

An Empirical Case Study on Public Space and Youth Health and Mental Well-being in Botswana Cities and Major Urban Villages

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Abstract

Public spaces are vital in urban image and a settlement's sociocultural fabric and identity. Furthermore, public spaces affect the degree to which people and the community socialise, especially young people who face adverse challenges that affect their health and mental well-being. Research has proven that connection with nature and safe play spaces are vital to youth's healthy lives and cognitive and social development, where peer pressure and developing a sense of belonging are critical issues to youth who have become more susceptible to the effects of social exclusion in a digitising and urbanising world. However, intense urban transformation processes have led to an influx of challenges and sometimes threats to public spaces that require countries and the globe to revert some of the city systems and policies that govern settlements. Nonetheless, there should be an integration and interconnection between youth initiatives and urban systems for convivial public spaces. Through an empirical case study, composed of a mixed data collection approach using literature review, observation, questionnaire, and interview surveys, this research provides a more critical approach to assess public spaces in Botswana and their impact on youth mental health and social well-being who are faced with adverse challenges including social exclusion, unemployment, and drug and alcohol abuse. This paper starts by giving a background overview, then gives an in-depth understanding of public space in Africa, focusing on Botswana and probes to understand youth health and mental well-being in a continually urbanising and globalising world.

Keywords: place-making, public spaces, youth health and mental well-being, urban village

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I. Background information

Poor mental health is a global issue, and moreso for African youth, who make up approximately 60% of the continent's total population. African youth are at greater risk of mental health issues due to Africa's predominant challenges heightened by post-colonial era and globalisation impacts, such as unsafe digital space, high unemployment rates, and climate change (Magamelal et al., 2021). Good public spaces give youth more sophisticated social interactions, including encounters with strangers they would not ordinarily meet in their more private domains (Fleckney and Bentley, 2021, p. 114242).

Youth are often perceived as threats in society due to their association with social ills and violence (Diouf, 2003 pp. 1-4). Gray & Manning (2022, pp. 1400-1417) argue that youth are not often included in spatial politics; they are absent from social and psychological analyses of place as they are placed at 'risk' and 'risky' in the urban space. This has caused measures seeking to minimise their use of public spaces. However, young people should not be blamed for social ills; rather poorly planned environments and poorly conceived and created urban public realms have produced spatial disadvantages, resulting in reduced social networks, collective efficacy, stigmatisation, and land use patterns that impede access to community facilities, and greenspace (Fleckney & Bentley, 2021, p. 1142).

Public spaces have contested histories and perspectives, and have been understood from personal, cultural, and urban design and planning perspectives. The terms public space, open space, and place are often used interchangeably (Valdes, 2022 pp. 2-3) argues that public spaces are more than a network of streets and spaces between buildings but a building block of our communities that define and are defined by culture. Anastaciu (2021 p. 1) defines public spaces as open and enclosed places that are accessible and enjoyable by everyone for free and these can be categorised into four categories namely; streets, open spaces, public facilities, and markets.

Njokweni (2015, pp. 3-7) views public space as a new ideology in the African context; however, Blignaut (2020, pp. 1-12) argues that public spaces have always existed in Africa but have lost their unique roles due to influences from Western counterparts. He further argues that rapid urbanisation in Africa has led to the contestation of public space uses and perceptions; however they have evolved and carried out various activities such as celebrations, informal activities, and revitalisation activities to name a few. Colonial policies significantly influenced urban spaces in African settlements, challenging the development of place identity for African communities in the post-colonial era; however, African local history can enrich social and physical space through lived experience, the "spirit of place." (Home, 2021, pp. 317-337). Morobolo et al. (2018 pp 39-60) attest that colonies brought about spatial manifestations that redefined and affected spaces that created a sense of belonging to residents in Botswana.

For the past few decades, urban public space concepts in urban planning have continued to change and progress. Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte first described place-making concepts to reclaim the urban public realm in the 1960's (Moreira 2021 pp. 1-5).

Public spaces became more recognised from this concept as it advocates for a more participatory approach to urban planning where the community is at the forefront of issues affecting cities and city development in contrast to command urban planning, for the past decades, the ideas of the concept are still of relevance and have been used in various projects and academies to improve and enhance public spaces (Moreira, 2021 pp. 1-5). Mateo-Babiano & Lee (2019 pp. 4-6) elucidate that place-making is an evolving process that involves shaping, experiencing, and contributing to a multidimensional

'place', considering socioeconomic reality, ecological conditions, and political perspectives. However, Abbott-Chapman and Robertson (2015, pp. 123-134) argue that an individual's place identity, 'leisure' times, and spaces set apart for rest, relaxation, and a sense of play are becoming more porous for today's young people.

2. Problem statement

Young people are gradually attached to their digital lives, detaching from public spaces that alter how they socialise and form socialites with the real world. However, Duivenvoorden et al. (2021, p. 1) attest that although there have been many obstacles influencing urban residents' social and mental health, especially youth, as a result of urban development, public spaces have been recognised as essential components of metropolitan public life capable of improving mental health and well-being. Fleckney and Bente (2021, pp. 1-5) contend that the urban public realm encompasses the symbolic dimensions of the public space which is a social construct and an emotional investment in social and city development. However, neoliberal urbanism has been shrinking the public domain for young people as they have raised capital needs more than social development and mental well-being.

Despite public spaces having multifaceted definitions based on their characteristics, functions, management, and government authority and influence, their significance has been widely evoked by various academia and researchers; however, their capability to improve youth mental health and well-being has not been fully explored in most African countries. Managing public spaces and the practical provision of functioning and convivial public spaces to community and youth development has been challenging, which makes it difficult to attain the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goal 11 target 7 by the year 2030 (Duivenvoorden et al., 2021, p. 2-3). This has been the case in most settlements in Botswana and other African countries. Mosha (2014, pp. 1-4) terms public spaces as the lungs of urban centres, and further argues that public spaces in most areas, particularly Botswana, have been misused, neglected, and often used for activities impacting the urban landscape and community of the city in different forms.

3. Research aim and objectives

Through an empirical case study in one of Botswana's cities and urban villages, the study aims to understand public space roles in youth health and mental well-being, their uses, management, and how they are perceived by youth and the country's urban planning regulations.

4. Objectives

- To identify the roles, uses, accessibility, and interaction of public spaces and the youth in Botswana cities and urban settlements;
- To establish the degree to which urban planning regulations in Botswana recognise public spaces;
- To examine the role and impacts of public spaces on youth health and mental well-being.
- To examine strategies that can be employed to improve the management and performance of public spaces on social development and mental well-being of young people in Botswana and globally.

5. Geographical scope

The study is focused on the interconnection of the youth and public spaces in Main Mall Gaborone city and Central Business District (CBD) Letlhakane village in Botswana. The study examines these key areas as shown in Figure 1 and 2 assessing the accessibility, proximity and management of public spaces as well as their roles and interaction with young people in Botswana.



Figure 1 (top). Letlhakane Central Business District (Adopted from Google Earth, 2024)

Figure 2 (down). Gaborone Main Mall (Adopted from Google Earth, 2024)

6. Public spaces in Botswana

The morphology of settlements in most African countries, including Botswana, were affected by colonisation and the introduction of Western lifestyles to the colonies. Urban Safety Reference Group, (2020, pp. 4-6) cites examples from public spaces in South African cities which they argue have lost their quality because of colonialism and apartheid.

In Botswana, the dikgosi were responsible for the allocation and planning of their settlements' morphology through the horseshoe model. The *kgotla*, *patlelo*, or *lolwapa* were dominant public spaces that served as the backbone of the Indigenous Tswana model and the settlement, as depicted in Figure 3. According to Morobolo et al. (2018, p. 44), these spaces had various activities connecting people and serving several functions ranging from a playground for children, gathering places during cultural activities like weddings and funerals, as well as traditional games and entertainment activities for both young people and old. As time progressed, their emphasis waned, especially in urban areas due to the introduction of grid pattern morphology and adopted legislation and policies.

