Integrating Youth Well-being into Smart Urban Design: Insights from a Nationwide Survey to Inform Human-Centered City Planning

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Abstract

Understanding how young people envision happiness and ideal cities is essential for designing human-centered smart urban futures. This study explores the well-being perceptions of Japanese youth aged 16–24 (N = 2,437), using an online survey that included both closed and open-ended questions.

Topic modeling and cluster analysis revealed three dominant value orientations: Connection and Belonging, Freedom and Autonomy, and Stability and Security. These themes reflect diverse urban preferences grounded in emotional, social, and existential needs. While no urban feature showed strong statistical significance in predicting well-being, nature, safety, and cultural elements appeared consistently relevant.

Narrative responses highlighted symbolic openness and emotional nuance, suggesting the importance of environments that foster flexibility and non-prescriptive engagement—what we refer to as "slack fields." Though not directly measured, such affective dimensions may complement spatial metrics in digital twin and urban analytics systems.

This study contributes to value-based urban design by integrating youth perspectives and affective indicators into the smart city discourse. Its findings support more inclusive, emotionally resonant planning frameworks that go beyond technical efficiency.

1. Introduction

Cities are not merely technological systems—they are lived experiences. As smart urban development gains momentum globally, there is growing concern that city planning is becoming increasingly data-driven and automated, often sidelining the emotional and social needs of residents. Among the most underrepresented groups in this process are young people, despite their dual role as both current stakeholders and future stewards of urban life.

This study explores how youth in Japan envision happiness and ideal cities. Through a nationwide online survey of 2,437 individuals aged 16–24, we examine the emotional, social, and spatial values that shape their sense of well-being. Specifically, we ask:

(1) What types of urban environments foster young people's sense of belonging and emotional connection?
(2) What urban features support their autonomy, creativity, and purpose?
(3) How can these insights inform human-centered smart city planning?

While the smart city domain has made significant advances in technical domains such as mobility, energy, and governance, the integration of subjective well-being into urban analytics remains limited. To address this gap, we propose the conceptual model of a Slack Field—an affective buffer zone in urban life that captures psychological flexibility, symbolic belonging, and emotional safety. This construct is grounded in empirical insights from youth responses and interpreted through a mixed-methods framework combining clustering, topic modeling, and regression.

By embedding affective and value-based indicators into urban design thinking, this paper contributes to expanding the discourse on smart cities beyond efficiency and control, toward empathy, meaning, and inclusion. We argue that the future of human-centered city planning must cultivate emotionally resonant spaces that respond to the lived experiences of younger generations—those whose well-being today shapes the social sustainability of tomorrow's cities.

2. Related Work

In recent years, there has been growing international emphasis on well-being-centered urban development. Organizations such as the OECD, UN-Habitat, and WHO have promoted integrated frameworks that incorporate physical, social, and psychological dimensions of urban life. Research has linked specific urban features—such as green spaces, pedestrian accessibility, and public safety—with subjective well-being outcomes (Leyden, 2003; White et al., 2020; WHO, 2017). Human-centered urbanism has emerged in parallel, advocating for design strategies that prioritize emotional resonance, social connection, and quality of life over purely technical optimization (Gehl, 2010; Montgomery, 2013).

However, young people—particularly those aged 16–24—remain significantly underrepresented in both urban policy and smart-city analytics. This demographic often experiences a mismatch between their lived values and the structural offerings of urban environments (Arnett, 2000; Vallerand, 2000). In response, recent scholarship has highlighted the need for participatory and value-sensitive design approaches that reflect youth aspirations and emotional needs (Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Urban Institute, 2024). Subjective indicators—such as autonomy, symbolic belonging, and emotional safety—are increasingly being proposed as complements to spatial and economic metrics (Diener et al., 1999; Fujii, 2021).

