

Social Equity in Housing: Addressing Systemic Barriers in Johannesburg, South Africa

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1 ABSTRACT

Johannesburg continues to grapple with entrenched spatial inequality, which is deeply rooted in the apartheid era, resulting in uneven access to housing that is affordable, adequate, and well-located. While significant research exists on South Africa's housing challenges, there is limited systematic analysis of how scholarship on housing equity, particularly within the city of Johannesburg, has evolved. In this study, a literature review is combined with a bibliometric analysis from 1997 to 2024 to gain a broader understanding of the themes, authors, and patterns within this field. The results show that global scholarship on housing equity has expanded substantially since 2006, driven by urbanisation, the Sustainable Development Goals, and post-pandemic research interest. However, Johannesburg remains significantly underrepresented in global housing equity literature, with South Africa producing only two publications in the analysed dataset. Keyword clustering reveals strong attention to affordability, inequality, and policy themes globally, but limited focus on city-specific issues. Based on the findings, the study proposes a conceptual framework to guide future research and policy development on housing equity in Johannesburg, identifying opportunities for strengthening local knowledge production, improving policy responsiveness, and advancing socially just housing outcomes.

Key Words: Social Equity, Housing Policy, Spatial Inequality, Affordable Housing, Urban Development

2 INTRODUCTION

Social equity in housing is a critical component of sustainable urban development, particularly in cities grappling with historical injustices and socio-economic inequality. Johannesburg, South Africa's largest city and economic powerhouse, exemplifies the enduring impact of apartheid-era policies that entrenched spatial segregation and economic disparities. These systemic barriers have left marginalised communities, particularly low-income earners and informal settlement dwellers, without equitable access to adequate housing, infrastructure, and services (Turok, 2016). According to McKay, Fakudze and Gunter (2022), the disparities in housing and human settlements manifest as spatial inequalities and, persistent socio-economic challenges, further exacerbating exclusion and limiting upward mobility for vulnerable populations. Despite substantial policy reforms, including the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and Breaking New Ground (BNG), the city continues to experience unequal access to adequate and well-located housing, particularly for low-income households and residents of informal settlements (Turok, 2016; Huchzermeyer, 2011). The concept of social equity in housing encompasses fair access to adequate, affordable, and quality housing for all parts of society, regardless of socio-economic status, race, or ethnicity (Hochstenbach et al., 2025). In the setting of Johannesburg, achieving social equity in housing is crucial for addressing historical injustices and promoting inclusive urban development (Makalima, 2024). Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of the intersection between historical legacies, contemporary urban policies, and the lived realities of affected communities.

While housing inequality in South Africa has been widely studied, there is a notable insufficiency of studies that map the evolution, structure, and influential contributors to research on housing equity in Johannesburg. Existing scholarship is fragmented, largely qualitative, and seldom assessed for thematic evolution or conceptual patterns. This presents a critical knowledge gap given the city's prominence and the complexity of its housing challenges. This research explores the systemic barriers to housing equity in Johannesburg, focusing on access, affordability, and quality. Through employing a mixed-methods approach, including a thorough literature review and bibliometric analysis, this study identifies policy gaps, highlights socio-economic constraints, and proposes actionable solutions. The findings may offer some insight into ongoing

discussions on enhancing inclusive urban development and addressing spatial inequality through holistic and community-driven strategies.

Beyond documenting housing inequality, this study positions Johannesburg within broader global housing equity debates by interrogating the intellectual and collaborative structures that shape knowledge production in this field. The limited visibility of Johannesburg within global housing equity scholarship is not merely a geographic gap but reflects broader epistemic imbalances in urban research, where Global South cities remain underrepresented in dominant conceptual frameworks. By combining bibliometric mapping with contextual analysis, this study therefore contributes not only to understanding housing inequality in Johannesburg but also to examining how knowledge hierarchies influence urban policy discourse and research priorities.

3 AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research aims to investigate the landscape of social equity in housing within Johannesburg, South Africa, aiming to unpack the structure of knowledge of this multifaceted field. Guided by the overarching goal of understanding the systemic barriers and potential solutions, the study addresses the following questions:

- What are the dominant conceptual frameworks used to understand social equity in housing in this scenario?
- What constitutes the intellectual structure of this field, as evidenced by crucial publications and influential authors?
- How is the social structure of research on this topic configured, including collaborations and networks?
- How does the body of knowledge specifically addressing Johannesburg contribute to broader understandings of social equity in housing?

