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Youth entry into work and social participation in Brazil: young activists conduct research on problems and solutions

Irene Rizzini, Renata Mena Brasil do Couto and Malcolm Bush

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The International Center for Research and Policy on Childhood (CIESPI) is a research center and a reference center operating in conjunction with the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio). It is dedicated to the development of studies and social projects about children, young people, their families and their communities. Its goal is to inform policies and social practices for these populations thus contributing to children's full development and for the promotion of their rights.



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1 - Introduction

Young people, particularly low-income youth, in urban Brazil find it difficult to enter into productive work. Some of them spend a lot of time neither working nor in school. Many are not actively engaged in civic participation particularly in the forums where public policy decisions are debated and made. These issues are particularly important to a group of youth activists in the industrial city of Volta Redonda in the state of Rio de Janeiro and these activists in participation with the International Center for Research and Policy on Childhood (CIESPI) at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro engaged in a project to determine the scope of the problem and solutions. The young people were partners in the design and implementation of the research and conducted the interviews with youth and with key actors in the field in the city of Volta Redonda.

The Brazil work was part of an international partnership. Those partners were in addition to CIESPI Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA), Mumbai, India; and the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), New Delhi, India. It was funded by the British Academy's Youth Futures Programme with the support of the UK Global Challenges Research Fund (YF/19004)ⁱ. CIESPI's Brazilian partners were the Youth Forum of South Fluminense in Action (FJSFA/VR) and the House of the Child and the Adolescentⁱⁱ. The

partnership between CIESPI and FJSFA started in 2018 as part of a CIESPI study on youth activism and participation. FJSFA which operates in the industrial city of Volta Redonda 240 kilometers west of Rio de Janeiro, is a space created so that children and youth can meet and discuss public policies particularly those that impact them.

2 - Description of problem

Recent statistics show the depth of the youth employment problem. Statistics from the Brazilian Census Bureau (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, IBGE) in August 2021 show a nation-wide unemployment rate of 14.7% of economically active person. That rate was 46% for youth aged 14-17, and 31% for youth aged 18-24 (Ribeiro, 2021). While the unemployment rate for youth has always been higher than the national rate, COVID 19 made this situation worse by impacting the educational and professional training of young people. They were forced to take lower quality positions, with lower wage, and without social protections making their future work trajectories worse (Corseuil and Franca, 2020).

While the immediate problems of the pandemic pushed unemployment to record heights, the re-ordering of capitalism toward neo-liberalism with the weakening of worker protections, decreasing percentage of full-time jobs with benefits, and the

reduction of government expenditures, were creating problems for young people—decades before COVID 19. An additional problem was the increasing number of young people going into the work force earlier to support their families. Much of this work was in the informal economy and some involved child labor thus robbing the young people of their education and their futures.

Another indicator of the plight of young people is the number who neither work or study which by the end of 2020 had reached 25.5% (NERI, 2021). This condition is often temporary and the causes of young people being in this situation long term are controversial. However, there is a recognition that to be poor, black, have a low age-related educational level, or to be a young woman with children are characteristics which increase the chances of being in this situation known as *neither or* (Rocha et al., p. 545, 2020). Recognizing the heterogeneity of this group will allow the promotion of more effective public policies for them.

The second part of the problem is the lack of youth participation in public life particularly in those forums which make decisions about their lives. In Brazil, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), the Statute on the Child and Adolescent (1990), and the Youth Law of 2013 are the foundation for the practice of child and youth participation. Article 3 of the 2013 law provides:

Public and private actors involved in public policies about youth must observe the

following rules: (...) II incentivize the broad participation of youth in the formulation, implementation and evaluation; III increase alternatives for the social participation of youth promoting programs which prioritize their comprehensive development and participation in decision making spaces;

And in Article 4:

A young person has the right to social and political participation and in the formulation, execution, and evaluation of youth public policies.