At the same time, the smart city paradigm has been critiqued for its technocratic and efficiency-driven orientation, often

overlooking the affective and symbolic dimensions of urban life. Scholars in affective computing, narrative analytics, and urban anthropology have begun to call for more inclusive frameworks that incorporate emotion, ambiguity, and symbolic meaning into the design of urban systems (Kent & Thompson, 2018; Lahoz et al., 2025). However, practical integration of these perspectives into tools like digital twins and city dashboards remains limited. Our study contributes to this evolving discourse by proposing the concept of the Slack Field: an affective-spatial construct that captures the emotional and symbolic buffers young people seek in urban life. By grounding this idea in large-scale empirical data and youth-centered narratives, we aim to bridge the gap between value-based planning and smart-city technologies. This work thus offers an interdisciplinary contribution to the field of human-centered urban analytics.

3. Methodology

3.1 Survey Design

This study employed a nationwide online survey conducted in August 2024, targeting individuals aged 16–24 across all 47 prefectures of Japan. The survey was administered via GMO Research & AI, and after cleaning for incomplete or invalid responses, 2,437 valid cases were retained. The sample was approximately balanced by gender, education level, and residential context (urban/rural).

The questionnaire was designed to capture three core dimensions: (1) subjective well-being—both current and projected; (2) urban feature preferences—encompassing natural, social, and cultural elements; and (3) narrative interpretations of happiness and ideal city images. The survey included scalar items (e.g., 0–10 ratings), multiple-choice preferences, and free-text responses. Table 1 summarizes the structure and mapping of the key variables.

Internal consistency across related scalar items was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .78$), confirming acceptable reliability for composite interpretations. All free-text responses were pre-processed using MeCab for morphological analysis, and responses under 10 characters were excluded to ensure semantic robustness.

No.	Question	Type	Options
Q1	Age	SA	16–24 years
Q1s1	Gender	SA	Male, Female, Other
Q1s2	Current status	SA	High school, Vocational, University, Graduate, Working, Other
Q1s3	Residence (prefecture)	SA	All 47 prefectures
Q1s4	Area type	SA	Urban, Suburban, Coastal, Rural, Mountainous, Other
Q2s1_1	'Happiness' definition	Text	Free-text
Q2s2	Current happiness	SA	0–10
Q2s3	Future happiness	SA	0–10
Q3s1_1	Elements for happiness	MA	Family, Health, Safety, Food, Nature, Dreams, Stability, etc.
Q3s2c1	Top 3 priorities	MA	Same as above
Q4s1	Satisfaction with area	SA	5-point scale
Q4s2_1	Likes about area	Text	Free-text
Q4s2_2	Dislikes about area	Text	Free-text
Q5s1_1	Ideal city features	Text	Free-text
Q5s2_1	Elements for ideal city	MA	Nature, Culture, Safety, Learning, Youth spaces, etc.
Q6	Attractive initiatives	SA	Jobs, Events, Learning, Community, Other

Table 1. Structure of Survey Items and Variables Mapped to Analytical Constructs

Notes: This table outlines the main components of the questionnaire, categorized by type, content, and analytical role. It serves as a reference for understanding how survey questions were linked to dimensions such as subjective well-being, urban preference, and youth values.

3.2 Analytical Approach: A Mixed-Methods Strategy

To explore both quantitative patterns and subjective narratives, we employed a five-stage mixed-methods strategy. This approach allowed us to triangulate structured indicators with emergent emotional and symbolic content. All analyses were conducted in R (v4.4.2), using packages including tidyverse, topicmodels, cluster, broom, and udpipe.

(a) Descriptive Statistics
Subjective well-being scores (Q2s2 and Q2s3) were summarized by basic demographics. We conducted T-tests and one-way ANOVA across gender, area type, and age group. No significant differences were detected ($p > .05$), suggesting that perceived well-being was distributed relatively evenly among subgroups, thereby supporting further segmentation on non-demographic bases.

(b) Topic Modeling (LDA)
To analyze the meanings attributed to happiness (Q2s1_1), we applied Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) after tokenizing responses via Japanese morphological analysis (MeCab). A model with $k = 3$ topics was chosen based on coherence and thematic interpretability. This revealed underlying value orientations—e.g., connection, freedom, and stability—that shape how youth emotionally conceptualize happiness.

(c) Cluster Analysis
We then applied k-means clustering ($k = 3$) to individual-level LDA topic distributions, enabling segmentation based on semantic patterns. The elbow method guided the choice of k, and qualitative review confirmed conceptual clarity. The resulting clusters reflected distinct motivational profiles: (1) relational well-being, (2) autonomous exploration, and (3) security-oriented coping.