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study aims to reinforce the rationale, support the investigation of the research question, and locate the study's variables within the existing body of knowledge. It examines the concept of social equity in housing, explores historical and contemporary challenges in Johannesburg, and critically analyses policy interventions and their effectiveness in addressing spatial inequalities. Through synthesizing important academic discussions, this review identifies gaps in current research and highlights potential strategies for enhancing inclusive urban development.

4.1 Historical Background of Housing Inequality in Johannesburg

According to Kamana, Radoine, and Nyasulu (2024), the apartheid era in South Africa institutionalised racial segregation and spatial planning, resulting in deeply entrenched inequalities in housing and urban development. Policies such as the Group Areas Act of 1950 designated specific residential areas based on race, forcibly relocating black communities to the urban periphery and relegating non-white populations to underdeveloped areas with limited access to resources and opportunities (Francis and Webster, 2019; Harrison et al., 2008). This deliberate spatial planning entrenched socio-economic disparities, creating a legacy of unequal access to resources, services, and economic opportunities that continues to shape Johannesburg's urban landscape, perpetuating spatial and socio-economic disparities. The apartheid-era policies systematically entrenched spatial segregation, limiting access to adequate housing for non-white populations (Turok, 2016). Under the Group Areas Act (1950), non-white communities were forcibly relocated to peripheral townships, restricting their economic opportunities and access to essential services (Mabin & Smit, 1997). This historical displacement created enduring spatial divides that persist in contemporary Johannesburg (Bremner, 2000). Post-apartheid efforts, such as the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and Breaking New Ground (BNG), aimed to address housing shortages and rectify spatial inequalities. However, these initiatives have faced criticism for their limited impact on transforming entrenched patterns of segregation and addressing systemic barriers. Persistent challenges include inadequate infrastructure, insufficient service delivery, and the slow pace of housing provision, particularly for low-income households (Charlton & Kihato, 2006).

4.2 Conceptualising Social Equity in Housing

Social equity in housing refers to the fair distribution of housing resources, opportunities, and services, ensuring that all socio-economic groups have access to adequate shelter (Fainstein, 2014). Fundamental dimensions of housing equity include access, affordability, and quality, each playing a crucial role in determining the inclusivity and sustainability of urban housing systems. Access refers to the ability of marginalised communities to secure housing in well-located urban areas with proximity to economic opportunities, social amenities, and public transportation (Turok, 2016). Many low-income households in Johannesburg face exclusion from such areas due to high land costs, restrictive zoning policies, and historical spatial inequalities (Parnell & Pieterse, 2014). Affordability is another critical dimension, highlighting the financial feasibility of obtaining adequate housing without compromising other essential needs such as food, healthcare, and education (Bredenoord, Van Lindert & Smets, 2014). The persistent housing backlog, rising property prices, and limited access to financing options further exacerbate affordability challenges, leaving many households reliant on informal settlements or substandard rental housing (Charlton & Kihato, 2006). Quality encompasses the physical condition of housing, including infrastructure, safety, and access to basic services such as water, sanitation, and electricity (Huchzermeyer, 2011). According to Marais and Ntema (2013), poorly constructed dwellings, inadequate service delivery, and overcrowding contribute to deteriorating living conditions, particularly in townships and informal settlements. These dimensions collectively provide a framework for assessing Johannesburg's housing challenges, emphasising the need for integrated policies that address spatial inequality, enhance affordability mechanisms, and improve the overall quality of housing for low-income and marginalised populations.

4.3 Contemporary Housing Policies and Their Effectiveness

Post-apartheid housing policies were designed to address the legacies of apartheid by providing affordable housing and rectifying historical injustices. Among the major initiatives was the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), launched in 1994, which aimed to deliver mass housing to low-income households. While it was a significant attempt to provide housing for the previously disadvantaged, the RDP has been criticised for promoting peripheral urban expansion, creating low-density developments on the outskirts of cities, and failing to promote social integration or meaningful economic opportunities within these areas (Charlton & Kihato, 2006). In response to some of these challenges, the Breaking New Ground (BNG) Initiative was introduced in 2004 with the goal of creating integrated, sustainable human settlements. This initiative was more progressive than its predecessor, placing emphasis on sustainability, infrastructure, and social inclusion. However, despite these improvements, the BNG has faced implementation challenges, including limited success in overcoming spatial segregation, with many housing developments still reinforcing patterns of inequality and exclusion (Harrison, Todes, & Watson, 2008). Both the RDP and BNG illustrate the tension between achieving immediate housing delivery and addressing broader spatial, social, and economic inequalities in South Africa's urban landscape.

