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How Young People Talk and are Talked About: Regional Policy Discourses and Community-Based Dialogues on Local Climate Adaptation

Como os Jovens Falam e São Falados: Discursos Políticos Regionais e Diálogos Baseados na Comunidade Sobre Adaptação Climática Local

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Abstract

Local climate adaptation requires alignment between rhetorical, policy-level, and experiential, real-life levels, particularly concerning groups most likely to be affected by the climate crisis, such as young people. This article examines this issue on two levels: i) how young people are talked about and represented in normative policy discourses in climate regional plans, and ii) how young people talk and make themselves heard in dialogues with community stakeholders. First, a content analysis was conducted on the Climate Change Adaptation Plans of 8 northern regions of Portugal. Second, a thematic analysis was performed on observation notes from 8 ' collaborative climate labs' in those regions. The findings show that normative discourses mostly ascribe passive and vulnerable roles to young people, overlooking them in the design and implementation of adaptation measures. Yet, when given the

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opportunity to participate in climate-related discussions, young people reveal a strong willingness to engage in collaborative efforts towards solutions for their territories, despite facing adults' condescending attitudes.

Keywords: youth participation; climate change adaptation plans; community-based dialogues; local climate politics

JEL codes: I28, P48 and R58

Resumo

A adaptação climática local requer um alinhamento entre o nível retórico-político e o nível experiencial, da vida real, particularmente no que diz respeito aos grupos que mais serão afectados pela crise climática, como os jovens. Este artigo explora esta questão em dois níveis: como os jovens são falados e representados nos discursos políticos normativos dos planos regionais climáticos e ii) como os jovens falam e se fazem ouvir nos diálogos com atores-chave das suas comunidades. Em primeiro lugar, foi realizada uma análise de conteúdo dos Planos de Adaptação Climática de 8 regiões do Norte de Portugal. Em segundo lugar, foi conduzida uma análise temática das notas de observação de 8 'laboratórios climáticos colaborativos' nessas regiões. Os resultados mostram que os discursos político-normativos atribuem sobretudo papéis passivos e vulneráveis aos jovens, negligenciando-os na conceção e implementação de medidas de adaptação. No entanto, quando lhes é dada a oportunidade de participar em debates relacionados com o clima, os jovens revelam-se empenhados em esforços de colaboração para encontrar soluções para os seus territórios, apesar de enfrentarem atitudes adultas condescendentes.

Palavras-chave: participação juvenil; planos de adaptação climática; diálogos baseados na comunidade, políticas climáticas locais

Código JEL: I28, P48 and R58

1. INTRODUCTION

Considering that the next generations will be the most affected by climate change (Meyer, 2012), the lack of youth participation in climate-related political discourses comes as a matter of intergenerational injustice (Ursin et al., 2021). Effective climate adaptation requires aligning normative political frameworks with the real-life concerns and experiences of people. Efforts are underway to develop local policies, programs, and plans that address the demands of youth from both urban and rural areas (Guerra and Lopes, 2022), which according to Batista et al. (2023) are crucial for designing climate change mitigation strategies. Studies in this field increasingly highlight the importance of combining scientific, political and local knowledge in identifying territorial vulnerabilities, given that only by bringing together various stakeholders (e.g., citizens, companies, activists, policymakers), is it possible to collaboratively determine priority actions and a participatory elaboration of regional adaptation plans (Gonçalves et al., 2022; Lopes et al., 2022). However, challenges remain in implementing these initiatives effectively. In Portugal, policymaking has largely followed a top-down approach (Campos et al., 2016), often excluding citizens, especially young people[2], from meaningful involvement in climate adaptation planning.

The literature reports widely that young people are often excluded from decision-making processes in their own communities (Mallan and Greenaway, 2011). In fact, several dynamics of youth-related political exclusion are reproduced in the climate-change domain (Haynes and Tanner, 2015; Mort et al.,

[2] We understand youth as a social and cultural construct rather than merely a phase of life. This generational perspective risks viewing young people as a homogeneous group, downplaying the diversity among youth based on social, cultural, geographical, and political contexts and conditions (Bourdieu, 1983; Pais, 1990). Furthermore, such a perspective has implications for youth citizenship, regarding young people as citizens-to-be. We, instead, emphasize that young people should be seen as citizens in their own right. This contrasts with legalistic and statutory definitions of citizenship (bonded, for instance, to voting-age and nationality) that contribute to the exclusion and marginalization of young people from opportunities for political participation and decision-making, including concerning climate-related issues (Malafaia, Neves, and Menezes 2021; Malafaia 2022).

2017; Rousell and Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2019; M. Walker et al., 2012; Williams and McEwen, 2021). In addition to the ambiguous perspectives on young people – regarded either as climate victims or agents of change – and their exclusion from decision-making processes, there is a proliferation of tokenistic political practices regarding the inclusion of young people in climate policies. Indeed, tokenism (Arnstein, 1969; Bessant, 2003; Fielding 2012; Hart, 1992, 2008) translates into symbolic maneuvers that lead to young people feeling excluded from meaningful participation in climate-change debates and decisions (O'Brien, Selboe, and Hayward, 2018). Despite young people not having the right to vote, that is, not having direct participation in traditional mechanisms of institutional politics, they will be the ones inheriting the world. Therefore, young people's "voices and priorities" (Gasparri et al., 2022:7) should be present in climate policies.