(d) Regression Analysis
To assess the predictive value of urban features, multiple regression models were run with subjective well-being scores as dependent variables. While many predictors did not achieve statistical significance at $p < .05$, variables such as natural space, psychological safety, and creative opportunities consistently showed positive standardized coefficients, implying their symbolic influence on youth perceptions.

(e) Thematic Coding of Ideal Cities

Free-text responses regarding ideal urban environments (Q5s1_1) were inductively coded. Recurring motifs included emotional openness, symbolic belonging, and personal transformation. These narratives suggest that youth value cities as adaptive emotional containers rather than static infrastructures. We interpret this as aligning with the concept of the Slack Field—a cognitive-affective buffer that enables experimentation, emotional safety, and flexible identity exploration in urban contexts. This construct offers a novel heuristic for integrating emotional indicators into smart city design.

3.3 Survey Limitations

While the survey achieved broad coverage across Japan's 47 prefectures, it was conducted online and may reflect certain biases—such as self-selection and overrepresentation of digitally literate youth. Future studies should aim to include offline respondents through mixed-mode data collection (e.g., interviews, in-school surveys). Additionally, free-text responses varied in length and depth, which may have influenced topic modeling outcomes. Expanding qualitative prompts may improve narrative consistency in future work.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Overview

The survey yielded 2,437 valid responses from individuals aged 16–24 across all 47 prefectures of Japan. The sample was approximately balanced by gender, educational background, and residential type (urban, suburban, and rural), offering a comprehensive demographic representation of the youth population.

Table 2 summarizes the demographic characteristics and reports the average scores for current and projected subjective well-being (Q2s2 and Q2s3). The mean current well-being score was 6.7 (SD = 1.9), while the projected well-being five years into the future was notably higher at 8.5 (SD = 1.7). This contrast suggests a generally optimistic self-forecast among Japanese youth, despite modest present-day scores.

To assess subgroup differences, independent t-tests and one-way ANOVA were conducted across gender, residential type, and age group. No statistically significant differences were found in either current or future well-being, implying a shared emotional baseline across key demographics. This finding supports the conceptual approach taken in this study: interpreting urban aspirations through common symbolic and affective frames rather than rigid sociodemographic distinctions. These results set the foundation for deeper exploration into the values, narratives, and symbolic preferences that inform how young people imagine their ideal cities.

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	16	321	13.2
	17	250	10.3
	18	259	10.6
	19	188	7.7
	20	229	9.4
	21	230	9.4
	22	278	11.4
	23	273	11.2
	24	409	16.8
Gender	Male	1063	43.6
	Female	1374	56.4

Current Status	High School Student	773	31.7
	Vocational Student	116	4.8
	University Student	603	24.7
	Graduate Student	55	2.3
	Working Adult	765	31.4
	Other	125	5.1
Residential Area Type	Urban	588	24.1
	Suburban	1146	47.0
	Coastal	137	5.6
	Rural	382	15.7
	Mountainous	179	7.3
	Other	5	0.2

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents (N = 2,437)

Notes: This table summarizes the age, gender, educational status, and residential area types of the youth sample, confirming broad national representation across Japan.

4.2 Topic Modeling Results

To examine how young people define "happiness," we analyzed responses to the open-ended question "What does happiness mean to you?" (Q2s1_1) using Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA). This technique enables the identification of latent semantic patterns in free-text data, offering insight into shared value orientations beyond preset categories.

The responses, written in Japanese, were preprocessed via morphological tokenization using the udpipe package. After testing multiple configurations, a three-topic solution was selected based on semantic coherence and interpretability. Each topic represents a distinct emotional and cognitive lens through which youth construct their understanding of happiness.

• Topic 1: Emotional Belonging – Emphasizing interpersonal relationships and community ties, with frequent words such as "family," "friends," "support," "connection," and "love."

• Topic 2: Personal Autonomy – Highlighting individual freedom and self-expression, including terms like "free time," "doing what I love," "being myself," and "no pressure."