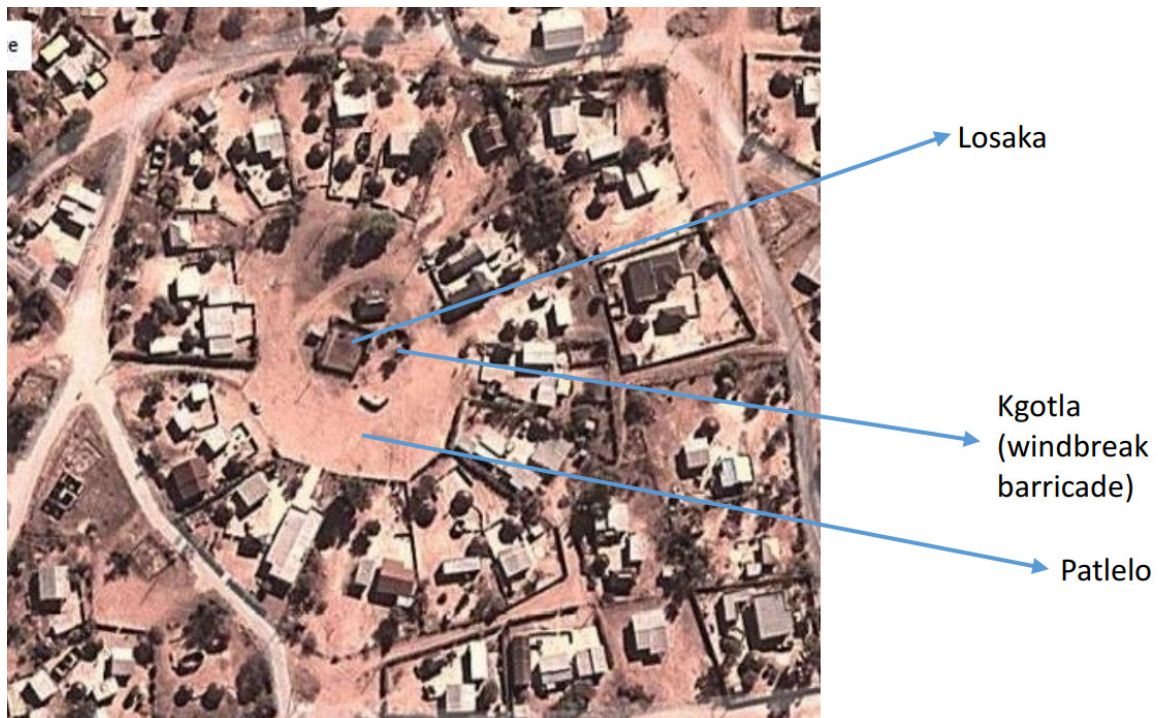


Figure 3. Indigenous Tswana Model (Morobolo et al., p. 45)

Due to the geometric layout of the streets proposed by the new model, public open spaces had to be allocated based on the number of plots within a particular neighbourhood with no specific relation to the plots surrounding it, aside from proximity (Morobolo et al., pp. 50-51). Public spaces in Botswana are now mostly recognised as open spaces that are to serve recreational activities. Mosha (2014 pp. 1-4) argues that open spaces are seen as individual sites such as parks or squares, and the continuous matrix of all unbuilt land in urban areas, public parks as well as private gardens and urban streets that provide the connectivity of different places. He further stipulates that public spaces have ecological, societal, structural, and aesthetic functions that promote health and well-being.

The Town & Country Planning Act (2013) of Botswana outlines that local authorities are responsible for regulating open spaces and any other public/community facilities as per section 19 (4) (schedule 2, part I section 2-3). However, public spaces in Botswana now have been subject to various challenges as they often have contested functions. According to Mosha (2014, pp.4-10), public spaces in Botswana are shaped by public policies, planning regulations, and conditions placed upon the granting of building permits. He articulates,

however, that in rapidly urbanising countries such as Botswana, open spaces are shrinking at an alarming rate and becoming less accessible; those that exist are used for informal activities that are not properly recognised in the planning legislation.

According to Costa et al. (2021 pp. 1-2), since the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 in December 2019, the global response in the form of lockdowns, confinement, restrictions on mobility, border control, etc., directly influenced the usage of urban fabric, limiting access to public spaces, and demanding a quick response from the authorities. They further contend that the current question is how a public space will respond to the needs and preferences of citizens, including adolescents, in this crisis and that policymakers, urban planners, and researchers must reflect on the consequences for public life and space sociability to city development.

Although African countries, including Botswana, have been affected by colonialism, Watson et al. (2009, pp. 198-200) suggest that planners in African and global south countries should invent their methods, processes, and techniques relevant to the context and shift from the continual direct withdrawal of global north ideas and innovations, or adapt to the methods and techniques to best suit conditions in the global south. Therefore, this research is based on the concept of 'learn globally apply locally' supported by Vanessa Watson's Global South planning theories.

7. Public spaces vs. Youth Health and Mental-Well-being in an urbanising and globalising world

According to the Revised Youth Policy of Botswana 2010, 'youth' is defined as a person aged 15-35 years (Minister of Youth, Sport and Culture, 2023, p. 5). According to UNFPA Botswana (2024 p. 1) over 60% of the population in Botswana is below 35 years and this proportion is growing. (UNFPA, 2024)

Due to various factors brought in by urbanisation and globalisation, youth have been facing complex and multifaceted mental health challenges in the African context, demanding a nuanced understanding and targeted interventions to address the unique cultural, social, and economic factors at play. Mpemba et al. (2023 pp. 11-13) stipulate that as technology advances rapidly, African youth find themselves at the forefront of the digital age, with their lives intricately woven into the digital landscape, however this has been a double-edged sword. Mpemba et al. (2023, pp. 11-13) argue that although the digital space has raised awareness of mental health issues globally, it has made youth vulnerable to issues such as threats, exploitation, cyberbullying, and the consumption of inappropriate content that has resulted in feelings of anxiety, depression, and a sense of vulnerability, impacting their mental well-being and loss of touch with the real world.

The World Mental Health Report shows that globalisation has been having a drastic impact on mental health; emerging nations have high rates of these issues, especially among young people (Amin, 2023 pp 1-2). According to Brook et al. (2022, pp. 4-6), the root causes of mental health problems among Botswana's youth identified by stakeholders included the rapid growth of technology, limited mental health knowledge among the youth and the community, family problems, poor communication, low self-esteem, and biological/genetic predisposition.

Collins et al. (2023, pp. 137-141) argue that urban life shapes the health and mental well-being of city dwellers; urban environments are often detrimental to mental health issues. This similarly relates to Guy Debord's work where he argues that in advanced capitalism,

life is reduced to an immense accumulation of spectacles, which prompts a shift from individual expression through directly lived experiences and inflicts significant and far-reaching damage to the quality of human life for both individuals and the society. Debord critiques that the ideology was “the abstract will to universality and the illusion thereof”, which was “legitimated in modern society by universal abstraction and by the effective dictatorship of illusion.” (Debord, 2021 pp. 1-215)

Abbott-Chapman & Robertson (2015) argue that public spaces are building blocks of cities and that public spaces have a mutual dependency relationship; the success of a building should be seen by how people interact with the vicinity of the building and the performance of a public space is seen by how people are attracted to a particular building.

Vesterhus (2015, p 1-14) argues that despite frequent usage of public areas, youth have a limited impact on their planning and development. He contends that young people seek places where they can feel safe while meeting their requirements for social contact, self-expression, and seclusion. Vesterhus (2015, p 1-14) further articulates that public space is formed and transformed by multiple factors which have played a critical role in the usability and interaction of public space and the youth. Youth need safe public spaces to come together, engage in activities related to their diverse needs and interests, participate in decision-making processes, and freely express themselves (Costa et al., 2021).