Due to the global urgency in addressing the climate crisis and the 2030 Agenda's calls for youngsters to play a more active role in climate action because of their "capacities for activism" (UN General Assembly, 2015:12), there is a need to explore effective and meaningful ways to engage youth and their communities at the local level (Macintyre et al., 2019; Monroe et al., 2019). Previous studies account for the challenges related to the mobilization of diverse stakeholders, including in northern Portugal (Gonçalves et al., 2022), in responding to local climate problems. At the same time, it is argued that participation, particularly of young people, should be encouraged not only to improve the quality of decision-making (Lopes et al., 2022) and climate policies, but also to create democratic spaces for dialogue and promote intergenerational justice (Diógenes-Lima et al., 2023). To effectively include youth voices in climate policy-decision settings (Bessant, 2003; Delicado et al., 2017), participatory approaches and transformative processes (Haapasaari, Engeström, and Kerosuo, 2016) that promote youth reflection on their experiences and perspectives on the community are required.

Participatory methods emerge as potential tools that must be better developed (Haynes and Tanner, 2015), especially for young audiences. If young people are to be considered active agents rather than solely vulnerable actors (Mallan and Greenaway, 2011), community-based participatory methodologies on climate issues at the local level hold the potential to become crucial tools in bringing community actors together to promote young people as agents of change and as key actors in climate policies. In that sense, this article aims to (1) analyse the roles assigned to young people in regional Climate Adaptation Plans and (2) explore how young people discuss their community's climate issues with adults' representatives (e.g., policy-makers, economic agents, activists and researchers).

1.1. Youth Participation and their engagement in climate policy

The withdrawal of young people from formal and conventional mechanisms of political participation has, for decades, been an object of concern for both academic scholars and political institutions (e.g., Henn and Foard, 2012; Percy-Smith, McMahon, and Thomas, 2019). At the same time, in recent years, a body of research has consistently claimed that young people are not disengaged from democratic politics, even though they are increasingly distant from traditional institutional arenas. Instead, youth participation practices and 'acts of citizenship' (Isin, 2009) have evolved into new shapes and formats, oriented towards cause-based repertoires, lifestyle and identity politics, and horizontal and hybrid arenas of expression (Amnå and Ekman, 2015; Henn and Foard, 2002; Norris, 2004; Percy-Smith, 2010; Ribeiro and Menezes, 2022; Ribeiro, Neves, and Menezes, 2014; Walsh, Black, and Prosser, 2018; Weiss, 2020). In parallel, as noted by Malafaia, Neves, and Menezes (2021), an overemphasis on these participatory transformations may risk overlooking the importance of institutional political decision-making processes, while failing to adequately represent youth groups that engage with politics in ordinary ways – neither disengaged nor highly active. Moreover, in terms of political socialisation, young people often perceive family and media as contributing to a negative relationship with politics, as "the message youngsters are getting is that the political world is an adult world, with an adult language and clouded by an adult bias" (Malafaia, Neves, and Menezes, 2021: 451).

Research shows that the shortcomings identified in institutional initiatives and designs aiming at fostering the inclusion of young people in deliberative processes (e.g., public consultations and participatory budgeting) are, in fact, reproduced in climate change politics. The condescending environments, the instrumentalisation of young people, and the lack of recognition of youth's political competence and agency (Amnå and Ekman, 2015; Boldt, 2018; Talpin, 2011) are recurrently reported as institutional failures to genuinely support youth participation. In environmental policy and planning,

symbolic practices of participation, top-down modes of discussion, and the co-optation of youth views for the purposes of adult and powerful actors tend to prevail (Conrad et al., 2011; Fernandes-Jesus, Seixas, and Carvalho, 2019; Thew, 2018).

As Davies, Tabucanon, and Box (2016) point out, children's perspectives are frequently excluded from legal and political debates about climate change. The absence of youth voices in institutional climate policy settings results from the ambiguity (Lorgen and Ursin, 2021) surrounding the role of youth. Indeed,

> the way in which the climate crisis is played out at the political level entails important paradoxes: young people are pointed as victims of climate change and, simultaneously, placed at the centre of climate responsibility, namely as catalysts of political change. (Malafaia, 2022: 4)

The school climate strikes come as an example of a highly mobilised youth movement, considered a "watershed moment in academic literature and global climate politics" (Neas, Ward, and Bowman, 2022: 1). At the same time, it is challenging to measure "the direct causal impact that these climate strikes have had on state and intergovernmental climate change policies" (Han and Ahn, 2020: 2).

Outside the institutional political arena, young people have been acting as "active frontline agents" (Gasparri et al., 2022: 7) through protest actions and concerted pressures to change a system that is widely dominated by economic interests (Feldman, 2021; O'Brien, Selboe, and Hayward, 2018). An example is the development of campaigns focused on pressuring universities to divest from fossil fuels and pursuing climate litigation against companies and governments – as the case of the lawsuit filed by Portuguese youngsters against 33 European countries at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), as documented on the Youth4ClimateJustice.org website, enabling replication by young people in other contexts. With the intensification of the climate crisis and the rise of youth mobilisation around climate-related claims, the phenomenon of tokenism – where children's participation is mostly superficial, e.g., under the appearance of being given a voice, youth hold little power and agency (Hart, 1992) – figures as crucial to examine, not only in official documents (Plan International, 2021) but also on the educational field (Fielding, 2012).