Article 5 of the same statute provides that the public sector must promote the free association of young people so as to guarantee their dialog through youth associations, networks, movements and organizations and the creation and enlargement of public spaces for the discussion and planning of youth policies, and for youth protagonism.

The opening of spaces for discussion and participation was a constant theme from the young people. This opening should happen in ways involving young people in their daily lives, starting with schools, and then universities and workplaces, in accessible language in a way that would extend these opportunities to everyone.

One existing space for young people in Brazil are the federally mandated children's rights councils which operate at the federal, state and municipal levels. They have the responsibility to write plans at each level for policy about children and monitor policies. Their membership is equally divided between public and nonprofit sector actors, the latter being elected by organizations that serve children. Since 2013, they have been instructed to include adolescent members as councilors. The young people in Volta Redonda first organized around making their voices heard in the local municipal council and became active members of that council. In fact, the Volta Redonda Children's Rights Council was the first in the nation to seat a young person as a council member.

Despite this key Brazilian tool for citizen and young people's participation, the research literature argues that much of the space for debate aimed at young people's participation is in fact occupied by adults where children and youth are regarded as property or as potential not as currently active partners (Pires; Branco, 2007; Pérez et al, 2008; Contreras and Perez, 2011; Pavez-Soto, 2012; and Cussianovich, 2013; Ribeiro, 2015). The Latin American literature more broadly argues the importance of an active role for youth in society at large (Oraison and Perez, 2006; Novella, 2012; Sarcostti et. al, 2015) and the opportunity to exercise the role of citizen (Acosta and Pineda, 2007; Corvera, 2011 and Lay-Lisboa, 2018). Numerous obstacles,

however, stand in the way of such participation (Rizzini, 2018; Collins et al, 2021).

Another obstacle to participation is ageism, and little has been written about its characteristics and scale. More recent studies describe this prejudice against youth in political debates where their voices are doubted, dismissed or rejected (WHO, 2021).

There is a major private public sector partnership program in Brazil that addresses the youth employment issues. The Youth Apprenticeship Program (Programa Jovem Aprendiz). According to the law which established it (Lei no. 10.097/2000), all medium and large companies must offer between 5 and 10 percent of their openings to young people between the ages of 14 and 24 whether they are still studying or have graduated. The program has the following advantages: the reduction of taxes to participating businesses, the offer of remuneration to the young people while training, the opportunity of getting a first job, and the mixture of practical learning with mandate additional schooling. We discuss it in detail below.

3 - The projectⁱⁱⁱ

The project involved the development of a research design, the identification of key actors in the public and private sectors, interviews with local stakeholders and focus groups with young

people, conducted by activists from FJSFA/VR. It also included the published research material described in the previous section. CIESPI staff met online with the youth activists in Volta Redonda every two weeks for training between October 2020 and March 2021. This partnership was aided by CIESPI's prior work with some of the youth including the partners several visits to each other's cities. Those personal connections were very important given the adaptations that COVID 19 forced on the original design. The pandemic forced reliance on online interactions and showed the limitations of the participants internet connections.

The research team also developed an online map of the principal public bodies and nonprofit organizations related to our theme. Ten of them were selected for interviews due to their relevance to the issue of youth employment. These included: the Volta Redonda Municipal Council on Children's Rights, the Youth Coordination, the Commission on the Rights of Young People, the Commission for the Defense of Children and Adolescents in the Municipal Council, the Municipal Department of Economic Development and Tourism, the Department of Education, the Center for the Integration of Work and School, the Foundation of the National Surgical Equipment Company, the Beatriz Gama Foundation and the House of the Child and the Adolescent.

