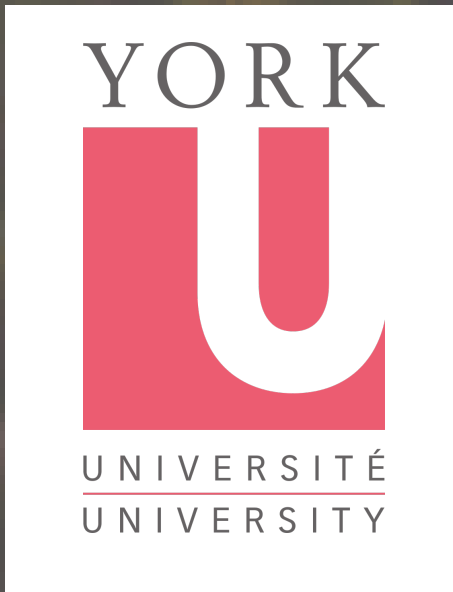


Partnerships for Youth and Planetary Wellbeing through Ecologies of Repair

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CHALLENGE

Ecological degradation and climate change are among the greatest challenges on earth. There are currently over two billion young people^[1] on the planet, all of whom suffer disproportionately from impacts of these challenges while simultaneously finding new ways of living well and sustainably. Collective and youth-centered actions offer better understanding of the effects on human and societal wellbeing and the ecological systems on which we all depend. At these intersections of human and planetary wellbeing, what are young people in various ecological and social contexts teaching us about youth led responses and resilience to these challenges? ^[1] Age 14-24]

PARTNERSHIP FOR YOUTH AND PLANETARY WELLBEING TEAM

This partnership is led by a dedicated group of researchers and community organizations from Canada, Costa Rica, Belize and Chile.

Dr. Kate Tilleczek, Dr. James Orbinski, Dr. Felipe Montoya, Dr. James Stinson, Dr. Debra Pepler, Dr. Mark Terry, Roxanne Cohen, Pablo Aranguiz, Deborah MacDonald, Vyjayanthi Janakiraman, Kasia Lujan, Lee McLoughlin, the Las Nubes EcoCampus (Costa Rica), Julian Cho Society (Belize), Wekimün Foundation, Los Lagos University, and the Indigenous Williche Community of Liukura (Chile).

Youth Advisory Committees (YAC) are also core team members since young people are crucial to insights and responses. The YAC currently consists of 4 young people in each location (n=16) who co-develop methods, analyses and knowledge sharing processes.

PROJECT AIMS

Our research partnership investigates and supports youth-centred ecological work in the Americas (Canada, Costa Rica, Belize and Chile). Together we fill gaps in knowledge and policy about youth and planetary wellbeing to understand how young people are affected by ecological degradation and climate change and how their responses contribute to living well and meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. We have three specific aims:

1. Investigate how youth live well and practice sustainably in various ecological and social contexts in the Americas;
2. Mobilize data within, across and beyond research sites, and
3. Co-develop and share educational tools with multiple audiences

“...youth will face...new ecological tipping points, while being equipped with less traditional knowledge and innate ecological stewardship. Climate change will be increasingly stressful for youth into the future...” (WHO Policy Brief, 2022)



METHODS

We hold reciprocal and long-standing relationships with partners in each research site. We employ youth-centred and decolonized methods alongside Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people through inclusive and socially just participatory research methods, including:

- Literature reviews (including local sources in each research site)
- Training youth as young anthropologists (certified by the Young Lives Research Lab)
- Filmed interviews with youth (n=125) and their chosen community members (n=60)
- Ethnographic activities co-developed with youth participants in each location, including filmmaking, art, and intergenerational knowledge sharing (nucham)
- Intergenerational Talking Circles (n=80)
- Additional interviews with adult key informants (n=20)



Figure 2: Williche youth learning with an Elder in an intergenerational knowledge sharing activity in Chile.