Recognising that young people can play active roles, rather than merely being seen as victims in need of protection (UN General Assembly, 2015), requires a real recognition of their potential as agents of change, equipped with the capacity to contribute to the development of local climate adaptation policies. Involving young people in discussions about climate policies as critical thinkers capable of proposing ideas and solutions for their surroundings (Mallan and Greenaway, 2011) requires recognising them as full-fledged citizens and political agents. In practice, this means embracing the power-agency nexus: political agency always incorporates a power-relational process intersected by structural constraints and conflictual differences. Democratic institutions should focus precisely on this; rather than "to level out differences between citizens, [it is about] to find ways to bring competing needs to the table and make difficult decisions about the allocation of resources and the production of values" (T. Walker, 2010: 187), which includes challenging broader established power dynamics (Eide and Kunelius, 2021; Zummo, Gargroetzi, and Garcia, 2020). While young people seem aware and mobilised by the urgency of the climate crisis, there remains a fundamental lack of opportunities for a real inclusion of their voices and positions in arenas of decision-making, ranging from the macro-level institutional politics to the local and micro-level contexts where they live.

As Percy-Smith and Burns (2013:14) argue, fostering the role of children and youth as increasingly valued, active agents in the development of sustainable communities requires not only a greater articulation between schools and communities requires not only greater articulation between schools and communities, but also the provision of "spaces which are not always controlled by adults or defined by the adult agenda". This aligns with the aforementioned problems of initiatives aiming only at symbolic (not real) inclusion, without due consideration of young people's agentic power (Bowman, 2019) – which translates into a mismatch between rhetoric and practice (Schlosberg, 2012). Recognising this shortcoming, Rousell and Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles (2019) contend that there is a lack of participatory approaches that actively engage young people in envisioning responses to the complexities of climate change.

1.2 Participatory research processes towards youth inclusion in climate policy

As a counterweight to the shortcomings discussed above concerning institutional efforts to engage young people in inclusive and horizontal decision-making processes, a range of academic-oriented projects have been proposing alternative designs and practices related to climate change. Acknowledging that children and youth will be particularly affected by climate risks, albeit seldomly engaged in climate political decision-making, Trott (2020:550) argues that participatory approaches could help develop practices to "build awareness, enable agency, and enact change".

Participatory methodologies entail the potential to create space for the engagement of diverse voices in decision-making (Dollinger et al., 2021; Green et al., 2022) when there is a collective endeavour capable of "challeng[ing] power relations, (...) provoking a bottom-up approach that welcomes the active involvement of participants in the design process" (Green et al., 2022: 194). In this vein, diverse participatory research approaches and methodological tools have been developed to support young people as active agents in shaping sustainable communities and climate futures – ranging from Participatory Action Research approaches (Campos et al., 2016) to the Photovoice method (Lam and Trott, 2022) and other visual tools (Trott, 2020). These community-based methodologies, driven by empowering and pedagogical goals, intentionally attempt to promote climate agency and bring youth closer to the institutional political sphere.

Donald, Young, and Mach (2022) argue that promoting community debates about climate problems using methodologies such as local climate storytelling is a way to leverage climate governance towards alleviating territorial inequalities in policymaking. Likewise, in the field of urban planning, Mallan and Greenaway (2011: 374) point out that "most young people have insightful and practical ideas that take into account the needs of the whole community", which is why it is crucial that they "[be] given the opportunity to recognise the interaction between their own understandings of the world as it is now and the vision of what it might become". Ursin and colleagues (2021) analysed the Climate Workshop methodology in Norway, which was developed to include children and youth in policymaking related to local climate action by instigating debate among them and interdisciplinary researchers. It is argued that by considering new youth perspectives on local problems and generating meaningful conversations around solutions, these methodological strategies are quite promising for developing local climate policy. It is important to move beyond the representation of children and youth as citizens-in-the-making (Lorgen and Ursin, 2021; C. Walker, 2017), which marginalises them from decision-making processes.

In Portugal, two European-funded projects are worth highlighting: BASE ('Bottom-up Climate Adaptation Strategies for a Sustainable Europe') and CUIDAR ('Cultures of Disaster Resilience among Children and Young People'). Both focus on climate change adaptation and disaster risk management, adopting participatory methodologies such as climate scenario workshops (Campos et al., 2016) and other workshops (Delicado et al., 2017). By bringing together diverse stakeholders and creating collaborative discussion forums, both projects were grounded in community-based, bottom-up approaches. However, only in the latter project were children and youngsters in direct interaction with relevant (powerholder) actors, showing "institutional representatives the relevance of including the perspective of younger people in the development of emergency plans and public policies" (Delicado et al., 2017: 337). As the authors stressed, it remains urgent to address the problem of "children and youth rarely [being] considered as active subjects" (249) in policy documents and legislation on disaster management in Portugal.