Key adult actors were contacted and after much negotiation all agreed to be interviewed between

May and July 2021. Because of the pandemic some of the interviews were conducted online and others in-person depending on public health restrictions. Part of the plan was to develop three online focus groups composed of young residents of the city. The project posted information about the project to the social networks of FJSFA/VR and CIESPI/PUC/Rio describing the project and inviting young people to participate. The project also reached out to individuals and to schools. But because of people's struggles with COVID-19, limited access to the internet, young people's move to online classes and the mental health impacts of the pandemic, we were only able to conduct two online youth focus groups, one with two participants and the other with five. But the involvement of additional young people was vital to the project so we increased our efforts to complete interviews with individuals and between July and August 2021 conducted nineteen such interviews mainly through WhatsApp. The young people from FJSFA/VR and the CIESPI team acted in concert throughout these efforts.

4 – Responses on entry into the workforce

We questioned the adult respondents about youth unemployment. These respondents emphasized (1) the need to expand technical and

professional training for young people focusing especially on information technology; (2) actions against child labor by expanding the supply of legal work opportunities; (3) enlargement of training initiatives and existing job offerings especially in low income communities; (4) diversification of formal schooling and preparatory courses taking into consideration the diversity of social contexts including psychosocial and personal support; (5) expansion of social protection for young people and their families; (6) increase full time education; and (7) financial aid for students (transportation + meals + scholarship) to mitigate inequalities between social classes. A typical response summed up the problem:

Young people are not prepared for the work force in reality. They are prepared for a world that does not exist. They do not know how to use the proper tools which are demanded and do not have emotional capacity and support deal with it.

One program which took youth rejected from Youth Apprenticeship also noted the factor of the discouraged young person.

Many young people arrive discouraged and their learning and interactions in the program help them not just professionally but also personally. Their resistance stems from their background which took away their expectations for life or reduced their

vision because of their difficulties, their precarious conditions and the fact of being low-income.

There were problems on both sides of the fence.

The institutions of civil society do not have the infrastructure or the capacity to help as necessary young people in their entry into productive activity on their own. Although they wish to do that.

As mentioned before, the key public private program for assisting young people enter the workforce in Brazil is the Youth Apprenticeship Program (Jovem Aprendiz), a two-year work and schooling experience. According to the Apprenticeship Law, all medium and large businesses must offer 5% to 15% of their vacancies to young people between 14 and 24 years old enrolled in school or with a high school diploma. However, even before the pandemic, the program numbers were alarming. A survey published in January 2020 by Fundação Instituto de Pesquisas Econômicas (FIPE) pointed out that businesses offered on average 2% of their vacancies to young people. In total businesses should offer around 1 million job vacancies, but only 445,000 were filled in 2019, representing 46% of the quota established by legislation. The adult respondents filled out this picture. They

said there was too much emphasis on offering low-paid professionals work and not on training; bureaucratic obstacles making it difficult for small businesses to participate; the jobs offered focused on administrative and office activities, which do not correspond to current market demands; and the Program lacked integration with schools. Earlier CIESPI research underlined this last point as young people in Rio complained that scheduling both the work and education element of the program could be very difficult since they found it hard to be admitted to classes they need and often had to travel long distances between their work place and the school. These studies also showed that many young people in low-income communities had not heard of the program and that the amount of paper work needed to enroll was excessive.

The adult respondents also thought it necessary to expand information about the program to young people. There is little monitoring of the program and the suspicion is that the most vulnerable young people are not enrolled. The paper work required for a business to enter the program makes it difficult for smaller businesses to participate despite the fact that small and medium sized businesses comprise more than half of all jobs in the formal sector (Petra Smits et al., 2018). Businesses with fewer than seven employees are not required to join the program but if they were encouraged to do so they could add geographic and type of work variety to the program's offerings.

Several of the public organizations interviewed for this project recognized the problems and admitted that their actions were insufficient to confront them. However, some respondents thought the young people themselves were to blame on account of their lack of interest in work or their passivity. This kind of response feeds prejudice and discrimination against young people especially when the most vulnerable encounter inter-generational cycles of poverty, structural racism, machismo, homophobia, among other social problems.