INITIAL FINDINGS: A CASE STUDY OF WILICHE ECOLOGIES OF REPAIR IN CHILE

In one research site in Chile, community engagement was conducted as an environmental kin study (Kanguieser & Tod, 2020), with/by and for the Indigenous Williche youth and Elders of the community of Weketrumao in the archipelago of Chiloé. In 2018 this community used traditional methods of ‘collective work’ (minga) to restore an old water mill that had historically been used to mill grain. These mills were originally introduced by the Spanish during colonization and they drastically changed work, family relations, and connection to the land for the Williche people as they came with the introduction of new seeds, food and economic practices, incorporation of new agricultural methods, and shifts in health and nutrition of Chiloe’s families, turning the ‘molienda’, or the act of ‘grinding’, into a local institution. Thus, the study explores how this intergenerational collective work became a practice of reparation, education, resistance, reconciliation, care and connection in response to overlapping ecological and social crises.

“But today, the mingas have to be recovered. We are contributing in solidarity with what we can, nobody is paying for it and nobody is buying it [...] people collaborate with their work, and contribute with food. And that's good for us. I feel good, I feel good. I am happy about that, because the people here, we have not lost much of our custom or our culture of the minga. Because our community continues to maintain that support.” - (Williche youth)



Figure 3: Maya youth in Belize participate in the “marshmallow and spaghetti” icebreaker as part of a youth engagement event.

In interviews (n=8), talking circle (n=1), and intergenerational nuchams (n=2) participants discussed ecological crises as symptoms of a sick planet. Williche reparation implies “recovering ourselves as children of mother earth”, and “resituating ourselves as humans within the set of relationships that sustain the human and more than human community”. The ideas and practices of ‘living well’, born from the South American Andean Indigenous peoples (Buen Vivir in Spanish, or Kúme Mogen in the Williche language, Mapudungun) illustrate processes of searching for harmony between every being that is part of the web of life.

“Because we lived from our culture, we were human beings with everything, with everything, with everything. No, the Spaniards did not bring us anything. We had our beliefs and our prayers, the great Lepuntunes (ceremonies) for our land and they tried to take everything from us, they invaded us and put so many things in our minds. But how many people from our past were not convinced with that? And that is what today is, bearing good fruit, I am very happy, I am very happy.” - (Williche Chief)

But we the Williche people are here and we will have to keep [the Land] to those who come to continue the struggle, because the Land is ours. And it means much more, the land...for us the Land is everything, because without Land we are nothing. That is why we want Land back, because whatever we sow on the land, that is for us, to feed ourselves. And for our health! That is what our parents taught us” - (Williche Elder)

For Williche youth and community members, reparation also means to look and reconnect once more with the territory through the lens of Williche values (such as solidarity, conviviality and reciprocity). Reparation is an act of care that creates opportunities to improve planetary health in ways that are relevant to contemporary movements for climate justice, land back, youth engagement, intergenerational knowledge exchange and collaboration with/by and for young people and their communities. Thus, ecologies and practices of repair bridge Buen Vivir for current forms of ecological and social degradation.

Technology plays an important role in reparation processes. Participants understand the mill as a problematic colonial technology. However, they also express that this modern device is also useful in addressing contemporary ecological issues through community and land-based practices of repair that have become educational.

“The mill is a classroom, it is a real school. There is a whole learning that has to do with the mill. For the younger children of our community and for the rest of the archipelago. And now I was saying that we, to the younger ones, have to engage with them and share that knowledge with those young people who today have a piece of land, so that they do not only exploit it and waste the money that they are taking from it.” - (Williche participant at the mill reparation)



Figure 4: Young participants define what wellbeing means to them as part of an ethnographic activity in Belize.

CONCLUSION

This case study of the ecologies of repair begins to show how a partnership approach to youth and planetary wellbeing provides generative possibilities when grounded in reciprocity, respect, prioritizing youth and Indigenous sovereignty and rights, and acknowledging the inherent interconnectedness of lands, peoples, and environments. As such, there is tremendous opportunity for anti-colonial ecologies of repair to flourish and be shared with educational and policy audiences. Youth and planetary wellbeing are better understood as an embodied and reciprocal process towards sovereignty, achieved through intercultural and intergenerational practice, research, and partnership.