• Topic 3: Stability and Security – Centered on mental calm, economic safety, and predictability, reflected in keywords like "peace," "income," "health," "future," and "no anxiety."

These results reveal that happiness, for Japanese youth, is not a unidimensional goal but a multidimensional construct encompassing relational, autonomous, and security-driven values. The diversity of expressions extracted through LDA suggests that affective needs—rather than structural indicators—play a significant role in shaping young people's emotional expectations of urban life.

Table 3 summarizes the key characteristics of each topic.

Topic	Thematic Label	Representative Keywords
1	Emotional Belonging	family, friends, support, connection, love
2	Personal Autonomy	free time, doing what I love, being myself, freedom
3	Stability and Security	peace, income, health, future, no anxiety

Table 3. Latent Themes of "Happiness" Identified via Topic Modeling (LDA)

Notes: This table lists the keywords associated with each topic extracted from open-ended responses to "What does happiness mean to you?" Each topic represents a distinct psychological orientation: social belonging, personal autonomy, or psychological stability.

These thematic categories provide a foundation for segmenting respondents based on their dominant narrative orientation. In the next section, we employ cluster analysis to examine how these themes converge into distinct value-based profiles, informing urban design preferences.

4.3 Cluster Analysis

To build upon the topic modeling findings, we conducted a cluster analysis to segment respondents based on their dominant happiness narratives. This allowed us to identify recurring value-based profiles that reflect shared emotional orientations among youth, providing a foundation for more targeted urban design implications.

Using the topic proportions generated by the LDA model, k-means clustering was applied. The optimal number of clusters was determined as k = 3 through silhouette analysis, balancing interpretability with internal consistency. Each respondent was assigned to one of the three clusters based on their individual topic distribution.

The resulting clusters are described as follows:

• Cluster A: Community-Oriented (42%)

Characterized by strong emotional ties, relational thinking, and collective well-being. Respondents in this group emphasized values such as support, connection, and mutual care. Their happiness narratives were rich with terms like "together," "community," and "family."

→ Urban implication: These youth are likely to prefer shared public spaces, local festivals, and emotionally resonant environments that foster a sense of belonging.

• Cluster B: Autonomy-Seeker (35%)

Defined by a desire for freedom, creativity, and psychological independence. Respondents expressed a strong emphasis on doing things "at their own pace," "being unjudged," and "having time alone."

→ Urban implication: They may be drawn to flexible, low-surveillance, expressive urban spaces—such as creative hubs, informal zones, and quiet retreats for self-reflection.

• Cluster C: Stability-Oriented (23%)

Anchored in the pursuit of peace, financial security, and low-anxiety environments. This group emphasized mental safety and predictable surroundings as key to happiness.

→ Urban implication: Preferences may lean toward structured, safe, and economically supportive infrastructures, such as reliable public services and low-stress commuting.

Figure 1 illustrates the average topic distribution across these three clusters. Each cluster shows a distinct narrative configuration derived from the latent themes of happiness, indicating that young people engage with urban environments through varying emotional lenses.

These findings underscore the diversity of emotional orientations among youth, even within a demographically consistent population. The segmentation provides a valuable lens through which smart city design can respond to differentiated emotional and psychological needs.

In the following section, we assess how these value-based profiles relate to specific urban features and their perceived connection to subjective well-being.
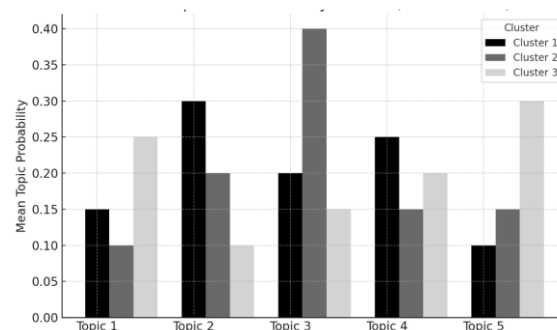

Figure 1. Topic Composition by Narrative Cluster (k = 3)
Notes: The chart displays the relative proportion of each latent topic (identified via LDA) within three narrative clusters derived through k-means clustering. The clusters represent Community-Oriented, Freedom-Seeking, and Stability-Oriented profiles of youth happiness narratives.