For all these criticisms we should note that Youth Apprenticeship is a very good program for those enrolled in it. The young people receive the minimum wage though amounts may be deducted for travel and food benefits or the business may add these to the benefits. The businesses have their employment taxes reduced on these employees. The private sector training program SENCA established by federal law in 1946 offers specific programs for youth in Youth Apprenticeship in the areas of commerce, services and tourism. Our research respondents also mention a number of other programs with the same goals such as the Opportunity Center, the Program for Educating Adolescents, and the National Steel Company which is headquartered in the study city of Volta Redonda.

The experience of a first job could be substantial, as one of the youth activists pointed out:

It was at McDonald's. It was a unique experience because I learned to attend in a different way, a good afternoon, good morning, it was a huge difference, I learned to act with all kinds of people, to be patient, and not to take everything personally, to understand that not everyone has an education, that the problem is not always ours, and so I really learned a lot.

One educational administrator pointed to the problems with young people not benefiting from the basic educational infrastructure:

The major problem is elementary education... for social and financial reasons they do not remain in school. Sometimes they cannot come to these places because of violent situations. Currently, the secretariat of education does not offer technical courses directly to help them enter the world of work.

The young respondents that participated in the study stressed the need for the expansion of training initiatives and job vacancies. They also mentioned the need for more spaces for dialogue with adults and psychosocial support along with information campaigns and conscious raising about these issues especially given the increase in mental health problems among young people in Brazil in the last several decades. COVID 19

exacerbated mental health issues given the fear of contamination and of death from COVID and financial stresses. The study Mental Health in the Pandemic (IPEC, 2021) showed that young people between the ages of 18 and 24 were the most affected with a half of them classifying their mental health as either bad (39%) or very bad (11%) during the pandemic.

In line with issues being discussed in society at large, the youth respondents were asked questions that had to do with the positive and negative aspects of gender, sexuality, religion and race and ethnicity in youth participation in work. Despite responding that these issues did not interfere much with their experience of work, most of the youth said that minority groups were impacted negatively in getting work and in the daily work experience. They talked about times when racism and homophobia resulted in firings and constraints. To be a woman and young as well created a profile that resulted in stares and judgement at work. Others said that they suffered prejudice at school, university, the community and family. One young person both acknowledged the problems and said how he dealt with them.

As to my color, my religion, my sexuality, my gender, they are all against me in this city, because I am black, and non-binary. I use all this as a way of bringing about something positive for example, I tackle everything with force, I move things forward.

5 - Responses to questions about social and political participation

These questions were directed only to the youth respondents in the project. Several of them summed up the issue as one of having direct experience:

Adults can conjecture but they will never understand the reality of this (the youth) population in the current context in such a way as being capable of formulating adequate policies.

A young person knows more about the realities with a potential for creativity that allows better ideas about public policies.

Others saw participation as necessary for results:

Public policies don't get to these communities, to the communities on the periphery of the city. It's only schools that operate there, the rest of policies don't get there, the students are not seen.

Included in the questions for young people in Volta Redonda were questions about social participation touching upon their participation in the life of the community and in spaces where rights were discussed and about their participation in the development and implementation of policies. Most of the young people responded to these questions that they had never participated in these ways. But several of the youth added, however, that they had taken part in student councils in school, in social projects, and resident and religious associations. They also said they had participated in public debates on social media, petitions, and city council assemblies.

The young people were interested in movements or groups that discussed issues related to youth, particularly issues of race, gender, sexuality, social rights and issues related to involvement in productive activities. When asked how they would like society to be different they talked about living in less violent communities that had more respect for diversity and everyone's rights, without social inequality. They also wished for a society with more activist youth and with more education and public policy. The need for their participation was urgent:

It got to me that what was going to happen here was what happened to George Floyd. We need to have a sense of what is happening. Because it is annoying! At some point people will stop tolerating this and develop the drastic attitude that we do not need this.

I have an interest in everything, to struggle for the rights of women, children, LGBT, and I have always had this spirit of almost revolt, and then I chose the study of law. I want increasingly to enter this arena to fight for change.