4.4 Systemic Barriers to Housing Equity

Several interconnected barriers hinder equitable access to housing in Johannesburg, perpetuating spatial inequality and socioeconomic disparities. Economic constraints, such as high unemployment rates and low wages, severely limit affordability, excluding a significant portion of the population from formal housing markets (Huchzermeyer, 2011). This is compounded by spatial segregation, where affordable housing developments are often located on the urban periphery, distant from economic opportunities and essential services, thus reinforcing apartheid-era spatial divides (Todes, 2012). Infrastructure deficiencies in informal settlements, characterised by a lack of adequate sanitation, water, and electricity, further exacerbate precarious living conditions (Del Mistro and Hensher, 2009). According to Zhou (2023), market dynamics play a crucial role, as the private sector tends to prioritize middle- and high-income housing developments, resulting in a limited supply of affordable housing options. These factors create a complex web of challenges that must be addressed holistically to promote equitable access to housing in Johannesburg.

4.5 Informal Settlements and Housing Insecurity

Informal settlements continue to accommodate a significant proportion of Johannesburg's low-income population and play a central role in the city's housing landscape. Despite several policies aiming to upgrade these areas, challenges such as insecure land tenure, inadequate access to basic services, and occasional

forced evictions still persist (Huchzermeyer, 2004). These conditions contribute to ongoing housing insecurity and highlight some of the practical difficulties in achieving more equitable housing outcomes. Some scholars suggest that more participatory and community-driven planning approaches could be useful in addressing these issues, as they may allow affected communities to play a stronger role in shaping their living environments (Watson, 2009).

4.6 Emerging Strategies for Inclusive Housing

In order to achieve social equity in housing, various strategies have been proposed. Community-driven approaches, emphasising participatory planning and involving local communities, enhance housing outcomes by ensuring that development aligns with residents' needs and preferences (Gerrits, 2012). Mixed-income developments, integrating low-income housing within middle- and high-income areas, foster social inclusion and break down socioeconomic segregation (Landman and Badenhorst, 2014). Affordable rental housing offers greater flexibility for low-income earners by expanding rental options and reducing the financial burden of homeownership (Lonardon and Bolay, 2016). Lastly, infrastructure investment plays a crucial role in bridging spatial inequalities by improving transportation and service delivery in low-income areas, connecting residents to opportunities and essential amenities (Geyer & Geyer, 2015). These strategies, implemented comprehensively, can contribute to a more equitable and just housing landscape.

5 METHODOLOGY

For this study, a mixed-methods approach was used, incorporating both a comprehensive literature review and a bibliometric analysis. The literature review served to contextualise the historical and contemporary challenges of housing equity in Johannesburg, South Africa, exploring systemic barriers, policy limitations, and socio-economic constraints impacting equitable access to adequate housing, particularly for marginalised communities in informal settlements and low-income areas. The bibliometric analysis, a rigorous quantitative approach for analysing large datasets, was used for the purpose of exploring the knowledge structure and visually mapping and analysing the field of "social equity in housing," focusing on Johannesburg. Bibliometric analysis offers a robust approach for understanding the evolution and current structure of a research field, providing valuable insights into its key themes, influential authors, and emerging trends (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Data related to "social equity in housing", "Johannesburg", and related terms such as "affordable housing Johannesburg", "housing policy", "housing inequality Johannesburg", "housing Johannesburg" between 1997 and 2024 were exported using Scopus. Figure 1 is a representation of the years that were used to identify, select, and include relevant publications in this bibliometric analysis.