4.4 Regression Findings

To examine how young people's preferred urban features relate to subjective well-being, we conducted multiple linear regression analyses using two dependent variables: current happiness (Q2s2) and anticipated happiness five years into the future (Q2s3). Independent variables were derived from selected ideal urban elements (Q5s2_1, multiple selection) and preferred local initiatives (Q6, single choice). All predictors were dummy-coded and standardized.

As shown in Table 4, no predictor reached statistical significance under conventional thresholds ($p < .05$). While this may initially suggest a lack of explanatory power, it is important to interpret these findings with nuance. The subjective nature of well-being and the symbolic interpretations of urban features among youth may not conform to conventional linear models. However, several features—including access to nature, cultural spaces, safety, and learning opportunities—consistently showed positive beta coefficients across both dependent variables.

These directional patterns suggest a latent affective resonance rather than direct causality. For example, "nature" may symbolize more than green spaces; it may evoke emotional recovery or mental spaciousness. Similarly, "culture" might represent self-expression, diversity, or the freedom to imagine. These symbolic meanings, while not easily captured through parametric models, are crucial for understanding the psychological infrastructure of urban preference.

Importantly, the lack of statistical significance does not invalidate these insights. Instead, it calls attention to the limitations of traditional metrics when applied to emotionally complex and symbolically dense data. We argue that future research should integrate complementary methods—such as structural modeling, Bayesian estimation, or narrative analysis—to better capture the affective and interpretive dimensions of urban design preferences.

Ultimately, these findings highlight the importance of designing cities that align not only with functional needs but also with emotional expectations. Incorporating affective dimensions such as emotional safety, symbolic openness, and imaginative affordance into urban planning may prove vital to enhancing well-being among younger generations.

A full list of coefficients is presented in Table 4.

Predictor	β: Current SWB	β: Ideal SWB	Significance
Natural Environment	.08	.13	p < .10
Cultural Expression	.07	.12	n.s.
Safety	.06	.11	n.s.
Youth Spaces	.05	.09	n.s.
Transportation	.03	.06	n.s.
Community Connections	.02	.04	n.s.
Events and Entertainment	.01	.03	n.s.
Learning Opportunities	.02	.05	n.s.

Table 4. Regression Coefficients of Urban Features on Subjective Well-being

Note: This table reports standardized beta coefficients from multiple linear regression models predicting current and ideal well-being scores based on preferred urban attributes. Although significance levels are limited, the directional trends suggest perceptual relevance of nature, culture, and safety.

4.5 Exploratory Interpretation of Open Responses

To further explore youth perspectives on urban well-being, we analyzed free-text responses to the prompt: "What kind of city would you like to live in?" (Q5s1_1). Unlike previous questions focused on scalar or categorical evaluations, this open-ended item aimed to elicit deeper emotional and symbolic visions of future cities. The responses were qualitatively coded and interpreted through an inductive thematic approach, allowing latent psychological constructs to emerge.

Several representative narratives included:

- A place where I can be myself without fear.

- A city that lets me try, fail, and try again.

- Somewhere that doesn't expect me to always smile, but supports me when I cry.

Rather than focusing on infrastructure or services, these narratives emphasize affective qualities such as emotional safety, symbolic openness, and the right to vulnerability. This finding suggests a critical gap in conventional urban indicators—such as transportation coverage, service density, or digital infrastructure—which rarely account for these subjective and psychological needs.

These expressions align with our theoretical proposition of a Slack Field: a symbolic and cognitive buffer zone that enables individuals to explore, adapt, and restore their psychological flexibility. Although not directly measured, the recurrence of themes such as permission to fail, emotional elasticity, and personal authenticity indicates the conceptual validity of the Slack Field as a latent perceptual space.

This observation reinforces our initial research hypothesis that well-being is not merely a function of tangible urban inputs but also of affective affordances. The Slack Field thus operates as a metaphorical infrastructure—an emotional "layer" in the city's cognitive architecture—that supports psychological resilience and adaptive identity construction. This concept fills a critical blind spot in existing smart city frameworks, which tend to emphasize technological optimization over emotional resonance. From a methodological standpoint, the integration of open-ended narratives provides complementary validation to the structured data analyses presented earlier (LDA, clustering, regression). While the quantitative findings offered limited statistical significance, the qualitative results reveal coherent symbolic patterns that speak to the broader emotional ecosystem desired by young people.