6 - What the young activists said about their participation in the research project

The wish for more activist youth raised the question of how to stimulate more young people to get involved in social change. Our respondents talked about the importance of conversation and debate about issues that concerned youth, creating networks for dialogue and roundtables, being closer to people, producing pamphlets, acting in social networks and enlarging public spaces for debate. Some young people had found spaces in college, school councils, religious communities and among families and friends. One young person said he liked to debate because that was the only way to achieve change. For all this, the young people in general thought that their opinions and their wishes were not taken into consideration particularly by government. Perhaps for this reason they thought the best ways to be heard involved demonstrations, protests and participation in social movements, nonprofits and social projects.

The opening of spaces for discussion and participation was a constant theme from the young people. This opening should happen in ways that involved young people in their daily lives, starting with schools, and then universities and workplaces in accessible language in a way that would extend these opportunities to everyone.

The participation of nine members of the Youth Forum of South Fluminense (FJFSA/VR) was central to every part of the project^{iv}. CIESPI staff was in constant dialogue with this group about what they thought was most interesting, what questions they wanted to address, and what changes of direction they wanted at every point of the project. Towards the end of the project, we asked them about their participation, what they thought about this kind of collaboration between adults and young people and how it could contribute to youth participation and mobilization for the achievement of their rights.

The young people were struck by the different phases of a research project as they learned about the importance of collecting data and information to test out their ideas. They were most interested in the theme of entry in the work force and in the legislation and the programs that were designed to assist young people enter the world of work. They wanted to learn more about these topics and were invented about ways to approach the respondents.

Conducting meetings and interviews online was a struggle. The members of FJFSA found that conducting in-person interviews made it much easier to concentrate and to absorb the

responses. On the other hand, online interviews made scheduling easier and made participation from different places easier. And such interviews allowed the young people to learn or become more adept at such online platforms as Zoom and Google Meet. While the whole experience was considered challenging the young people had a positive view of it.

Using the internet was a problem when I was on the streets but this was easily dealt with by the investment [in better equipment and internet access]. The use of Word helped me enormously and the Zoom application too although it was kind of confusing for me but with practice, I was able to deal with it.

The first task, however, was to line up individual and focus group interviews and the young people had trouble finding people online because of various public department sites were not in operation. Many of the young people had low quality internet access and there was some support from the project to improve their access.

The internet was certainly the major problem. In the project we had support to stabilize our internet connections but the people we interviewed often did not have a very good internet and that made the interviews a little tiring.

CI&SPI staff in fact helped them contact the public officials.

The youth also had some insecurities about conducting the interviews themselves. They worried that no-one would pay attention to their request for interviews, that they would be ignored because of their age, and because of the reputation of FJSFA/VR as an active social movement in the city. It turned out that the young people thought themselves very well received by the key actors they spoke with but they were somewhat upset by some of the off the cuff responses and lack of understanding in some of the responses. Some found it difficult just to listen and not to engage in debate but they thought it important to be heard and respected by public officials.

We should note that this group of young people connected to FJSFA/VR had experience of policy events and some of them had participated in other studies. Notwithstanding, they experienced nervousness before the interviews and keeping the respondent involved in the themes and getting responses. They would have liked more experienced interviewers to be keeping notes of the sessions and to have had in-person interviews but the consequences of the pandemic would not allow the latter. Their interest was demonstrated in their desire to add time to the interview schedule but the project plan did not allow for this. However, this kind of interviewing was new to the young people and not easy:

Challenging, because the control of the interview was with us and keeping the interviewee involved in the subject may have been a challenge, but that was conducted with mastery.

We asked the young people about their reactions to the respondents replies. They agreed especially with those replies which stressed the importance of expanding young people's presence in policy discussions and the mechanisms for guaranteeing them their rights. They were, however, bothered by the possibility that such advances would be appropriated by the usual actors and that nepotism for example would not be curtailed. They were upset by respondents' support for child labor and for characterizing youth as lazy and responsible for their state of unemployment.