Linking participatory methods with adult-youth partnerships – where not only the voices of young people are valued, but they also provided with the tools and opportunities to engage in participatory processes that extend beyond mere consultation - is crucial to promote horizontal learning practices and democratic school environments. Indeed, just by being at school – a key socialisation context – young people experience every day what democracy (and its limitations) entails, which turns the schooling context into an obvious setting for fostering collaborative and participatory designs that include young people.

As made clear, the ambiguous and paradoxical representations of youth voices in climate policy come as a problematic symptom of the broader disregard for young people's climate political agency. Simultaneously, while academic researchers are fostering participatory designs and spaces, there is a lack of exploration of both youth's discourses on local climate challenges and how they manage to make themselves heard and considered in those spaces. That is why, in this article, we first examine the representations of young people in local normative discourses and, second, how youngsters discuss

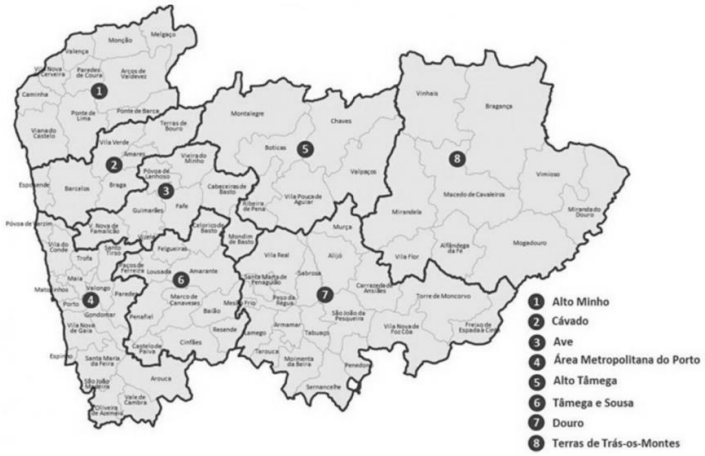
climate adaptation with community stakeholders and other relevant actors, through a participatory methodology – the Collaborative Climate Labs (CiCli-Labs). The uniqueness of the CiCli-Labs' methodology lies in bringing together economic actors, policymakers, activists, and researchers to address community-level climate problems selected by young people in their schools, aiming at creating plural dialogue towards enhancing local climate resilience. (Malafaia et al.., 2024)

2. CONTEXT AND METHODS

2.1. Context and scope of the project

This article is based on data collected within the project 'ClimActiC: Citizenship for Climate - Building Bridges between Citizenship and Science for Climate Adaptation' (NORTE-01-0145-FEDER-000071), which began in late 2021 and ended in mid-2023. With a strong territorial scope, the project was implemented in eight public schools, each located in one of the eight Intermunicipal Communities (CIMs) in northern Portugal. The CIMs correspond to NUTS III[3] and consist of clusters of municipalities with administrative and cooperative functions within regional territories, as local governance in Portugal is primarily vested in municipalities (see Figure 1). The ClimActiC project aims to create spaces of dialogue between young people, scientists, activists, economic agents, and policymakers to deepen the knowledge about local climate problems and lay grounds for collaborative construction of local climate adaptation.

Figure 1. Map of Northern Portugal, according to Nuts III (EU Regulation No. 868/2014 of the Commission, dated 8 August 2014)



2.2. Methodological and analytical procedures

First, we performed content analysis (Bardin, 2011) of Climate Adaptation Plans produced by the CIMs between 2017 and 2020. Then, a synthesis of these documents was shared with teachers and students to trigger classroom discussions about local climate adaptation challenges and the development of community profiling projects in schools (Pinheiro et al., 2024) with the supervision of educational researchers through a set of workshops with teachers. The community profiling projects, inspired by previous initiatives in environmental education (Marques, Faria, and Menezes, 2018), were articulated with different school subjects (e.g., Geography, Sciences, and Citizenship) and aimed at challenging students to investigate specific climate issues of their territories. Based on the community profiling results, pre-selected groups of students in each school discussed their findings on the local climate issues they deemed significant with local actors (from the social, economic, political, and academic sectors) within Collaborative Climate Laboratories (CiCli-Labs). Overall, 19 teachers and 67 students from the 8th to the 12th grade were involved in the CiCli-Labs, as well as diverse local actors in each school/region (see Table 1). Since the CiCli-Labs' dynamic relies on a manageable number of participants, a smaller number of students representatives were selected from each participating school class; sometimes teachers also opted for student rotation in each session.

[3] NUT III is explained on this link: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/background

Table 1. Participants in the CiCli-Labs (young students and local actors) by each region

		Alto Tâmega	Terras de Trás- os-Montes	Tâmega e Sousa	Douro	Alto Minho	Área Metropolitana do Porto	Cávado
	School years	8th grade (1 class)	8th grade (6 classes)	7th grade (1 class)	9th to 11th grade (4 classes)	8th and 10th grade (5 classes)	secondary level (3 classes)	secondary level (4 classes)
	Age-ranges	13 years old	13 years old	12 years old	14 to 16 years old	13 to 15 years old	15 to 17 years old	15 to 17 years old
Participants	Students	6	14	6	10	14	8	9
	Policy makers	1	2	1	1	1	2	2
	Economic agents	1	0	1	1	1	0	2
	Activists/NGOs representatives	1	0	1	1	1	0	2
	Researchers	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

As presented in Table 1, diverse young students and community stakeholders participated in climate adaptation discussions, within the CiCli-Labs held in schools in the specified Portuguese regions. To achieve our goal of understanding how young people are represented and express themselves, we performed a qualitative cross-analysis of normative policy discourses conveyed in the regional climate adaptation plans alongside youth discourses voiced during the CiCli-Labs, and recorded in observation notes.