5.1 Literature Review

The qualitative component involved a systematic review of scholarly publications on Johannesburg's housing landscape. The review aimed to synthesise existing knowledge on social equity and housing, highlighting historical, policy, and contemporary dimensions of inequality. The areas of scope included:

- **Historical Inequality:** Examining the spatial and social legacies of apartheid and colonial-era planning that continue to shape urban housing disparities.
- **Policy Evolution:** Reviewing major housing policies, programmes, and interventions in Johannesburg, including public housing initiatives, low-cost housing projects, and mixed-income developments.
- **Contemporary Systemic Barriers:** Identifying structural, economic, social, and institutional factors that impede equitable access to housing for low-income and marginalised groups.
- **Emerging Strategies for Social Equity:** Evaluating recent interventions and innovative approaches aimed at promoting inclusion, integration, and affordability in the city's housing market.

This literature review provided the theoretical and conceptual foundation for the bibliometric analysis, helping to contextualise patterns in research outputs, collaborations, and thematic focus areas. Furthermore, it informed the identification of relevant keywords, search terms, and inclusion criteria for the bibliometric component.

5.2 Bibliometric Analysis

The bibliometric analysis was conducted to quantitatively assess the scholarly landscape on housing equity in Johannesburg, examining patterns of authorship, collaboration, and thematic development over time.

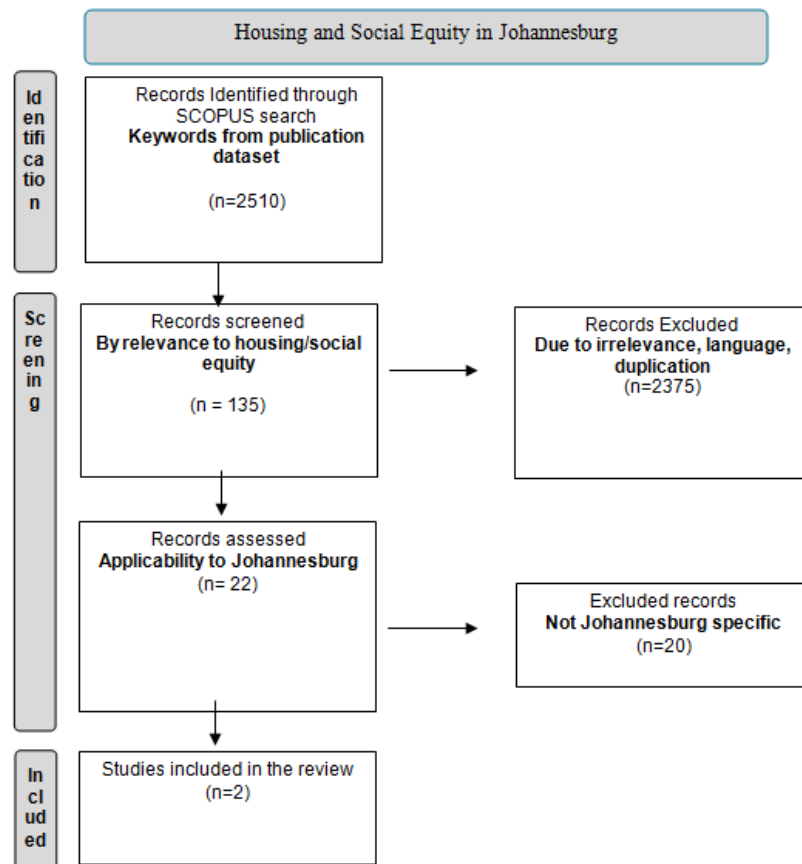


Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram. Source: Authors

Figure 1 illustrates the systematic process used to identify and select relevant academic publications for the study. An initial 2510 records were retrieved from Scopus using keywords connected to housing, social equity, and Johannesburg. During the first screening stage, 2375 records were excluded due to duplication, irrelevance to the subject, or language restrictions, leaving 135 records for further evaluation based on thematic relevance to housing and social equity. In the second screening stage, those 135 publications were assessed for specific applicability to Johannesburg. This screening resulted in 22 studies that discussed housing and equity concerns within broader South African and urban studies frameworks. A final screening was done, and only 2 studies directly addressed Johannesburg-specific issues related to social equity in housing. These 2 studies were found to be relevant and were included in the bibliometric analysis.