Although architects and planners are increasingly aware of the influence of natural and built environments upon an individual’s place identity, ‘leisure’ times and spaces set apart for rest, relaxation, and a sense of play are becoming more porous for the youth (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson 2015, pp. 123-134). Although there is limited literature in Botswana regarding public spaces and youth interaction, it is evident that the above challenges are also experienced by youth in the country. Dee & Crane (2001, pp. 13) argue that in many instances attempts to include “community” and social parameters in urban planning and development processes have not incorporated meaningful involvement of those young people affected by such processes; this is due to predominant challenges such as urban governance implications and socio-economic factors. Public spaces have significant importance in the life of the settlements and is fast attracting the interest of cities all over the world; however in the African context public spaces have not been anchored in planning policies and regulations (Njokweni, 2015, p. 2).

As depicted in Figure 4, Project for public spaces (PFPS) (2023) argues that a successful public space is easily accessible and pedestrian-friendly, while offering enough parking bays for personal vehicles and public transit. PFPS further stipulates that public spaces should be comfortable in terms of safety, cleanliness, and the availability of places to sit, should be walkable and attractive, but also hold a historic and spiritual feel. A convivial public space should also be vibrant and give a variety of activities to choose from, prompting strong social interactions. However, most places and public spaces are designed with little or no due consideration to the needs and preferences of youth which has affected their psychological, social and emotional development (Khalifa et al., 2022 p.1). According to Carmona (2018, pp.47-59), strategic considerations relating to how public spaces should be designed and planned for evolve and need to be changed over time, due to social dynamics and urban transformations. This criterion will later be used in the research to measure the quality of public spaces in the two chosen areas and how they cater for Botswana youth; however other aspects will be taken into consideration to critically analyse the quality and interaction of public spaces in the chosen areas.

What Makes a Great Place?



Figure 4. Tool/Criterion for successful spaces (Project for Public Spaces, 2023)
Available at: <https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking>

8. Methodology

The empirical study was conducted using a mixed data collection procedure that combines qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the topic thoroughly, as will be evident in the research findings and analysis. The deductive approach was used through a literature review to compare theories and concepts nested in the urban public realm and spaces and their impact on youth health and mental well-being, which have previously been discussed earlier with real-life situations experienced in Botswana cities and urban settlements. The inductive approach helped draw theories and interpretations from the raw data obtained from the observatory, interview, and questionnaire survey to help understand how public spaces in Botswana are perceived their current roles, and their impact and interaction with young people in the area.

A questionnaire survey as indicated in Annexure (i) was conducted in two settlements Gaborone and Letlhakane, Botswana, narrowing it down to one of the settlement centres, Gaborone Main Mall and Letlhakane Central Business District. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to the two settlements, Letlhakane and Gaborone (50 each), using the systematic sampling method where the questionnaires were distributed to the young people within the vicinity of the chosen geographical scopes at an interval of 10 minutes. The physical planning officer and environmental health officer were interviewed in Letlhakane as indicated in annexure (ii) to understand the roles performed by the local councils in public spaces as well as the challenges they face concerning the utilisation and management of public spaces. An observatory survey was also conducted in both settlements through

a question checklist as indicated in annexures (iii). The question checklist was informed by the criterion for measuring good public spaces stipulated earlier in this work by the Project of Public spaces. The observatory survey was carried out 2hrs/day for a week in each for the two selected areas to study patterns and engagement of youth with public spaces in Gaborone main mall and Letlhakane central business district area.

9. Research findings and analysis

Mental health and well-being issues identified by youth

Most of the youth showed that they are faced with various mental health and well-being issues in Botswana due to limited convivial public spaces as shown in Table 1. They shared a common concern that these issues are also associated with high unemployment rates and social media impacts in Botswana, as well as other various issues.

Mental health and well-being issues	Total number of respondents (Letlhakane)	Total number of respondents in % (Letlhakane)	Total number of respondents in Gaborone	Total number of respondents in % (Gaborone)
Stress	35	70	30	60
Anger issues	22	44	25	50
Anxiety	20	40	30	60
Mental breakdown	12	24	15	30
Depression	26	52	34	68
Eating disorders	15	30	20	40
Bipolar disorder	5	10	10	20

Table 1. Youth health and mental well-being issues identified by youth in Letlhakane and Gaborone (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)

Perception of public spaces by young people in Gaborone and Letlhakane

Three dominant public spaces were identified in the Central Business District (CBD) in Letlhakane namely; the Letlhakane public library, bus rank, and the street as indicated in Figure 5. However, young people perceived private shopping complexes as forming part of the public space and inevitable in public spaces.

Young people perceive the term public space differently. In Letlhakane, 50% of the respondents identified public space as a place of interaction or where people meet, 30% identified public space as free, open, and accessible places for everyone while 20% viewed public space as areas of recreation, refreshment, and relaxation. One of the respondents stated that they believe public spaces are places of interaction where different people from different walks of life meet, relax, and share common values and interests. In Gaborone, 44% of respondents believed public spaces to be places of recreation, refreshment, and relaxation, 30% identified public spaces as places of interaction or where people meet, while 26% viewed them as free, open, and accessible places for everyone.

10. The Quality of Public Spaces around CBD, Letlhakane

Figure 6 shows how Letlhakane youth rated the quality of public spaces in the CBD area. Most of the youth view the cleanliness and attractiveness of public spaces within Letlhakane CBD as poor. Young people showed common concerns such as poor sanitation and hygiene, limited toilet facilities, and poor waste management within the area, especially along the street which has limited street furniture.

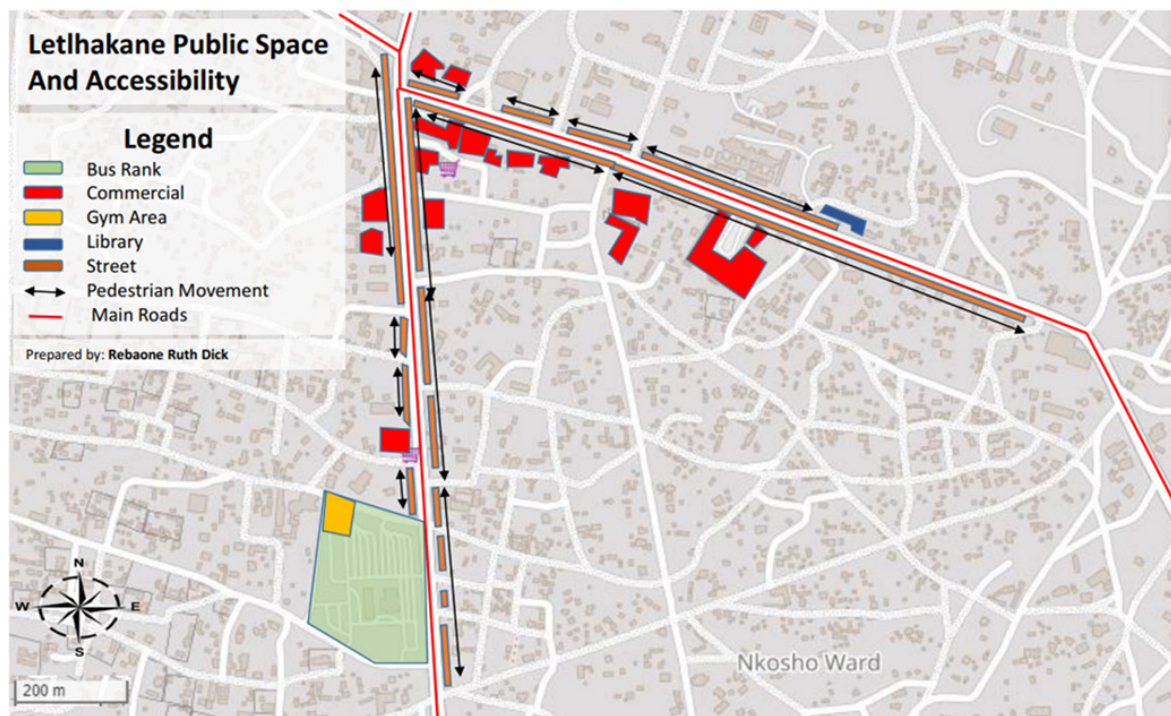


Figure 5. Letlhakane public spaces and accessibility (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)