I identified with the necessity of giving more attention to young people and bringing them to public policy events; but the comments that young people were lazy did not represent me and did not represent the reality of being young, but was only ignorance and a superficial comment.

The young people from FJFSA like the other youth interviewed reiterated that they were especially discriminated against for their lack of professional experience which made them more

exposed to child labor and precarious work. They thought that structural discrimination made them more insecure and affected their mental health making it even more difficult to get into the labor market. To overcome these barriers, they needed free courses adequate for the demands of the job market and opportunities which allowed them to gain more experiences while they worked. Also important would be the offer of psycho-social help and increased monitoring of what employment opportunities businesses were offering.

We asked the young people about public services in their own city of Volta Redonda. They responded by talking about the lack of: quality, information about the services and their reach especially in the periphery of the city. Specific examples concerned the lack of professionals and supplies in hospitals and an insufficient public transportation network. Despite these shortcomings, the young people thought that few of their peers got involved in what happened in the region perhaps because of lack of information or perhaps because there were few arenas where they could be active. When public bodies sought their insight, they were more likely to respond. But since few actually knew their rights, they were used to being looked down on and relegated to second place. They were used to complaining that politics were terrible and that they would not be involved in community issues. For this to change, young people needed to be offered training about their rights and about the importance of participation. The spaces for

participation and debated needed to enlarged and advertised and the Children's Rights Council needed to be more active in outreach.

But during the process the activist group learned a great deal about entry into the job market and especially about the Youth Apprenticeship Program making them much more capable for discussing these issues with other young people. They were already familiar with the term participation and the right to participate from their previous activity and they acknowledged that this prior exposure allowed them to conduct the study especially in their interactions with the key respondents.

This project was a partnership between the group of young activists and CIESPI staff and the young people saw this partnership in a very positive light especially because they felt their experiences were respected. There were language and attitude differences at the beginning of the project but these were worked through.

The young researchers' overall reaction to being involved in the research was very positive:

It was an incredible experience which will stay with me always. They were very productive Saturdays [the research team met online early evening on Saturdays] which gave me a lot of understanding and especially that there were adults who were concerned about young people. This was incredible.

I believe we learned with you and you with us (the CIESPI team). This experience gave me a big jump in personal maturity and an increase in my citizenship and academic life important for my future.

With all the exchanges and experiences the project offered us throughout the process, I believe that that we all learned more than we offered. But all our past experiences were also fundamental to the development of the project.

The research pointed out huge difficulties in preparing young people, particularly low-income young people for the contemporary Brazilian labor market. It exposed deficits in legally mandated opportunities for young people to participate in public decision-making forums. But it showed opportunities in both areas. And it pointed out the possibilities and advantages of recruiting young people themselves to research these critical topics.

7 - Final considerations

At the end of field research, which included the tasks of collecting and analyzing data from interviews and focus groups, young people from the Youth Forum of South Fluminense in Action (FJSFA/VR) formulated a compilation of priority recommendations. The objective was to expand

and improve social participation and entry into the job market in the city of Volta Redonda. The young members of the team prepared a document entitled *Volta Redonda Youth Manifesto* for work and social participation.

The manifesto is part of the final report distributed to the stakeholders interviewed by the young people in the city. They also scheduled meetings for presenting the results. On the occasion, young participants of the research team were able to dialogue with representatives of governmental agencies about their ideas and recommendations. A final meeting was held through the forum's social networks to disseminate the results of the project to other young people. The meeting was broadcasted live.

Among the positive outcomes of the Youth Futures Project we highlight the mobilization of the city to pay attention to the themes proposed by the research. For instance, the Municipal Secretary of Education of Volta Redonda adopted measures to expand the dissemination of its courses to young people and adults, including on social networks. The Municipal Youth Coordinator created an executive committee to address youth-related issues with key actors from the current government, interviewed throughout the project. Also, a report by one of the team members about the role of public authorities in the formulation of policies for youth, was presented during the Municipal Youth Conference, held in August 2021. It contributed to the dissemination of data and recommendations

proposed by the research team as a contribution to the formulation of the new Municipal Youth Plan.