We argue that next-generation urban platforms—such as digital twins—should embed affective indicators as part of their design philosophy. This includes developing tools that capture emotional security, symbolic inclusivity, and narrative flexibility as dynamic urban parameters. Doing so would represent a meaningful evolution from "smart" to emotionally intelligent cities.

In conclusion, this interpretive layer offers both empirical insight and conceptual innovation: it bridges the gap between subjective urban imagination and normative urban metrics, suggesting that the future of urban well-being must be shaped not only by efficiency, but also by empathy.

These patterns of emotional and symbolic preferences—spanning safety, authenticity, and openness—align conceptually with the foundational stages of the ASOBI–Resilience Mediation Model (ARM), which we will elaborate in the following section.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how young people aged 16–24 in Japan conceptualize happiness and ideal urban life, drawing from both quantitative and qualitative data across 47 prefectures. Through topic modeling, cluster analysis, and interpretive coding of open responses, we identified a range of affective and symbolic values that remain underrepresented in existing smart urban design paradigms.

Our findings support the hypothesis that emotional and symbolic affordances—such as the sense of safety to fail, freedom from judgment, and permission for vulnerability—are critical to youth well-being, and yet are often absent in traditional infrastructure-centric planning. This disconnect points to a significant gap between the prevailing logic of smart cities, which emphasizes efficiency and data optimization, and the lived emotional landscapes of young citizens.

To address this gap, we introduced the concept of the Slack Field: a cognitive-affective space within the city that allows for psychological flexibility, emotional restoration, and authentic identity formation. The Slack Field is not a physical structure, but a symbolic layer of urban experience—comprising emotional safety, narrative openness, and the permission to explore. It is particularly relevant for younger populations navigating uncertainty in social and developmental transitions.

The integration of this concept into urban planning frameworks offers a novel contribution to smart city discourse. While previous research has advanced the technical sophistication of digital twins, real-time data analytics, and infrastructure design, few studies have proposed affective indicators as a formal design criterion. By embedding such values into planning tools, future urban environments can evolve from merely "smart" to emotionally responsive—supporting not just the logistics of life, but the psychological needs of their inhabitants.

Methodologically, this study contributes to the field by demonstrating how mixed-methods research can reveal hidden symbolic dimensions in large-scale youth surveys. Although the statistical models showed limited significance, the interpretive consistency across methods underscores the importance of narrative and affect in shaping urban preferences.

We suggest that policymakers, designers, and researchers consider integrating Slack Field concepts into participatory design, digital simulation, and planning evaluation. Doing so would not only bridge the emotional-technical divide, but also create cities that feel livable, adaptable, and emotionally sustainable.

In sum, this research contributes to a growing movement that reimagines urban design as an emotionally intelligent process—one that honors the complexities of human well-being, especially among the generation whose choices will shape the cities of tomorrow.

6. Future Directions

The findings of this study point toward a transformative direction for future urban design: cities that are not only efficient and sustainable but fundamentally human-centered and emotionally inclusive. As younger generations articulate desires for emotional safety, personal authenticity, and psychological flexibility, planners and policymakers must reconsider how urban spaces are conceptualized, measured, and governed.

First, it is essential to recognize that affective dimensions—such as symbolic openness, freedom from judgment, and space for narrative flexibility—are not peripheral but core components of urban livability. Traditional metrics based solely on infrastructure, economic output, or service provision risk neglecting the emotional undercurrents that shape everyday urban experience.

To further theorize this latent emotional infrastructure, we propose an integrative framework based on the ASOBI–Resilience Mediation Model (ARM). As illustrated in Figure 2, this model conceptualizes ASOBI—a form of cognitive slack or mental leeway—as a foundational cultural and psychological resource. Through the experiential stages of Fail, Excite, Analyze, and Try (FEAT), individuals cultivate adaptive flexibility, which in turn enhances resilience, strengthens decision-making, and ultimately contributes to subjective well-being (Iwamoto, 2025).