Most of the youth rated the safety of public spaces within CBD, as average and good. Most of the respondents argued that Letlhakane generally has low crime rates; thus even the public spaces within the CBD area are safe. However, others indicated that although the aforementioned is true they do not feel safe and free, especially at night when there is little movement in the CBD area. More young people believe that the comfort of public spaces within CBD is poor as there are few places to sit and relax and no demarcated bicycle lanes and pedestrian walkways where people can walk without disturbance from vehicle movement.

Most youths view public space overall quality as poor and argued that public spaces around Letlhakane CBD do not cater to all users as they do not offer paraplegic facilities such as ramps, rails, and pattern mats for the blind. Some of the young people argued that although the public library has access to the internet and helps them conduct research and study, it is not convenient to use during weekdays as they spend most of their time at school during library hours. However, Letlhakane CBD is strategically placed at the village core along the main roads linking various locations and activities and many young people visit the bus rank area and library for various activities due to its proximity to local amenities as depicted in Figure 7.

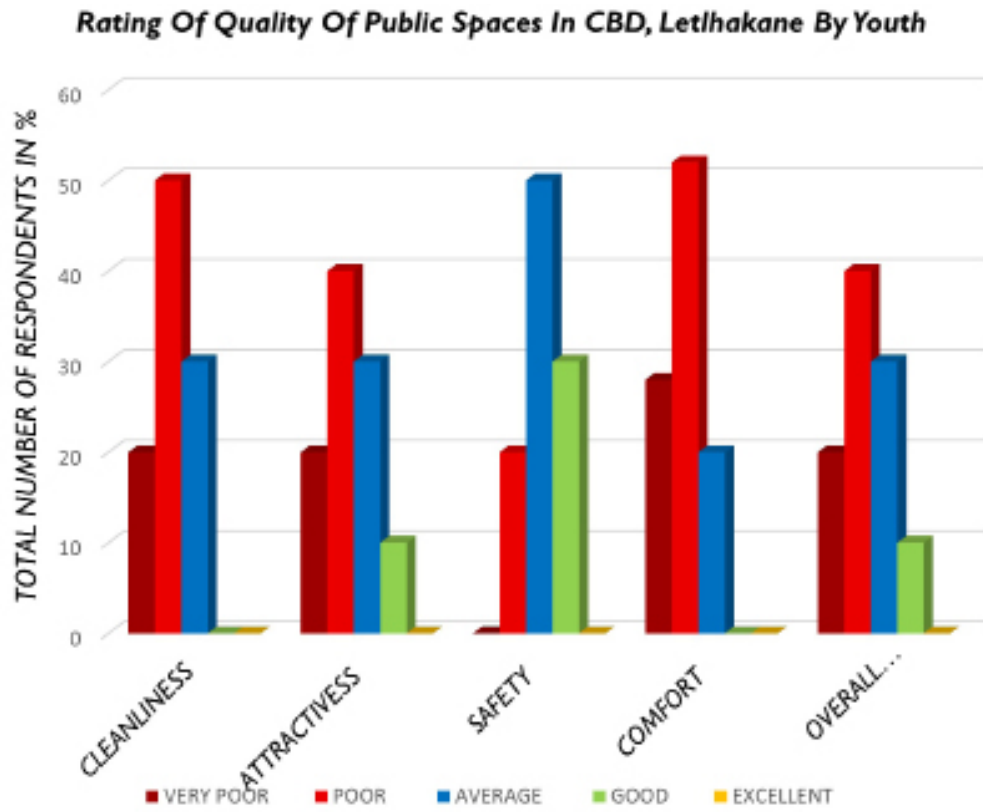


Figure 6. Rating of Quality of public spaces in Lethakane CBD (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)

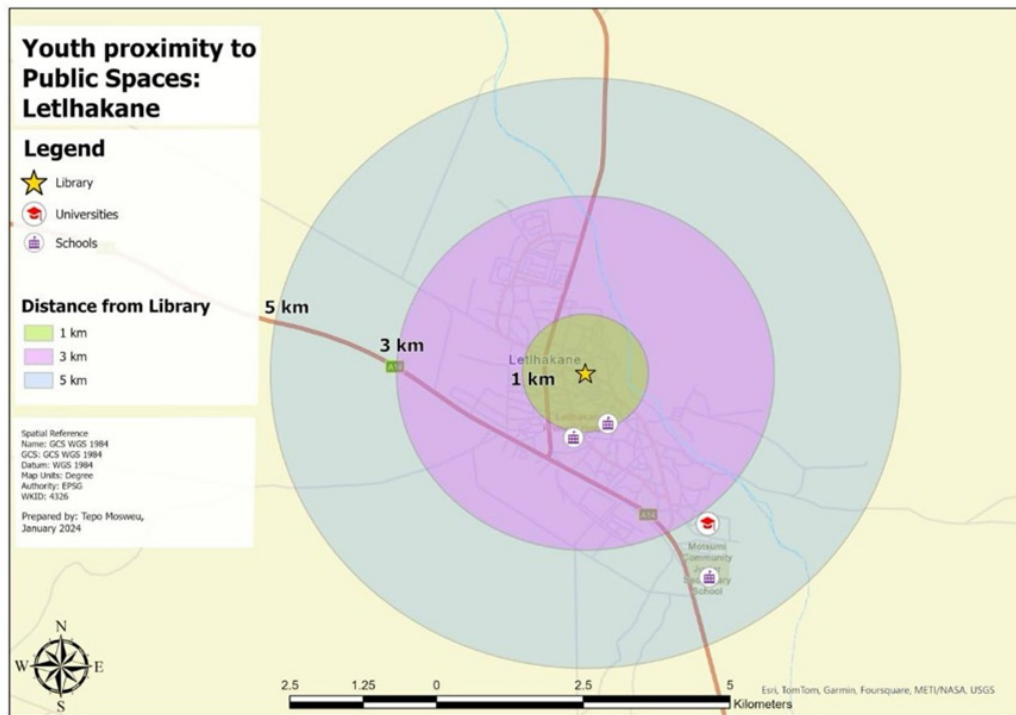


Figure 7. Youth Proximity to public spaces in Lethakane CBD (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)

Although there are no continuously paved walkways along the area, the youth use the road reserve area as a walkway corridor as depicted in Figures 8, and 9. The youth use a variety of transportation options such as taxis, private vehicles, walking, and bicycles to get to and through the space as seen in Figures 10 and 11. The space however does not fully cater for people with special needs as there are no ramps or rails and few paraplegic parking bays.



Figure 8. (left) Pedestrian walking along walkway strip CITATION Dic24 \l 1033 (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)
Figure 9. (right) Pedestrian walking along walkway strip CITATION Dic24 \l 1033 (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)



Figure 10. (left) Motorcycling along the walkway strip (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)
Figure 11. (right) Pedestrian walking along walkway strip CITATION Dic24 \l 1033 (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)



Figure 12. (both) Refuse bins in Letlhakane CBD; Bus Rank (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)

The spatial planners of the local authority indicated that the area has been facing challenges of underutilised and mismanaged public spaces. Informal traders are predominant users of these spaces especially in the CBD where most services and people are concentrated. This has caused a lot of consternation and alarm to some settlement-dwellers and business owners as some feel the informal traders have degraded these areas and disrupted the street facade. The planners further indicated that they acknowledge public spaces role in youth health and mental well-being, hence they have guidelines for the operation, maintenance and management of un-serviced open spaces in line with the Town and Country Planning Act of 2013 that they have recently used to tender out some of the open spaces to young entrepreneurs in the village to develop, improve, and uplift the face of these spaces.