2.2.1. Content analysis of the climate adaptation plans of Intermunicipal Communities

We performed a content analysis (Bardin, 2011) of the Climate Change Adaptation Plans of the 8 CIMs. The documents analysed were produced between 2017 and 2020, and were either obtained from CIM officials or downloaded from these entities' official websites (see Table 2).

Table 2. Analysed documents of the Climate Change Adaptation Plans of the 8 CIMs (NUTS 3) of the North of Portugal (NUTS 2)

Intermunicipal communities (CIM)	No. of analysed documents	Documents titles	ID	Year of Publication
Alto Minho	1	Summary Report: Intermunicipal Climate Change Adaptation Plan of Alto Minho	AM	2019
Alto Tâmega	1	Report on adaptation to climate change (AT)	AT	2020
Área Metropolitana do Porto	1	Metropolitan Climate Change Adaptation Plan	AMP	2017
Ave	1	Ave Intermunicipal Climate Change Adaptation and Risk Prevention and Management Plan	AVE	2020
Cávado	2	Intermunicipal Strategy for Climate Change Adaptation in the territory of NUTS III Cávado [Part 1]	CAV	2019
		Intermunicipal Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change in the territory of the NUTS III Cávado [Part 2]	CAV	2019
Douro	1	Intermunicipal Action Plan for Climate Change in the Douro	DOU	2017
Tâmega e Sousa	1	Intermunicipal Climate Change Adaptation Plan for Tâmega e Sousa	TS	2019
Terras de Trás-os-Montes	2	Identification and Contextualization of Climate Risks [1]	TTM	2020
		Risk assessment associated with climate change and production of inter-municipal cartography [2]	TTM	2020

Given our aim of understanding the extent to which the participation of youngsters has been considered in the design and development of climate adaptation strategies at the policy level, we began our content analysis by identifying whether and how young people are represented in the ten plans, listed above. Initially, we searched for and coded references to young people, organizing the data into five sections: i) contextualisation or characterisation of the territory/communities; ii) description of risks or vulnerabilities of the territory/communities; iii) identification of publics or sectors targeted by climate adaptation measures; iv) description of the design methods of climate adaptation measures; v) description of the implementation strategies of climate adaptation measures.

Subsequently, we conducted a keyword search within the documents (see Table 2) using terms such as *children*, *youth*, *young people*, *pupils*, *students*, *school*, *citizens*, *citizenship*, and *participation*. References unrelated to young people were excluded following an initial interpretative screening of units of analysis, particularly those using broader terms, such as *citizens* and *participation*. For purposes of data analysis and presentation, the keywords 'children', 'youth/young people', and 'students' were merged into one category ("young people"). For the same purposes, we grouped the categories "contextualisation or characterisation of the territory" and "description of risks or vulnerabilities of the territory/communities" into one category. Similarly, we merged "design of climate adaptation measures" and "implementation of climate adaptation measures" into one category, leaving "publics or sectors that are the targets of climate adaptation measures" as an independent category.

Following Bardin's (2011) procedures, we treated entire paragraphs containing the keywords as units of analysis for coding. The coding process was conducted using an Excel file to organize references by CIM and category. This initial coding was carried out by one of the co-authors of this article and subsequently reviewed and discussed by the other three co-authors to ensure the consistency and validity of the interpretations. Finally, the proportion of references coded under each category and CIM was calculated, as will be shown in the presentation of findings.

2.2.2. Thematic analysis of the observation notes of the Climate Collaborative Laboratories (CiCli-Labs)

The CiCli-Labs are a participatory methodology focused on creating space for a youth-led debate between the students and diverse local actors, including policymakers, economic actors, NGOs, and activists from each of the eight regional communities, and university researchers (for more information on the methodology of CiCli-Labs, see Malafaia et al., 2024). The ClimActiC team invited all external actors to consider the climate issues identified in each school. In total, 15 CiCli-Labs were organised across 8 schools (from the 8 Intermunicipal Communities) between April and June 2022.

As mentioned at the beginning of the methodological section, the CiCli-Labs were informed by the community profiling projects that students conducted in each school, with support from their teachers. In line with the community profiling methodology (e.g., Francescato, 2000; Menezes and Ferreira, 2014), students employed several data collection methods to identify and explore a climate issue they considered most relevant to their communities (Pinheiro et al., 2024). The young participants then brought these issues to the table. Their presentations of the climate problems and perspectives served as catalysts for collective discussion on how to address these challenges. This process, facilitated by our team, unfolded through three main stages of collaborative activities: i) a "Climate Problem Tree" and a "Climate Social Cartography"; ii) the "Solution Clouds" and the "Cumulonimbus Solution"; and iii) the "Speed Climate Dating", the "Hands on the Ground and Eyes in the Clouds" and the "Climate Adaptation Collaborative Plan" (Mafalaia et al., 2024). These activities were designed to be interdependent, progressing from a discussion of the problem's causes to its territorial effects, and ultimately collaboratively constructing the most feasible solution. The young students also evaluated the specific contributions of various stakeholders in facilitating its implementation (Pinheiro et al., 2024).