One of the most relevant aspects of the project was the experience of co-participation of adults and young people. It was an enriching and challenging process at the same time. Covid-19 has imposed new dynamics on Brazilian homes where children and young people needed to adapt to online classes. A significant number of the youth had to support their families, many of whom have suffered the impacts of the pandemic, on their physical and emotional health, as well as financially. At times, it was difficult to meet the project schedule, not only by youth but also by older team members given health and emotional strains imposed by COVID.

Inadequate internet access and lack of proper equipment imposed some constraints for the team interaction. It caused instability during research meetings and interviews with key actors while also challenged a widespread participation of young people in focus groups. Another issue shared by the youth with the research group was that academic formal language could be tiring. The team then discussed other ways to communicate and to encourage the engagement and participation of young people.

The exchange of knowledge between young people and adults was one of the high points of the project. The younger members of the team highlighted all they learned about the experience of conducting research together with the CIESPI

team, while the adults felt encouraged to think of more accessible forms of communication with the young researchers and activists, beyond the walls of the university. Another interesting aspect we observed was the importance of mediation by more experienced young people, helping not only to establish bridges with adults but to facilitate interaction with less experienced youth. Therefore, working with an already formed group of activists, as is the case with the Youth Forum, facilitated interaction between the team even on online meetings.

We would like to highlight some aspects that contributed to the success of the project. Issues concerning youth entry to the job market are of high interest for young people and are particularly aligned with current priorities, considering the increase of unemployment rates in Brazil during the Covid-19 pandemic. Demands discussed by young people and concerns expressed by public authorities in the interviews opened new possibilities to mobilize the political agenda of the city of Volta Redonda/RJ and allow further dialogue. It also favored the identification of gaps in policies, and the importance of engaging young people in the making of policies and programs. The fact that the FJSFA/VR had previous experience in political participation and advocacy facilitated the relationship with strategic partners in the city. It was also very important to have in the CIESPI/PUC-Rio team local residents who opened doors and facilitated the intergenerational dialogue based on the research results.

It is important to point out that bonds of trust were created along the process, facilitating dialogue and respect for different ways of thinking and expression among adult and young participants. Sharing, planning and executing actions collectively take time and often not possible due to time constraints in a project and/or research. Even so, listening to what children, adolescents and young people have to say, what they have learned from their previous experiences and what their needs and proposals are, is fundamental to guaranteeing their rights. Overcoming the concept of youth as a stage of transition to adulthood is important so that young people can actively participate in social life, guaranteeing respect for their rights and those of their community. Existing spaces for discussion and formulation of policies need to be remodeled to allow intergenerational participation, building a sense of belonging since childhood, and encourage involvement of all ages in the construction of a more democratic and fair society.

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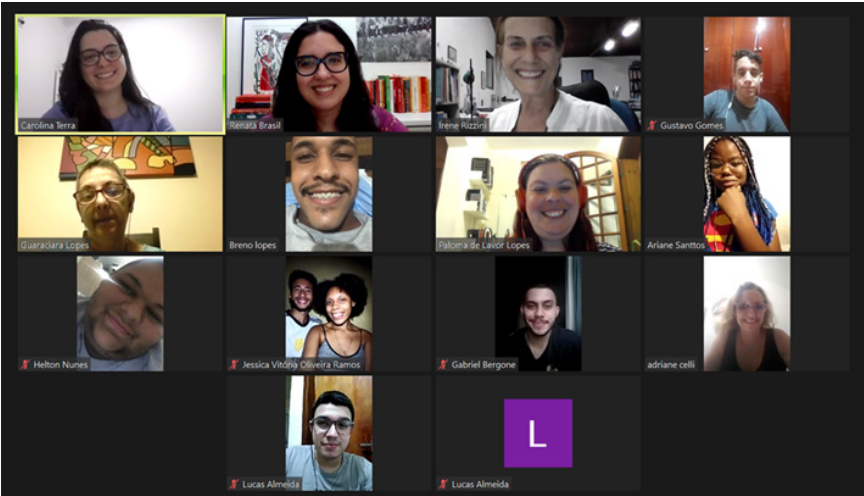
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Appendix 1

The young research/activists on a zoom call.