Sitting areas are only found at the bus rank area, and are usually used by young people for meet-ups and waiting for transit buses, minibuses, and taxis. The space has limited flushable toilets which are located at the bus stop and the village council which is located in the vicinity of the public library. The bus rank was the only place noted to have refuse collection areas although most were damaged as depicted in Figure 12.

It was realised that public open spaces in the Letlhakane village are frequently abused as dumping sites and most are not yet developed and in some instances breed negative implications such as crime. During an interview with environmental and public health experts in the local authority, they articulated that the area and the entire village are challenged with littering as there is no landfill in the village. They also articulated that the village experiences high wind speeds that normally cause sand storms and scatter the litter from refuse cages and the dumping sites.

11. Youth engagement in Letlhakane CBD public spaces

The youth stipulated that they usually go for recreational activities at farm gardens on the outskirts of the village's built-up area, but often visit the CBD area for various activities.

Figure 13 shows various activities the youth identified in the CBD public spaces.

Most of the youth identified commercial activities as dominant activities in public spaces.

Some identified meet-ups as the most common activities, followed by sports activities and cycling around the area. Some of the youth identified photography, social events, and exhibition shows as one of the activities they engage in within the space. The last activity identified was research and studying at the library through study groups, studying, and access to free Wi-Fi and computers. Some respondents argued that public spaces in Letlhakane do not offer a variety of choices and that most of the entertainment that youth engage in is usually at bars or liquor restaurants, while open spaces and other public spaces are under utilised and mismanaged.

Most of the youth are engaged in commercial activities such as buying and selling vegetables, and other mini essentials along the walkway corridor and the bus rank area as depicted in Figure 14. The most dominant activity in this area is street vending which the youth in this area use to improve their lifestyles through various businesses as shown in Figures 15, 16, 17 and 18.

The youth use the library for studying, research and surfing the internet as it has free Wi-Fi network. The youth usually go to bus ranks where there are notable sitting areas by the buses and the waiting room. The bus rank also has an outdoor gym and open space which youth visit for exercising and socialising at fitness clubs as shown in Figure 19.

Activities identified by youth in CBD public spaces, Letlhakane



Figure 13. Activities identified by youth in Letlhakane CBD Public Spaces (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)

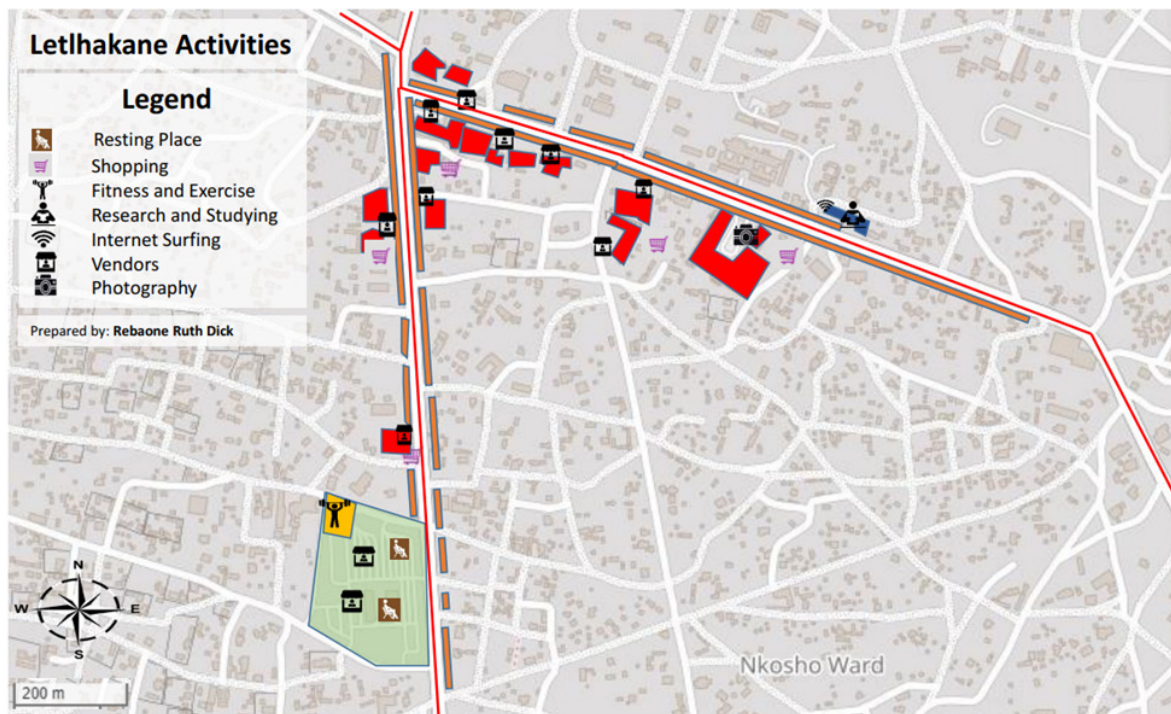


Figure 14. Activities in Letlhakane CBD public spaces (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)

12. Quality of public spaces around Main Mall, Gaborone

The youth of Gaborone had various perceptions and thoughts about the quality of Main Mall public spaces as shown in Figure 20. The youth argue that the cleanliness and attractiveness of the public spaces are average and good and indicated that waste management in the area has improved over time as there are accessible refuse areas within the space. The majority of the youth mentioned that Main Mall has been improving especially after hosting the Forbes under 30 Summit Africa, which not only uplifted the face of the plaza but also played a critical role in societal engagements, interactions, and economic development for the youth in Gaborone and the country together with young internationals.

Most of the youth rated the safety and comfortability of public spaces within Main Mall in Gaborone as good as it has enough sitting areas with shades where they can relax and meet others and low crime rates due to the police station in the vicinity. However some argued that the safety in the main mall space is poor and average respectively as they do not feel safe due to the city's generally high crime rates. Some showed concern that the space has limited access to some facilities such as toilets, which poses as inconvenience.



Figure 15. (left) Street vending CITATION Dic24 \l 1033 (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)
Figure 16. (right) Street vending CITATION Dic24 \l 1033 (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)



Figure 17. (left) Street vending (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)
Figure 18. (right) Street vending CITATION Dic24 \l 1033 (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)



Figure 19. Outdoor gym (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)

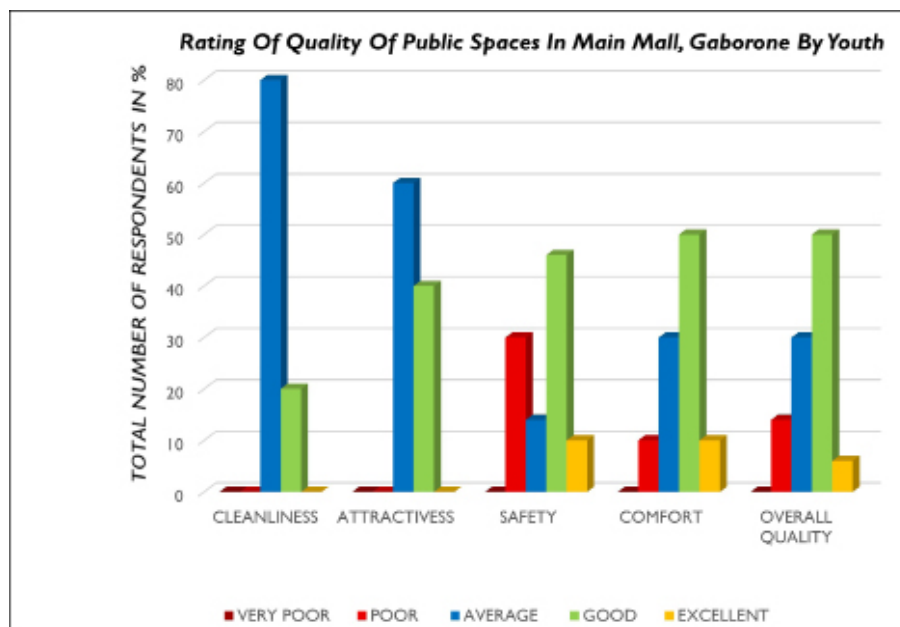


Figure 20. Rating of Gaborone Main Mall Public spaces by youth (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)