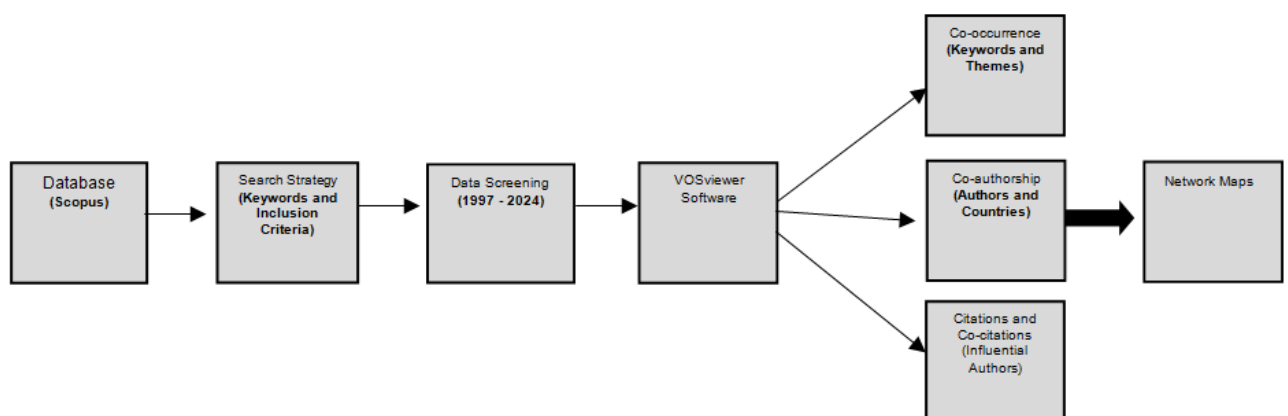


Figure 2: A bibliometric analysis guide. Source: Authors

Figure 2 summarises the systematic process used to analyse literature on social equity in housing and systemic barriers in Johannesburg. Data was extracted from Scopus using specific keywords and inclusion criteria, screened for relevance and quality using the years 1997–2024, and analysed in VOSviewer through three steps: (i) co-occurrence analysis to identify critical themes such as spatial integration, affordability, social cohesion, and policy interventions; (ii) co-authorship analysis to explore collaboration patterns; and (iii) citation and co-citation analysis to highlight influential scholars and foundational knowledge. The resulting network maps visually represent the thematic structure, collaboration networks, and knowledge base informing housing equity research in Johannesburg.

6 RESULTS, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

VOSviewer was employed to conduct the bibliometric analysis, generating keyword co-occurrence maps, country co-authorship networks, author co-citation networks, and temporal visualisation overlays. Threshold settings were applied to ensure meaningful results, with a minimum keyword occurrence of 5, a minimum citation threshold for co-citation of 3, and units of analysis including authors, keywords, and countries. From the exported dataset of 2,510 keywords, 225 met the threshold for inclusion in the analysis.

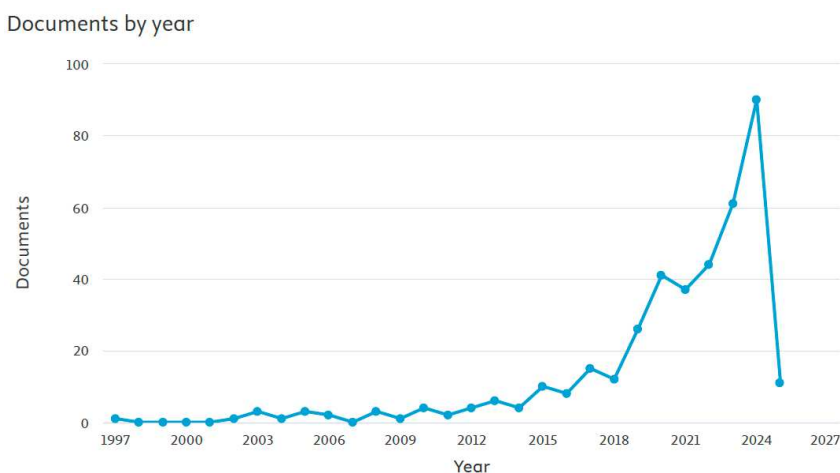


Figure 3: Graph depicting the publication trend of the research area between 1997 and 2024.