Appendix 2

The manifesto FJFSA drew up as a result of the project.



FÓRUM JUVENTUDE SUL FLUMINENSE EM AÇÃO

"Não fale de mim sem mim, fale de mim comigo"

MANIFESTO OF THE YOUTH OF VOLTA REDONDA ABOUT WORK AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

We, members of the Youth Forum of South Fluminense in Action, FJFSA, are participating in the Project Shaping Futures: Youth livelihood options in creating inclusive cities in partnership with the International Center for Research and Policy on Childhood at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (CIESPI/ PUC-Rio), the University of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom, and Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA/India). The object of the project is to contribute to making cities more inclusive and open to active participation and the development of young people.

We interviewed key actors in the municipality of Volta Redonda including public officials, non-government actors, as well as youth residents about how to enter into productive work and be active youth social actors. As we listened, we learned that the main difficulties for entering the work force were the lack of experience, the high levels of education demanded, the lack of qualifications and the shortage of compatible opportunities for those seeking their first job.

Given this, we know that it is critical that the public sector increases and prioritizes its policies for:

- Coordinating and funding programs for first jobs, guaranteeing compliance with the rules and capacity of the businesses to receive these young people;
- The professional formation and training of youth compatible with the actual demands of the job market with emphasis on areas of technology and information;
- Inclusion in the digital world prioritizing the offer of equipment and IT programs in schools especially in peripheral communities;
- Study help (fares, food, and stipend) that mitigates the inequalities of opportunity among different social classes. This assistance encompass youth in professional and technical courses which can contribute to the development of skills demanded by the workplace along with language courses.
- The establishment of the program Youth Apprenticeship in the municipality letting both businesses and youth know of the advantages of the program. In addition, it is critical to increase and diversify the number of job openings including those in small businesses, and making the professional training available compatible with the job openings available in the job market.
- Dialog and professional help for youth and the businesses to raise awareness of the negative impacts of discrimination in the lives of the young people;
- Combatting child labor;
- Ensuring youth participation in the various stages of the formulation of policies, programs and actions especially those aimed at young people;
- Disseminating information about initiatives aimed at placing youth in productive employment and social participation, guaranteeing access to information especially for youth on the periphery of the city;

Finally, we propose the planning of more meetings and the development of a municipal plan for young people in Volta Redonda which prioritizes the generation of work and income worthy of youth. We wish to contribute, to be heard, and to participate in the formulation of public policies, but for this to happen we need to be informed and trained on different topics and to have guaranteed access to public debates and the right to be heard and to vote in those places.

Volta Redonda, October 27, 2021

The Youth Forum of South Fluminense in Action

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Notes

ⁱ The full report is available at www.ciespi.org.br. This project was financed by the UK Youth Futures Programme supported by the UK Global Challenge Research Fund YF/1900.

ⁱⁱ The CIESPI staff were Renata Mena Brasil do Couto and Carolina Terra with Adriane Medina Celli as consultant and coordinated by professor Irene Rizzini. The youth participants of the project were Ariane Oliveira, Breno Santos, Gabriel Corrêa, Gustavo Ferreira, Helton Nunes, Jéssica Ramos, Lucas Santos, Marcela Silva and Sam Silva with Paloma Lopes and Guaraciara Lopes from the Home of the Child and the Adolescent as facilitators.

ⁱⁱⁱ Using creative and accessible outputs, the project aims to engage with young and adult stakeholders to transform local policies and practices, and provide lessons nationally and cross-nationally to support youth livelihood options that create inclusive cities.

^{iv} They are named in footnote ii.

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