Most youth noted that due to high unemployment rates in the country, youth entrepreneurs identify this public space as a place to display their talents and businesses that build strong networks and social interactions. The majority of the respondents indicated that the space does not entirely cater to everyone, especially people with special needs, and that it only provides for one type of disability by providing ramps, rails, and paraplegic parking bays for those using wheelchairs while disregarding other disabilities. The Main Mall is strategically placed at the city core, linking various locations and activities as shown in Figure 21. Most young people visit the area as it is within walking distance of most tertiary institutions and schools. Occupants from adjacent buildings and amenities also use the space for various activities, especially during pick-up hours (lunch and after working hours).

It is easy to get to and through the space through various routes as depicted in Figure 22. The youth use a variety of transportation options such as taxis, private vehicles, walking, and bicycles to get to and through Main Mall plazas as seen in Figure 23. The space caters for pedestrian movements through continual paved walkways that connect the space and other adjacent locations and buildings. The space also has several parking bays with paraplegic parking bays and ramps from the parking bays to the pedestrian walkways and adjacent buildings.

The observatory survey showed that the space has various sitting areas convenient and comfortable to its users, especially the youth. The space has an attractive image dominated by its public art and cleanliness, the space has refuse collection areas and bins around as shown in Figure 24.

13. Youth engagement in main mall Gaborone

The youth indicated that Main Mall area has numerous services that they normally need on a day-to-day basis as shown in Figure 25.

Most youth identified meet-ups and relaxation as the most common activities they engage in, followed by attending entertainment shows such as Forbes under 30 Summit, and other seasonal shows. The youth also identified eating out in both restaurants and outdoor eateries around the main mall and attending social events and campaigns such as clean-up campaigns, health and fitness campaigns. The youth also identified photography, videography, exhibition activities, and commercial activities as one of the activities that are profound in the space. Some respondents identified showcasing artefacts and skateboarding which youth however indicated that they normally do at one of the parking lots but are often restricted from such.

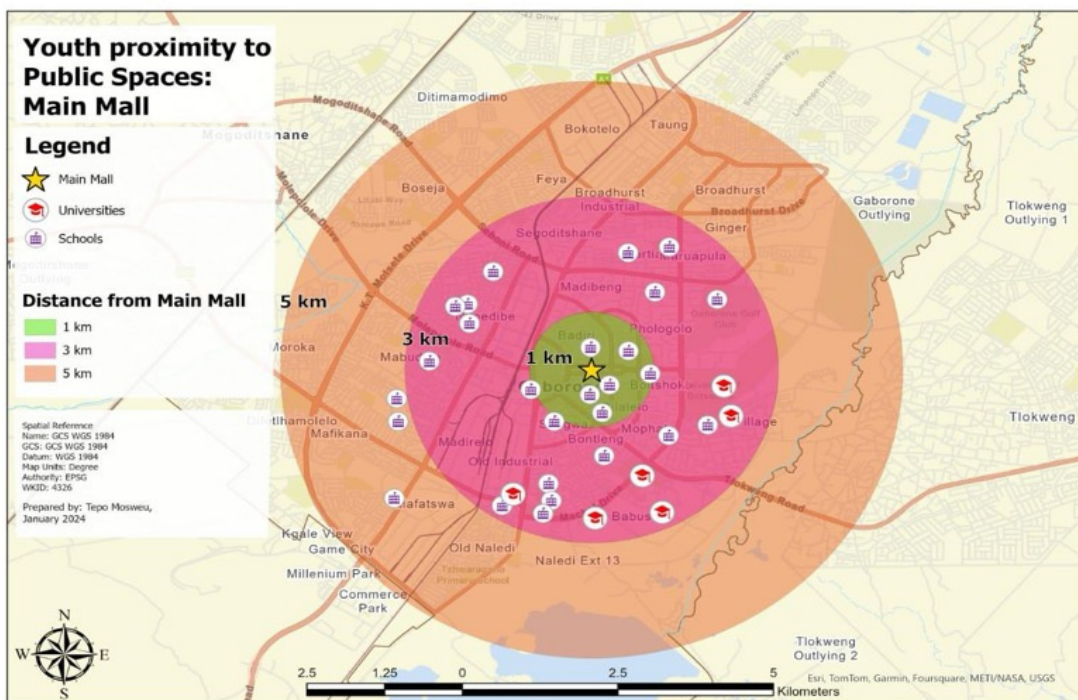


Figure 21. Youth proximity to public spaces in Gaborone Main Mall (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)

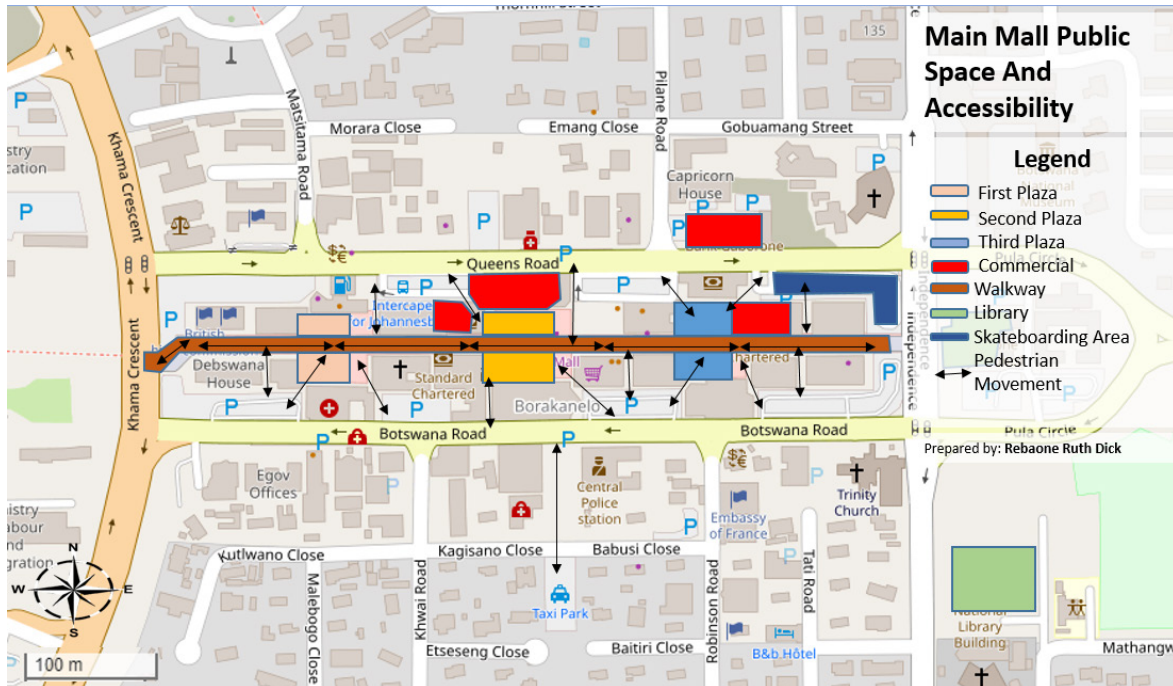


Figure 22. Activities in Gaborone Main Mall public spaces (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)

Public spaces in Main Mall offer diverse activities such as, vending, photography, videography, outdoor eateries, resting and meet ups as well as skateboarding as depicted in Figure 26.