6.1 Analysis of Publications by Year

Between 1997 and 2000, the publication rate on housing issues was notably low, likely due to a transition period where researchers focused on other pressing topics. From 2000 to 2006, a mixed trend emerged, with both increases and decreases in publications, indicating a growing but inconsistent interest in housing equity. From 2006 to 2012, there was a significant rise in housing-related publications, driven largely by the aftermath of the 2008–2009 Global Financial Crisis. This period also saw rapid urbanization, especially in developing countries, which increased housing demand. Concurrently, several countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and China, introduced new housing policies, further stimulating research in the field. The period between 2015 and 2018 witnessed a gradual upward trend in publications, fuelled by the emergence of funding opportunities, technological advancements, and the enforcement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities, which highlights housing as a critical area of. Between 2018 and 2021, the trends of heightened awareness of housing issues, the influence of the SDGs, and continued rapid urbanization persisted. However, the COVID-19 pandemic, beginning in 2020, introduced a significant inflection point. The pandemic highlighted housing as a critical determinant of health and well-being, as lockdowns and stay-at-home orders exposed vulnerabilities, particularly for those living in inadequate or overcrowded housing in informal settlements and marginalised communities. Finally, the period from 2021 to 2024 saw an increase in housing-related publications, driven by the long-term impacts of the pandemic, including economic disruptions, increased inequality, and shifts in work patterns, such as the rise of remote work. These factors intensified existing housing challenges and prompted research into their lasting effects. Furthermore, government policies and international programs aimed at addressing the housing crisis spurred research evaluating the effectiveness of these interventions. The intersection of housing with social justice movements focused on racial and social equity gained prominence, stimulating research on housing disparities and their

broader societal implications. However, despite increased global publication output, Johannesburg remains underrepresented, indicating a critical research gap. Figure 3 clearly depicts the publication trend of the research area between 1997 and 202.

6.2 Intellectual Knowledge Structure of the Field

This section of the research employs a bibliometric analysis and science mapping to depict the intellectual landscape of social equity in housing, focusing specifically on Johannesburg. This exploration directly responds to the first three research questions and advances the study's overall aim is to develop a comprehensive knowledge to enable conceptualisation and a great emphasis on social dimensions of the field which is being investigated. Starting with a broad overview of the global scholarship on housing equity, the analysis then narrows its scope to the specific case of Johannesburg. Consequently, the intellectual framework, consisting of critical publications and influential researchers, provides a foundation for the subsequent analysis.

6.2.1 Conceptual Structure: Keyword Co-Occurrence Analysis

The top 5 preferred keywords from the data are listed in Table 2. Compared to the total publications that were exported, it is evident that housing is tied to the complexities that have to do with inequality, affordability, policy, exclusion, and spatial inequality within the city of Johannesburg. The blue area, with housing being dominant, is an area of research that is of great interest, whereas the smaller red, green and blue parts are yet to be explored and researched on within the society of global knowledge, it is important to understand how the collaboration of countries can be unpacked where the prominent authors come from as well as their ties globally.

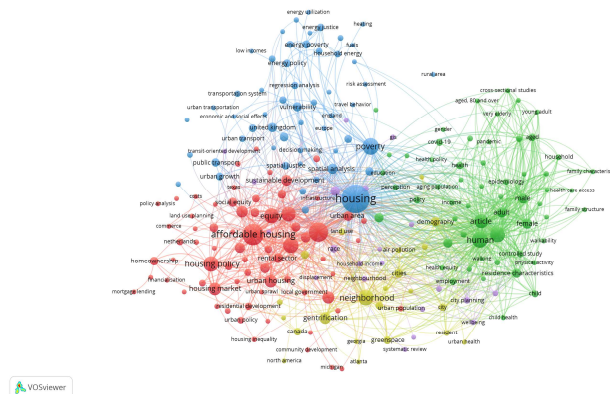


Figure 4: Visualised network map of research themes, overlay between 2014 and 2024 (10-year period) to understand the trajectory of research themes.

The analysis in Figure 4 revealed three distinct but interconnected clusters defining the mixed-income housing literature landscape. The largest group, Cluster 1 (Blue), forms the central axis of global housing research, tightly integrating core themes of housing, affordable housing, urban development, and inequality, signifying its critical and foundational nature in the scholarly conversation. Cluster 2 (Red) focuses on the institutional dynamics and instruments that shape housing outcomes, encompassing themes such as planning, policy reform, and governance strategies, which illustrate the pragmatic application of political will. Finally, Cluster 3 (Green) highlights the growing attention to justice-oriented frameworks, focusing on the critical dimensions of spatial inequality, segregation, exclusion, and informality, reflecting a necessary shift toward analysing social barriers and systemic marginalization within urban settings.