One of the authors of this article took observation notes throughout all CiCli-Labs sessions. These written records were revised and expanded by the research team responsible for facilitating the CiCli-Labs. In the first session, a loose observation was made to familiarise the researchers with the contextual dynamics, progressively adjusting the observation gaze. In a second moment, systematic observations were developed, considering four dimensions: contextual (e.g., climate problem; time; actors), spatial (e.g., description of the space; the way participants were sitting), discursive (e.g., what was said and by whom) and relational (e.g., discursive power relations, such as interruptions, additions, and oppositions). Several project researchers reviewed all notes, and a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) was

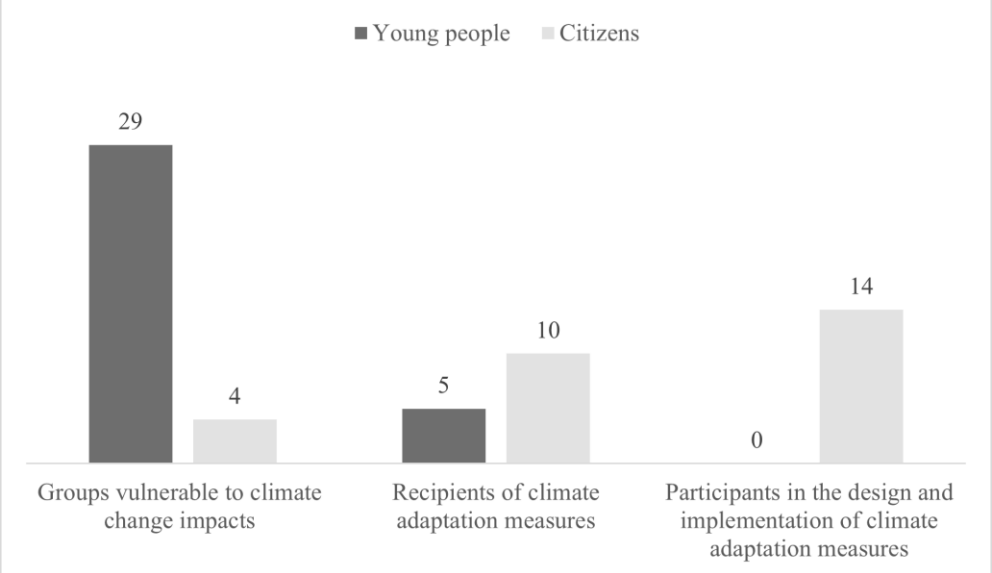
performed to identify and analyse patterns of meaning across the observation notes. Drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for thematic analysis, through an inductive and data-driven approach to the observation notes produced during the CiCli-Labs' sessions, we identified thematic patterns and tensions between students and adult participants in the debates around community climate issues. In order to interpret patterns (themes) within qualitative data, all researchers involved in the project started by familiarizing themselves with the observation notes, then proceeding to the generation of codes (e.g., 'Disagreements between young people and adults') and the combination of codes into themes. These steps, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) enable researchers to determine the significance of themes. This article focuses on the two following themes that emerged through the combination of codes: i) Adult positions and youth voices: nuances of power and resistance in a collaborative, participatory space; ii) Civic and political potentialities of collaborative spaces: learning and politicization in (inter)action.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Normative discourses of young people's role in climate adaptation

The content analysis of the normative policy discourses conveyed in the regional climate adaptation plans produced by the Intermunicipal Communities reveals that *citizens* are mentioned throughout all phases of the climate adaptation plan. However, specific references to *young people* primarily occur when characterising them as part of "vulnerable groups". Less frequently, they are mentioned as "recipients" of climate change measures, but are notably absent in the design and implementation stages. Figure 2 illustrates these findings, displaying how often young people are mentioned in different stages of climate adaptation plans.

Figure 2. References to young people in the North of Portugal CIM's (NUTS 3) Climate Change Adaptation Plans



Hart's (1992) ladder of participation is a theoretical model that describes the varying degrees of involvement children and young people can have in decision-making processes, particularly within community projects or educational settings: ranging from merely symbolic and tokenistic levels to active and real involvement. Our analysis shows that youth participation in the design and implementation process of the Climate Adaptation Plan is nonexistent, not even reaching the first step of participation (in which 'children are listened to') as defined by Shier (2001) based on Hart's typology. In the adaptation plans, young people are identified as a vulnerable group, particularly when considering demographic and economic-related problems in the territories, seldom called upon to participate in the design and implementation of adaptation measures. Moreover, young people are not necessarily considered beneficiaries of specific climate adaptation measures, nor as citizens with political agency. These

findings are consistent with previous research (e.g., Boldt, 2018; Delicado et al., 2017; Rousell and Cutter- Mackenzie-Knowles, 2019) that point to the lack of recognition of youth competence. In sum, the normative discourses in the regional policy documents point to representations of young people as a group holding a passive role in climate change adaptation. As will be presented and discussed in the following subsection, observations during the CiCli-Labs sessions suggest that this passivity is more a byproduct of adults downplaying the agentic role of young people than a lack of willingness and voice regarding climate solutions for their territories.