Young people use the parking lot area behind the commercial establishments depicted in Figure 26, for skateboarding and shooting videos as it has rich public art on the walls to depict the activities happening around the area. It was noted that Main Mall has a flea market where dynamic activities are carried out. The youth were most concentrated on the third plaza popularly known as the ‘Diamond Square’, where they showcase their artefacts and take photographs as shown in Figures 27 and 28. The plaza also has vendors who have outdoor eateries that serve various food and refreshments as shown in Figures 29 and 30.

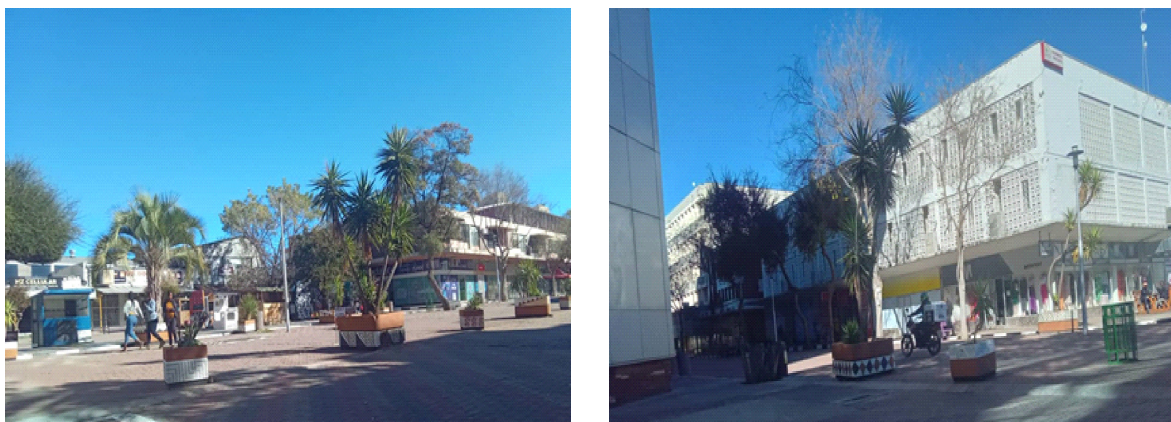


Figure 23. (both) Pedestrian movement and Motorcycling along Gaborone Main Mall
CITATION Dic24 | I033



Figure 24. Refuse bins around Main Mall public spaces (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)

Due to high unemployment rates in the country, youth entrepreneurs identify this area as an opportunity to display their talents, businesses, and at the same time, build strong networks and social interactions. Main Mall public space has a diverse and interactive feel where people usually meet and socialise. Young people were noted to be meeting in groups in this area and carrying out different activities. The plaza has sitting areas that are strategically placed with shading and youth use these for their ‘meet ups’ and to relax; hence, the youth find it comfortable.

The second plaza is where most entertainment shows and social events are carried out. The space on the walkway strip is dominated by strategically-placed vendors near the commercial complexes who sell goods such as traditional food, attires, vegetables, etc. (Figures 33 & 34).

Activities Identified By Youth In Main Mall Public Spaces, Gaborone

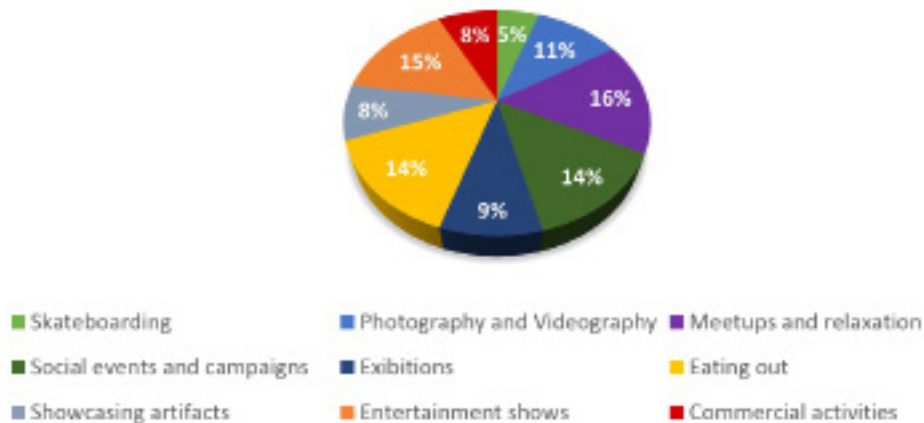


Figure 25. Activities identified by youth in Main Mall Public Spaces (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)

The first plaza has a sculpture at its centre that carries the cultural identity of Botswana as shown in Figure 35, and most people get photographs there and use the area for relaxation as it has seating areas and shade. Along the walkway corridor there are seating areas that have public art used for relaxation and photography, as shown in Figure 36. Public art was also noted on one of the pavements on the walkway strip popularly known as 'the Walk of Fame.'

In Letlhakane, the majority of respondents favoured private companies for the management of public spaces due to their financial capacity. However, 24% argued for community management, 20% suggested non-governmental organisations and 20% suggested local authorities as better placed to manage public spaces. In Gaborone, partnerships were preferred, while 24% suggested Non-Governmental Organisation management. A total of 20% of respondents favoured Local authorities for revitalising public spaces, while 16% preferred private companies for better aesthetics and activities.

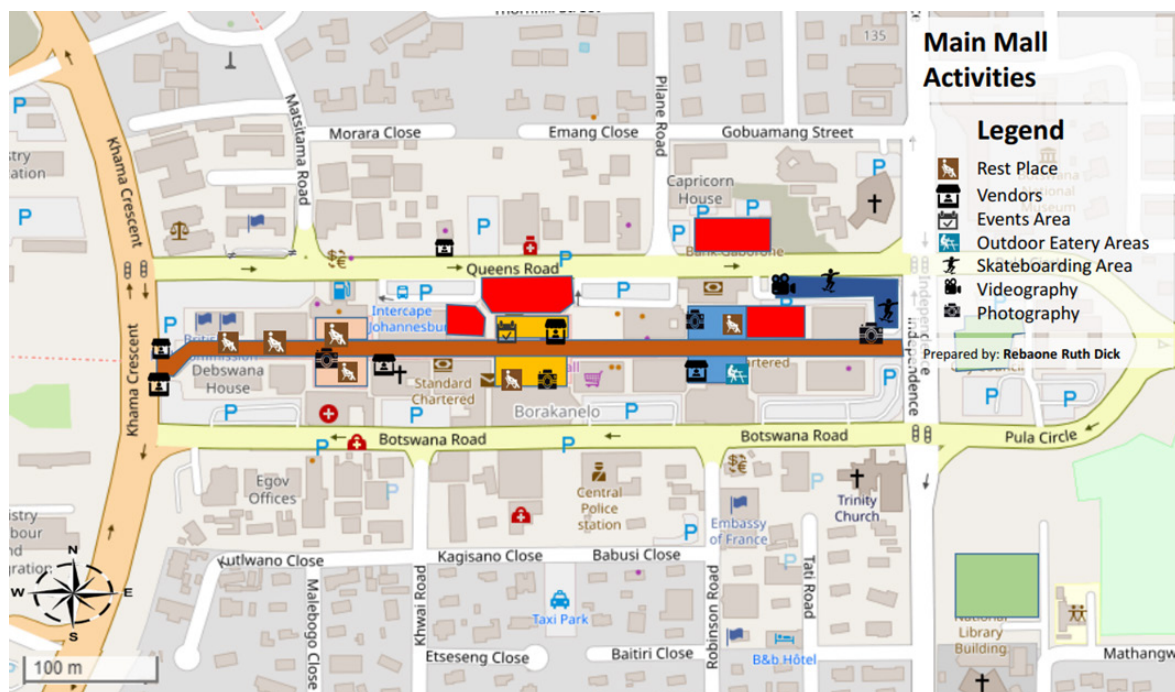


Figure 26. Activities in Gaborone Main Mall public spaces (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)

