

## Navigating “phygital” space of urban youth

How do urban youth actively shape the environments that shape their mental well-being?

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### Project description

Have you ever felt lonely in a city full of people, reaching for your phone without knowing why, and struggling to sleep without scrolling? You are far from alone. Rates of loneliness, anxiety, and poor sleep among young people across Europe have been rising steadily, and researchers are struggling to explain why ([McGorry et al., 2024](#)). Part of the problem lies in current research that seeks to explain these outcomes by measuring only individual characteristics and either physical or digital environments in which youth inhabit. However, in the current world, these two environments are entangled in an inseparable reality of the physical spaces we move through and the digital worlds we carry with us everywhere we go- thus a new single hybrid reality (‘Phygital space’) has been co-created and experienced by youth ([De Souza, 2006](#)). Most of our existing research tools capture physical environments with maps and sensors, and digital environments with screen time logs and platform data ([Buttazzoni et al., 2022](#)). Existing research lacks studies of the synergistic phygital experience and how it co-shapes the perceptions, emotions, and behavior of youth in real time, and how these, in turn, shape mental well-being. This project sets out to change that.

In this project, as a Bright Mind assistant on our team, you will investigate: how urban youth experience and move through the Phygital space in urban contexts they use every day. You will critically focus on the moments that matter: *when does a physical space pull youth in, and when does it push them toward their phone? How do they perceive and experience an outdoor space based on their physical movements and digital activities? Do certain components of these hybrid space experiences influence their mental well-being?*

Following a mixed-method research approach, in this project, your task will include:

- i. Collect quantitative survey and walk-along interview data on youth Phygital space encounter, perceived, lived experience of both worlds, and mental well-being
- ii. Analyze these data utilizing statistical and thematic analysis to identify the synergetic relations between physical and digital worlds and their relation to mental well-being

Through this project, you will have hands-on experience in co-designing research, collecting diverse data, and analyzing them to answer critical scientific and social questions.

### Job requirements

I encourage you to apply if you have a deep interest in solving crucial social problems related to declining mental well-being and increasing loneliness among young people, with a critical view of how their perspectives have been integrated into the current academic debate. Additionally, this project will attract someone who wants to explore cutting-edge topics using diverse datasets and analytical methods. Students from any discipline are welcome. Some experience with qualitative and quantitative data collection methods and with analyzing these data will be needed. You need a mindset to work outside your desk, as you have to conduct interviews in various places in Utrecht or other Dutch cities (e.g., Amsterdam, Rotterdam).