3.2 Young people's voices and interactions with adult stakeholders in collaborative spaces

During the CiCli-Labs' sessions, we often observed situations where adults tried to override young people when they had the floor. Interruptions of young people's speeches, as well as parallel and overlapping conversations among adult stakeholders, emerged as condescending and delegitimising practices, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> The young people were giving ideas and writing on post-its while the adults invited, sitting on the roundtable, were listening to them. The adults ended up offering opinions in the development of the young people's ideas. […] The facilitator kept encouraging them, but the adults' main challenge was listening without responding to comments. Whenever the young students followed a train of thought, the adults questioned what was being said. (...) At some point, the adults diverged, and it all sounded like two different conversations. The political and economic actors, and the researcher, were talking among each other. (...) When the facilitator asked the youngsters what they thought about the issues brought up by the community stakeholders, the discussion quickly went back to the previous adult-dominated conversation about the importance of agriculture without taking much time to listen to what the youth were saying on a personal level, concerning their family-related experiences with agriculture. (Cávado Region School – May 11, 2022)

The adults' inability to listen – contrasted with their willingness to speak – was strikingly evident in the observation notes. When young people spoke, adults often became distracted, chatting among themselves, or attempted to take over the conversation, sometimes interrupting the students and speaking at length. In essence, they showed interest in sharing opinions but did not demonstrate the same willingness to listen to the youth's perspectives and ideas. Additionally, we noted situations where adult actors tried to influence the young students' positions without recognising their experiences or seeking common ground. The observation notes also revealed the young people's difficulty in asserting their ideas in the face of somewhat critical attitudes from the adults involved:

> Young people shared their personal and family experiences with agriculture [its' importance in their families' sustainability and how it is being severely affected by the changes in temperature]. However, comments such as "you can't think of agriculture as a small business" quickly followed, and the young people's talk was eventually disregarded and turned into a very technical, 'adult-conversation' about the role of agriculture in the region. (Cávado Region School – May 11, 2022)

At the same time, amidst the unfolding of collaborative space for discussing local climate adaptation, the relationship between adult positions and youth voices was characterised by power-resistance dynamics. There were successful attempts by young people to express their views and assert their opinions in front of the adults. The following excerpt shows the youth's stance on climate issues, questioning the opinions of the local actors:

> "Many times, the Municipality organises initiatives to clean up certain places, but when these initiatives are organised, people don't show up", the local policymaker said.
> "But you cannot impose those things; you have to understand what people would want", Laura[4] replied.

[4] All names are fictional to protect the participants' anonymity

"You could probably join general and climate movements and help with that", Rita added.

The scientific actor invited (a university researcher) said that "There is not good enough dissemination of initiatives. Sometimes you don't go because you don't know about it." – Youngsters agree that they often don't know about the events because nobody tells them; that kind of information never reaches them. (Metropolitan Porto Region School – May 25, 2022)

Simultaneously, the civic and political potentialities of the CiCli-Labs became apparent throughout the observation notes. These collaborative spaces helped forge room for learning and politicising local issues. Bringing different perspectives of local stakeholders to schools (ranging from policymakers' viewpoints to activists' experiences and researchers' expertise) led young people to think about and complexify climate issues, laying grounds for transformative learning. In a debate at the Douro Region School about the effects of climate change on the community, with a focus on social vulnerabilities, young people's attention was drawn to the perspective of the actors involved:

Following the "Social Climate Cartography" activity, the facilitator asked the participants to indicate their conclusions about the areas of greatest vulnerability. (...) The economic actor referred to the region's orography, which allows for greater thermal accumulation, causing problems in the vineyards and the areas marked on the map, such as the grape moth. In her turn, the researcher mentioned some related social aspects, i.e., the effects of climate change on communities living in the most vulnerable areas, particularly regarding the impacts on their economic activities. Following these contributions, the young students reflected on the impacts that the economic activities, particularly in the vineyard region, would have on agriculture, including the reduced attractiveness of this important occupation and the deepening of the existing vulnerabilities. (Douro Region School - June 1, 2022)

The CiCli-Labs also represented an opportunity to build partnerships between young people and adults. Throughout the sessions, there was collaboration between these groups, focusing on discussing climate solutions and exploring concrete possibilities for change. The following excerpt depicts a moment in which young people presented concrete proposals for their territories in terms of solutions:

João asked if it would be possible to limit the circulation of individual transport in the city and, in parallel, to increase public transport options, mentioning the example of Luxembourg, a country he had been to recently, and where public transport was free for everyone. The economic agent agreed and added that there is already a free pass for students on public transport and mentioned Lisbon, where free access for young and older people was discussed in April. (…) Concerning the wildfires, and after hearing the perspectives of different actors, Ricardo suggested that forests should be cleaned and monitored more closely to prevent fires: "It is also one of the reasons why people don't buy houses in these areas because they are afraid of fires. Maybe the municipality could play a more active role in this regard". (Cávado Region School - May 25, 2022)

