

Brazilian youth's important role in fight against climate change, study finds

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Marginalized young people in Brazilian cities can play an important role in responding to the threat of climate change, but youth engagement needs to be both playful and take youth seriously to support them in expressing their full potential in bringing about local change—according to a new study.

Researchers working with young people in Sao Paulo, aged 12 to 18, discovered a mismatch between what matters to youth and the processes of communication around environmental issues by different adult groups.

They found that young citizens living in Sao Paulo's urban peripheries—the densely-populated and precarious spaces between the core city and [outer suburbs](#)—felt disconnected from discussions by academics, and policy-makers on issues around climate change whether local, national or international.

Young people's emotional relationships to their environment might sometimes seem unconventional and possibly even contradictory, yet they reflected the youngsters' own experiences, stories, and emotions.

Publishing their findings in *Children's Geographies*, researchers at the Universities of Birmingham and Sao Paulo found that COVID-19 threw into sharp relief existing inequalities and mechanisms of socio-economic exclusion in the urban periphery in Brazil.

They found that, although structural inequalities were found in some central neighborhoods of Sao Paulo, peripheral communities are more marginalized as poor public transport and long distances widened the gap access to education, the labor market and leisure.

Report co-author Dr. Susanne Börner, Marie Curie Fellow at the University of Birmingham, commented: "Overcoming this rupture requires us to work with young people to identify and connect with their views, experiences, and emotions related to their local environment and global climate change—moving beyond just listening to them. Young people, with no space in institutional and adult arenas, don't see themselves as part of the solution and perceive few opportunities for improving the neighborhood. Caught in a daily struggle to make ends

meet, some cannot think beyond their immediate necessities."

Dr. Börner added that a sense of belonging and connection was fundamental for young people to start perceiving themselves as part of the solution. Confidence and trust were [important factors](#) with young people not necessarily believing that they have a valuable point of view.

This made building and maintaining trust especially relevant during the current context of COVID-19, which amplifies current and future conditions of vulnerability and exacerbates systemic shortcomings in opportunities for virtual learning and engagement—increasing the risk that those young people already marginalized will be left behind even further.

"We perceive important opportunities for youth to develop a changing, more sustainable relationship with their environment—experiencing an increase in [self-esteem](#) and being better able to communicate matters of concern with both peers and adults," said Dr. Börner.

"Stimulating youth leadership is strongly connected to emotions such as fun and humor—[youth](#) engagement must be both 'playful' and take young people seriously in order to incentivise their participation and create better relations between [young people](#) and adults."

More information: Susanne Börner et al. Blurring the '-ism' in youth climate crisis activism: everyday agency and practices of marginalized youth in the Brazilian urban periphery, *Children's Geographies* (2020). [DOI: 10.1080/14733285.2020.1818057](https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2020.1818057)

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