Keyword	Occurrences	Total Link Strength
Housing	175	1323
Affordable Housing	97	590
Urban Development	51	333
Housing Policy	53	298
Housing Inequality	7	43

Table 1: The top 5 keywords in the research network

6.2.2 Country Contribution and Collaboration

Figure 5 is an illustration of a country collaboration map. The map reveals a highly centralised research network dominated by the United States (161 documents), which has the highest productivity and centrality, and China (60 documents), which maintains strong co-author ties with the US, alongside active contributions from the United Kingdom and Canada. However, South Africa produced only two publications that met the inclusion criteria and expressed weak collaboration links with these global centres. This underrepresentation points to weak global integration of housing research, which is focused on Johannesburg, proving that there is a need for local academic output that pays attention to social equity in housing, reinforcing the importance of this study and emphasising the need for stronger international research collaboration involving South African scholars.

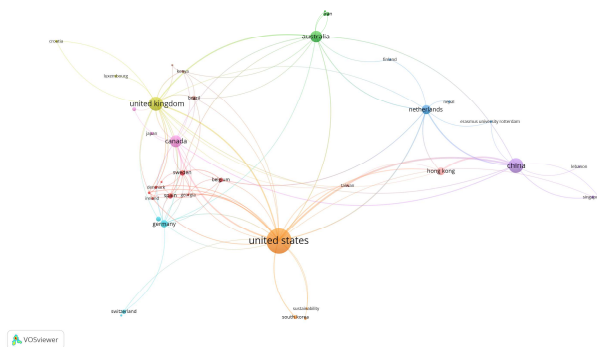


Figure 5: Visualisation of country collaboration and contribution network.

Country	Documents	Citations	Total Strength	Link
United States	161	4431	65	
China	60	898	43	
Canada	35	646	30	
Canada	35	646	30	
South Africa	2	12	0	

Table 2: A table of the top 5 countries and their publication numbers

6.2.3 Social Structure

The final data set focuses on the co-citation, which in turn determines the body of knowledge in which authors have found their niche. Authors have established a concrete understanding of their chosen area of interest.

Author Co-citation Analysis

Figure 5 and table 2 reveal a highly centralised research network dominated by the United States (161 documents), which exhibits the highest productivity and centrality, and China (60 documents), which maintains strong co-author ties with the US, alongside active contributions from the United Kingdom and Canada. Critically, South Africa produced only two publications meeting the inclusion criteria and exhibits no strong collaboration links with these global hubs. The minimal visibility of Johannesburg-centred housing equity research within global networks demonstrates a clear gap in scholarly engagement, further validating the aims of this study and emphasising the importance of building stronger global research links. Furthermore, table 3 illustrates that authors such as Anguelovski, Cole, García-Lamarca, Shokry, and Triguero-Mas form a cohesive cluster representing the environmental justice and urban equity school of thought. Their criteria, including the same number of publications (three each), citations (96 each), and total link strength (31 each), suggest an equally high-standing influence and shared conceptual foundation in justice-oriented urban studies within the dataset. However, the complete absence of any South African scholars among this influential group highlights the lack of Johannesburg-centred intellectual leadership in global scholarship.

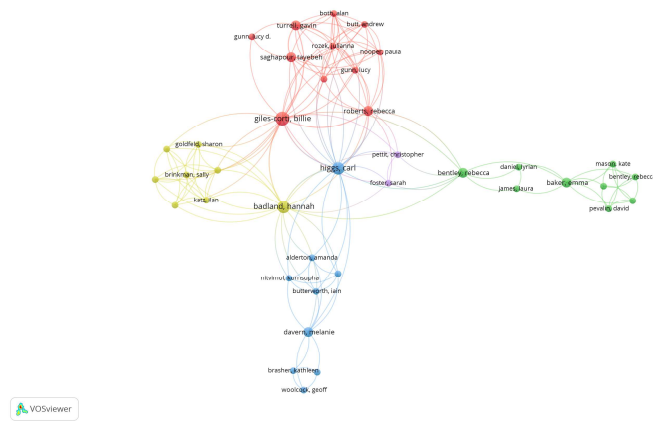


Figure 6: Visualisation of co-author network.

