



Youth's Political Participation – How to Imagine, Engage in Dialogue, and Conquer?

As a research project combining different disciplines and knowledge holders, PRODIGY wants to understand the connections between nature, economy and society in the southwestern Amazon region between Peru, Brazil and Bolivia.

Our research is based on the idea that functional diversity in the soil system increases resilience to disturbances in the entire social-ecological system. Therefore, we study functional diversity in the soil and aim to understand its impact on the resilience of the economic and social systems in southwestern Amazonia.

April 2022

An Amazonian night: the stars are shining in the sky and teenagers and young adults living in the Extractivist Reserve Chico Mendes in Acre, Brazil, make their way to the closest school where they can access the internet.

People living in protected areas in the Amazon often face challenges like the one described above. In this context, access to technology is a demand made especially by adolescents and young adults. Young people in the ResEx Chico Mendes, as in other places, want to use the internet to communicate with relatives, inform themselves, but most of all, to feel part of a bigger society. Through the improvement of roads, mobility is more viable and the internet is a window to other places outside of the inhabited territory. In this context, young people are constantly re-defining what living in the rural area and in this case, protected areas, means.

For some, it means that they can engage in a variety of economic activities, such as the collection of non-timber forest products, agriculture, ranching, among others. For others, living in a protected area and having the intention to study in the university means that they have to choose whether to stay, to leave or to live between the city and the protected area. At the same time, protected areas in the Amazon region are constantly the place where illegal activities, such as illegal gold mining, cattle ranching, among others, take place. These activities, although detrimental for the ecosystem, can represent an improvement in the economic situation and can be thus attractive to be pursued by young people.

To live in a protected area, a secure access to land and natural resources is a beneficial position, which is sometimes a challenge young people face. For instance, in the Manuripi Reserve, in Pando, Bolivia, inhabitants older than 18, not always have access to land. Therefore, they are dependent on their parents and have to share the earnings of the sold Brazil nuts with the extended family. Currently, in one community in the reserve, a group of young people organized themselves and negotiated its demand for land with the park-rangers and community authorities. In this dialogue, both parties agreed to allow some young adults to use state-owned lands, but only to collect the Brazil nuts and other non-timber forest products.

To preserve the protected areas, the new generations need to find and build spaces for political participation which in the best cases will be shaped dialogically by both young and old inhabitants, taking the different socio-environmental struggles, histories, and future imaginaries into consideration. Whether both achieve to think collectively about how to improve the populations' access to land, education and technology, among others, will be an important factor regarding the ability for building resilience in the communities of the Southwestern Amazonian ecosystem.

Contact PRODIGY
Claudia Pinzón
E-Mail: claudia.cuellar@fu-berlin.de

