimensional and context-dependent, arising from the interplay of visual, social, and environmental factors rather than from isolated physical attributes. The multicollinearity finding therefore reinforces the conceptual understanding that experiential qualities in informal public spaces are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

Taken together, the results underscore the predominance of experiential and contextual qualities over purely functional attributes in shaping youth preferences for informal public spaces. While accessibility, safety, and facilities remain important components of spatial planning, they appear to operate as baseline requirements that enable use rather than as key motivators of preference. In contrast, aesthetic appeal and environmental suitability directly influence emotional engagement, spatial attachment, and the desire for repeated visitation. This pattern suggests that young people evaluate informal public spaces not only on practicality but also on experiential richness and symbolic meaning.

From an urban planning and design perspective, these findings highlight the need to prioritize visual attractiveness and environmental resilience when developing or revitalizing informal public spaces. Enhancing greenery, improving visual coherence, integrating shading elements, and ensuring scenic quality may significantly increase youth engagement. At the same time, mitigating environmental risks such as flooding and addressing unfavorable land conditions are essential to prevent negative perceptions that may discourage use. By integrating aesthetic enhancement with environmental suitability, planners and policymakers can create informal public spaces that are not only functional but also emotionally resonant and contextually sustainable for young users' everyday activities.

5. Conclusions

This study concludes that young people's preferences for informal public spaces are shaped more strongly by experiential and contextual qualities than by purely functional attributes. The empirical findings reveal that visual attractiveness is the most significant positive predictor of youth preference, indicating that aesthetic appeal, visual coherence, and overall spatial atmosphere are decisive in encouraging use and repeat visitation. Conversely, location conditions demonstrate a significant negative effect, suggesting that environmental constraints, such as flood vulnerability, land conditions, and topographical challenges, reduce the attractiveness and usability of informal public spaces. Although accessibility, facilities, safety, spatial flexibility, and place attachment show positive associations with youth preference, their effects are not statistically significant in the multivariate model. These results imply that while functional attributes serve as necessary supporting conditions, they are insufficient to drive strong user preference on their own; compelling experiential qualities are required.

The descriptive findings further indicate that youth respondents exhibit a strong overall preference for informal public spaces, particularly for socializing and relaxation. Visual attractiveness and natural supporting elements receive the highest mean scores among all variables, reinforcing the regression results that aesthetic dimensions are central to youth engagement. Meanwhile, environmental risks and noise levels emerge as relatively weaker aspects, highlighting areas requiring improvement. Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample is restricted to a specific youth demographic within a defined geographic context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other age groups or urban settings. Second, the cross-sectional research design captures perceptions at a single point in time and does not account for seasonal or longitudinal variations in space utilization. Third, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce subjective bias in evaluating spatial qualities. Future research could expand the study area, incorporate comparative urban contexts, and employ mixed-methods

approaches, including behavioral observation and spatial analysis, to enrich understanding of youth-space interactions.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that urban planning and design strategies should prioritize enhancing visual quality and environmental resilience in informal public spaces. Investments in greenery, shading elements, scenic design, and overall spatial aesthetics can significantly increase youth engagement. At the same time, mitigating environmental risks such as flooding and improving land conditions are essential to prevent negative perceptions that discourage use. Policymakers should adopt an integrated approach that combines aesthetic enhancement with environmental sustainability and inclusive design principles. By doing so, informal public spaces can function not only as accessible communal areas but also as emotionally engaging environments that support social interaction, well-being, and inclusive urban development for younger generations.

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