

Challenging patterns of resource insecurity and social exclusion across age: participatory practices enabling youth potential as everyday agents and agents of change

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Abstract

The complex dynamics of power relations, social exclusion, and inequitable access to resources remain a critical challenge to the sustainable management of the WEF nexus. In the face of climate change, building long-term resilience to resource insecurity becomes even more crucial. Inclusive and multi-faceted approaches to nexus thinking are required to contest existing patterns of inequality and exclusion, both at a micro and macro level. This requires recognising the intersectionality of entangled differences as to engage marginalized voices not only in virtue of gender but also of age, ethnicity, and income. The potential of young people as knowledge producers has been neglected by nexus researchers and policy-makers. By zooming in to the local scale of young people's everyday lived experiences and social practices with the nexus, we seek to spark a discussion on the role of youth as 'everyday agents' and as 'agents of change'.



Photo: Community visit guided by young people, CRAS Vila Bazú, Franco da Rocha (Source: Susanne Börner)

Methodology

- **Youth participatory action research (YPAR)** with up to 40 young people aged 12-18;
- Weekly meetings with youth groups in two Community Social Assistance Centres (CRAS) in Franco da Rocha in the periphery of Sao Paulo;
- Engage youth as co-producers of knowledge in a dialogical reflection about their everyday experiences and social practices;
- **Activities:** participatory mapping, thematic community visits guided by youth, photo-voice, youth-to-youth interviews, intergenerational learning, multi-stakeholder workshops, etc.;
- **Challenges of "going virtual"** during covid-19 as the pandemic amplifies the vulnerabilities of the poorest and exacerbates social exclusion: limited access to mobile communication technology

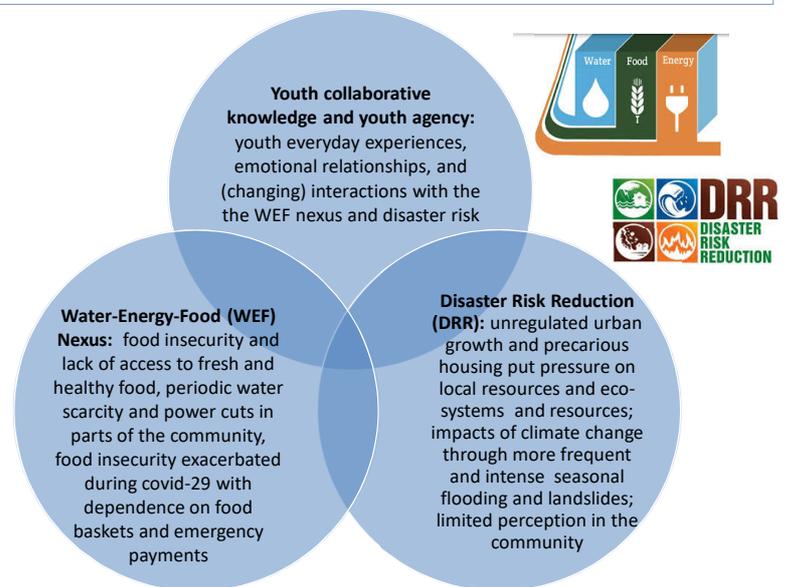


Photo: Photo-voice activity, CRAS Vila Bazú, Franco da Rocha (Source: Susanne Börner)

Research Objectives

To explore young people's (aged 12-18) local knowledge and social practices related to nexus threats in marginalized and disaster-prone communities in the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo, Brazil, and to identify pathways for integrating youth knowledge into public policies and education for resilience.

- RO 1:** To analyse the ways in which young people understand and experience their everyday role in the food-water-energy nexus, related to their everyday use of resources and their inclusion in accessing the different dimensions of the nexus.
- RO 2:** To explore young people's knowledge of the underlying causes of nexus threats (e.g. landslides and flooding) such as unsustainable resource use as well as their perceptions of future nexus scenarios regarding their access to and their use of the nexus.
- RO 3:** To explore the social practices of youth to reduce their vulnerability to resource insecurity and to create resilient communities, by analysing their practices in dealing with nexus threats and by identifying their needs for capacity building.
- RO 4:** To critically reflect on how youth knowledge and their social practices can be valued and taken into account for the development of public policies, focusing on integrating the role of youth agency in participatory early warning systems and education for resilience.



Preliminary Results

Contributions to key academic scholarship:

- a novel and interconnected approach **linking nexus thinking with disaster risk reduction**^{1,2}: addressing resource (in)security, (in)equitable access, and resource interdependencies in the context of vulnerability to natural hazards which can negatively affect long-term resource availability (nexus threats);
- **Young people as local knowledge producers** based on their **everyday lived experiences and social practices**^{4,6};
- Power relations and **social exclusion** based on the interconnectedness of age, class, gender, and income;
- (Re)conceptualization(s) of **youth agency** beyond issues of 'voice' and 'Politics' to include **non-participatory and 'implicit activism'**^{3,4,5,6}: youth everyday experiences with their local environment, connection and belonging, engagement, emotional relationships, and social practices regarding the WEF nexus and DRR

Benefits of YPAR

- Developing an **eye-level dialogue around the social representations** that young people have of the environment and the WEF nexus and **engaging with controversial perceptions** of their own vulnerability and their potential as young citizens;
- Stimulates youth **awareness, self-esteem, capacity to engage in critical dialogue** with peers and adults;
- Enables a changing, possibly more sustainable, relationship with their environment and resource use;

Challenges of YPAR

- "Social isolation" during covid-19 deepens **processes of exclusion** in marginalized communities in the urban periphery. Limited ability of youth to continue activities virtually (restricted access to mobile communication);
- Importance of **trust-building and confidence** to share sensitive information (on-site activities and virtually);
- Dialoguing with contradictory emotions: **negation** of environmental risks and situations of resource insecurity
- Importance of **'playfulness'** in engaging youth in YPAR activities to break the researcher-subject barrier

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