14. Recommendations and conclusion

Public spaces have always existed in Botswana but their functions and significance continued to wane due to colonisation, urbanisation and globalisation effects; however, they are gradually getting back their recognition as society is increasingly shaping public space functions and uses. Although upgrading existing spaces can be challenging due to financial constraints and bureaucratic practices, public spaces and entertainment areas are crucial in addressing the needs of youth in settlements. It is important to view public spaces as a remedy that can help improve the urban realm and create sustainable habitable places. Addressing special needs and promoting street vending and hawking is essential in the urban public realm. Encouraging young entrepreneurs and incorporating them in policy decision-making can create enabling environments for businesses in these public spaces. It is also clear that there is a need for a collaborative approach of local authorities with the



Figure 27. (left) Showcasing of artefacts CITATION Dic24 \ I 033 (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)
Figure 28. (right) Showcasing of artefacts CITATION Dic24 \ I 033 (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)



Figure 29. (left) Outdoor eatery CITATION Dic24 \ I 033 (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)
Figure 30. (right) Outdoor eatery CITATION Dic24 \ I 033 (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)



Figure 31. (left) Displays to promote businesses CITATION Dic24 \ I 033 (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)
Figure 32. (right) Displays to promote businesses CITATION Dic24 \ I 033 (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)



Figure 33. (left) Street vending (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)
Figure 34. (right) Street Vending: CITATION Dic24 V1033 (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)

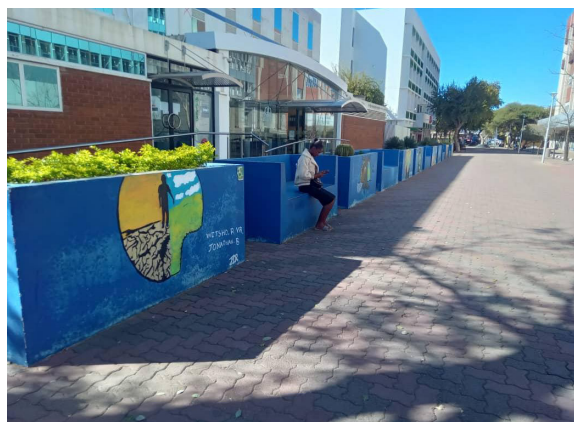


Figure 35. (left) Sculpture for cultural heritage CITATION Dic24 V1033 (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)
Figure 36. (right) Sitting area with public art CITATION Dic24 V1033 (Dick & Mosweu, 2024)

community, private companies, and NGOs to help manage, monitor, and evaluate public spaces as local authorities have financial constraints to do so. There is also a need to provide varied public spaces with unique activities to lure people to these spaces and help express individual and shared lived experiences within a community. Public art and cultural heritage has been utilised to revamp these spaces.

There is a need for more evidence-based policy interventions with youth at the forefront that will promote the historical and cultural sense of public spaces in Botswana. Green infrastructure and technology should be used to reduce the effects of climate change, lower the rates of psychological issues and poor health, and improve the economic growth of Botswana through investment and reinforcement of the tourism sector. This study experienced a few challenges and these include a lack of recent previous research studies on public space impact on youth health and mental well-being, limited statistical measurements, time constraints, and limited research resources. This limited the amount of data collected, hence, there is a research gap that needs to be filled relating to public spaces in Botswana. Although data from recent documentaries from the African context were used to try to bridge this shortfall this necessitates longitudinal studies on psychogeography to assess the impact of the geographical environment on behavioural patterns in Botswana. Emphasising public spaces in built environments and academia can revitalise urban areas, promote health, and improve economic significance in a globalising world.

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ANNEXURE (I)

Questionnaire to Youth

This questionnaire has been prepared to assist in obtaining research data for a research article titled: ***An Empirical Case Study on public space and Youth Health and mental well-being in Botswana cities and Major Urban Villages.***

NB: It should be noted that the information gathered is for research and policy intervention purposes and not for any other reason, strict confidentiality shall be considered and adhered to.

Section A

Please tick where appropriate.

Age: 15-18yrs 19-24yrs 25-30yrs 31-35yrs
Sex: Female Male Occupation: _____

Section B

1. What do you believe/ think public spaces are?

2. How often do you visit public spaces and what activities do you do there?

3. Which health and mental issues do you think the youth in your locality are more faced with?

4. What essence or role do you think public spaces have on youth health and mental health development?

5. For each question below, tick the response that best describes how you feel about the following statements/ questions.

	Very poor	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
How would you measure the cleanliness of public spaces in your locality?					
How would you rate the attractiveness and aesthetics of public spaces in your locality?					
How would you measure the safety of public spaces?					
How would you rate the overall quality of public spaces?					

Give reasons for the ratings given in question 5 a, b, c, and d.

6. Do you think public spaces in your locality cater to everyone?

Yes

No

Give reasons for the answer.

7. Do you think public spaces in your locality give a variety of choices and activities for the youth? Please tick where appropriate.

Yes

No

Give reasons for your answer.

8. Which facilities and improvements can/should be made to enhance youth engagement with public spaces in your locality and Botswana?

9. In your view, who would best manage public spaces in your locality? Please tick where appropriate.

Local Authority / City Council

NGO's

Community

Other

Give reasons for your answer.

10. What role do you think you should play/had played in the development of public spaces?

11. Any other comments and ideas?

Thank you!!!

ANNEXURE (II)

Interview Questions to Key Experts in Local Authority

These interview questions have been prepared to assist in obtaining research data for a research article titled: **An Empirical Case Study on public space and Youth Health and mental well-being in Botswana cities and Major Urban Villages.**

NB: It should be noted that the information gathered is for research and policy intervention purposes and not for any other reason, strict confidentiality shall be considered and adhered to.

Location: _____

Designation: _____

1. What do you believe/ think public spaces are?

2. Which health and mental issues do you think the youth in your locality are more faced with?

3. What role do you play/had played in the development of public spaces?

4. Which challenges have been faced in the development and management of public spaces by the local authority and your profession?

5. What do you think could be done to improve the state, development and management of public spaces and their engagement with the youth as well as to curb the challenges outlined above?

6. Which opportunities are there in relation to public spaces and youth health and mental well-being?

7. Any other comments?

Thank you!!!

ANNEXURE (III)

Question Schedule

Location: _____

Category	Measure	Yes	No	Additional Comments
Accessibility -Linkages -Walkability -Correctness -Convenience	Is it easy to get to and through the area?			
	Do adjacent buildings or locations' occupants (especially youth) use the space?			
	Does the space function for people with special needs or disabilities?			
	Is it pedestrian-friendly; are there sidewalks linking the area?			
	Do people use a variety of transportation options?			
Activities -Uses -Celebration -Usefulness -Sustainability	What kind of activities are done in the space?			
	Are there more young people than elderly people?			
	Which parts of the area are used more and the least by young people?	-	-	
Comfort -Safety -Good places to sit -Attractiveness -Cleanliness	Are there enough places to sit and are they utilised by youth?			
	Does the space offer photo opportunities for young people?			
	Are there enough WASH facilities?			
Sociability -Friendliness -Interactivity -Diversity	Are there young people in groups?			
	Do young people meet their various people there?			