The ARM model thus offers a theoretical scaffold that connects micro-level psychological dynamics with macro-level urban planning. It provides a structured rationale for why youth-friendly cities should promote environments that enable narrative flexibility, emotional openness, and symbolic affordances—features central to what we define as a Slack Field. From this perspective, cities are reimagined not only as service providers but as cognitive ecosystems that support human flourishing across life stages.

Second, although this study focused on youth perspectives, the aspirations uncovered—emotional safety, cognitive flexibility, symbolic richness—are not confined to a single generation. Designing for youth effectively means designing for future cities that will serve residents across all life stages. Inclusive planning must account for generational diversity, cultural plurality, and evolving emotional landscapes, avoiding narrow demographic targeting that risks excluding vulnerable or marginalized groups.

Third, digital transformation provides an unprecedented opportunity to embed emotional intelligence into urban systems. Digital twins, participatory urban dashboards, and affective sensing technologies can extend beyond tracking mobility and infrastructure to mapping emotional atmospheres, symbolic affordances, and experiential satisfaction. Integrating soft indicators into hard systems is critical for achieving genuinely human-centered smart cities.

However, realizing these visions requires a paradigm shift in how urban success is evaluated. Success must not only be measured by efficiency, density, or connectivity, but also by the degree to which cities foster narrative multiplicity, emotional security, and opportunities for self-actualization. Policy frameworks must thus evolve to prioritize affective outcomes alongside economic and environmental goals.

Finally, future research must continue to explore how concepts such as the Slack Field, emotional resilience, and symbolic flexibility can be operationalized in diverse urban contexts. Longitudinal studies, participatory experiments, and cross-cultural comparisons are needed to validate and expand these constructs. Collaborations between urban planners, psychologists, technologists, and residents themselves will be
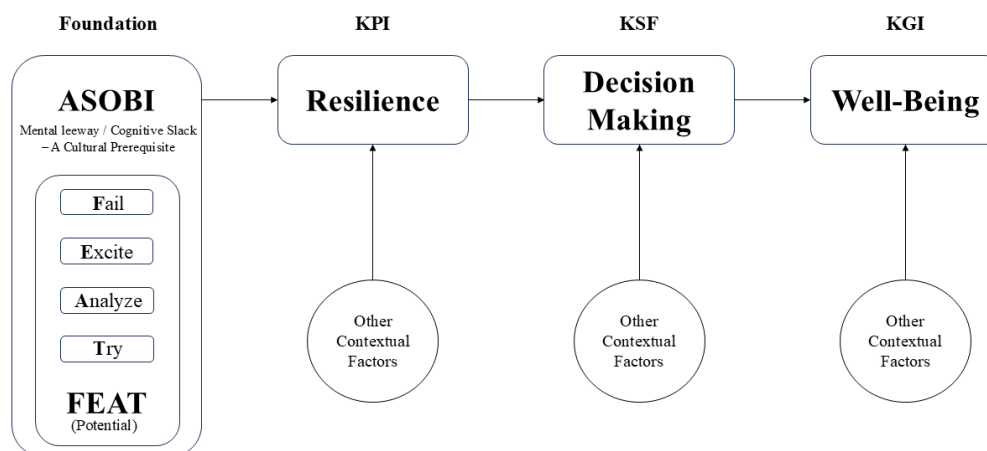
ASOBI-Resilience Mediation Model

Figure 2. The ASOBI–Resilience Mediation Model (ARM)
Notes: This conceptual framework illustrates how **ASOBI (mental leeway or cognitive slack)**—cultivated through Fail, Excite, Analyze, and Try (FEAT)—serves as a foundation for building **resilience**, enhancing **decision quality**, and promoting **subjective well-being**. The model provides a cognitive-affective structure through which cities can be understood as psychological ecosystems.

essential to building truly inclusive cities of tomorrow.

In sum, youth perspectives illuminate a broader imperative: the urgent need to reimagine cities as empathetic ecosystems that nurture not only bodies but minds, not only productivity but meaning. By centering emotional and symbolic well-being, we move toward cities that are not only smarter—but profoundly more human.

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