Author	Documents	Citations	Total Link Strength
Anguelovski I.	3	96	31
Cole H.	3	96	31
García-Lamarca M.	3	96	31
Shokry G.	3	96	31
Triguero-Mas M.	3	96	31

Table 3: Author co-citation analysis indicating the main authors within the network.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, a practical framework in Table 4 has been proposed to advance social equity in housing within Johannesburg. The framework is structured around five central dimensions, which are Spatial Justice, Affordability and Financial Inclusion, Infrastructure and Service Equity, Governance and Participation, and Research and Knowledge Production. Each dimension focuses on targeted actions that address systemic barriers, strengthen policy implementation, and enhance the lived experiences of low-income and marginalised residents. Together, these strategic components aim to reduce spatial and socio-economic disparities, improve access to well-located and affordable housing, foster inclusive governance, and promote knowledge generation that reflects local realities, ultimately contributing to more equitable and sustainable urban development.

Dimension	Strategic Focus	Actions & Interventions	Expected Outcomes
Spatial Justice	- Addressing deeply-rooted spatial segregation and exclusion	- Providing housing which is affordable and within close-proximity to amenities - Increasing mixed-income housing projects for the purpose of supporting social and spatial integration (Hofner et al., 2022)	- Reduced urban sprawl - Improved access to services and jobs (World Resources Institute, 2018)
Affordability and Financial Inclusion	- Increasing the access to secure tenure and different housing options catering to different income brackets	- Increasing affordable rental options - Increasing subsidies for low-income households - Use inclusionary housing policies to ensure private developments include more affordable units (Madell, 2025) - Improving tenure security	- Improved access to affordable housing for low-income earners (Madell, 2025) - Various housing options beyond home-ownership (SpringerLink)
Infrastructure and Service Equity	- Upgrading informal settlements and improving basic service delivery	- Incremental upgrading of informal settlements - Improving tenure security - Integrating amenities with transportation routes	- Healthier and safer environments - Reduction of spatial inequality with better access to amenities (Bettencourt and Marchio, 2023).
Governance and Participation	- Improving community participation and accountability	- Improving coordination between government departments - Working closely with communities in housing decision-making - Strengthening transparency and reducing corruption in housing processes	- Improved accountability from the government - Improved public participation in decision-making (SpringerLink) - Reduced forced relocation
Research and Knowledge Production	- Contribution more towards local knowledge while learning from global experience	- Creating research networks focused on Johannesburg's housing issues - Providing more financial support for local housing research - Encouraging international collaboration and sharing of data to strengthen knowledge	- Improved influence from a perspective which highlights local realities which will provide more data for the purpose of contributing towards future interventions (Watson, 2009)

Table 4: A proposed Framework for addressing systemic barriers to social equity of housing in Johannesburg.

8 CONCLUSION

This study provides the first integrated literature review and bibliometric mapping of research on social equity in housing with a specific focus on Johannesburg. The findings show that although global scholarship

on housing equity has grown substantially, particularly after 2015, Johannesburg remains significantly underrepresented in the broader academic landscape. Existing literature consistently highlights the city's deep-rooted spatial inequalities, persistent socio-economic challenges, and the lingering effects of apartheid-era segregation, all of which continue to undermine efforts toward equitable housing. While post-apartheid housing policies have introduced various mechanisms to expand access to affordable housing, they have often fallen short in addressing social integration, economic disparities, and long-term sustainability. As such, the systemic barriers to achieving genuine social equity in housing remain multidimensional, spanning economic, social, and institutional domains.

The bibliometric analysis unequivocally underscores these concerns by demonstrating the limited Johannesburg-specific scholarship within global debates on housing equity, with central thematic clusters revealing conceptual gaps, particularly in relation to social integration, community participation, and spatial justice. The country collaboration map highlights a highly centralised research network dominated by the United States (161 documents) and China (60 documents), while critically, South Africa is severely underrepresented (two documents) and exhibits no strong global collaboration links. This lack of integration is mirrored in the co-citation network, where authors forming the influential environmental justice school of thought (Anguelovski, Cole, García-Lamarca, Shokry, and Triguero-Mas) possess equally high-standing influence but none are South African. This complete absence of Johannesburg-centric intellectual leadership in global scholarship reinforces the need for this study, which contributes by identifying these critical research and intellectual gaps, mapping the collaborative structures shaping current scholarship, and offering a vital baseline for future urban housing studies in South Africa.

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