Within the CiCli-Labs' debates, the young students related the climate problems they had brought to those sessions to broader civic issues of their community, and, collectively, they began to envision how change could be brought about:

The NGO actor commented on the example Gustavo was talking about regarding trash cans being removed from football games to avoid vandalism: "Often, the problem is people's lack of civic manners", he said.
Luísa said that "there should be moments like these for reflection, a proper space for reflection", referring to the role that citizenship education (a school subject) can play.
"The citizenship education was very boring; we didn't do anything" – Gustavo said – "What we are doing here is actually a citizenship education class because it foments our reflection".
The Intermunicipal Community representative added, "moments of debate like these, the CiCli-Labs, are fundamental to think and reflect about things. It is fundamental to have more spaces like this because that's how you create change". (Metropolitan Porto Region School – May 25, 2022)

The analysis of the CiCli-Labs' observation notes shows that young people are inclined to express their voices towards climate-related issues at the local level, despite adults' difficulties in truly considering youth views as meaningful and endowed with political agency.

4. DISCUSSION

Our analysis of the normative discourses on climate adaptation at the local level shows the passive and condescending roles attributed to young people: they are largely portrayed as vulnerable to climate change impacts and not considered as groups to be involved in the design and implementation of climate adaptation measures. In both arenas – at the institutional political level and at the school-community level – there is a misrecognition of youth as citizens and agents of change. These findings resonate with recent literature unveiling adults' condescending attitudes towards young people's climate concerns (e.g., Malafaia, 2022), the exclusion of youth from political climate decisions (e.g., Lorgen and Ursin, 2021), and the lack of research aimed at bridging youth perspectives with climate policymaking (Thew, 2018). Interestingly, as shown in our data, while such disregard for youth climate agency is evident in local climate discussions within the CiCli-Labs, young people demonstrate a keen awareness of climate issues and a willingness to engage in collaborative efforts for solutions in their communities. Since youth is a social and cultural construct, encompassing multiple 'youths', there is a need to recognize the diverse experiences and roles that young people play within different social and cultural contexts and across different territories. We argue that community-based participatory methodologies hold potential to challenge tokenistic practices in policy and planning by promoting active youth involvement in local climate adaptation, which requires a multilevel process (Lopes et al., 2022) of co-designing adaptation plans (Gonçalves et al., 2022).

In response to Green and colleagues' (2022) call for bottom-up approaches that challenge power relations and promote active participation, this article provides empirical evidence that a collaborative, participatory space both leverages forms of youth resistance and holds civic and political potentialities. In line with Mallan and Greenaway (2011), we argue that involving young people in intergenerational, plural, and hands-on approaches at the community level may not only reflect their understandings of complex topics, but also promote transformative learning and lay the foundations for youth-adult partnerships (Haapasaari, Engeström, and Kerosuo, 2016; Fielding, 2012; Percy-Smith and Burns, 2013).

In the current context of the climate crisis, fostering youth participation in discussing and planning climate policies is a crucial matter of intergenerational justice, given that young people will inherit the consequences of today's climate crisis (Ursin et al., 2021). Departing from such recognition, this study has critically examined the roles assigned to youth in regional Climate Adaptation Plans and their interactions with community stakeholders, including those shaping local climate policies. By analysing both how young people are portrayed in regional political documents and how they engage with stakeholders in youth-led collaborative spaces, we aimed to assess the alignment between normative political discourse on climate adaptation and the real-life experiences and concerns of young people. Our findings underscore the need for a more genuine integration of youth perspectives into climate policy discussions, highlighting a significant gap between the current normative approaches and the lived experiences of young generations.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the regional Climate Adaptation Plans made clear that local political arenas should foster bottom-up mechanisms to include youth voices in climate policy-decision settings (Delicado et al., 2017) that effectively promote youth's agentic power (Bowman, 2019), and their experiences of learning and politicisation (Ribeiro and Menezes, 2022). Similar research projects, involving collaborative practices for climate adaptation, have been showing the challenges involved in sustaining the continuous engagement of diverse stakeholders in such participatory processes, while emphasizing that effective changes at the local level can occur only when different levels are articulated (e.g., academic, economic, political, social) and when target audiences are diversified (Lopes et al., 2022). Our study highlights a structural problem that encompasses all participatory efforts: the power differentials at stake and the

need to create conditions to equalize the weight of certain voices.

When it comes to actively engaging youth in the institutional political arena towards climate action, going beyond condescending environments and consultancy moments, we argue that schools may be suitable stages to test these practices by i) creating horizontal interactions with diverse local actors based on schools-communities' synergies; ii) promoting learning and mobilisation processes around issues that young people feel as personally relevant to them; iii) involving children and young people in community decision-making (e.g. planning and implementation) towards local climate adaptation; iv) and laying the ground for intergenerational dialogues and collective agency towards common futures. Taking into consideration the schools' role as a fundamental socialisation sphere and as potential democratic spaces of dialogue, they emerge as potential breeding grounds for an active involvement of young people in climate planning and decision-making processes (Shier, 2001), where a 'youth friendly' (Boldt, 2018) environment may be fostered and tokenistic practices tackled. As shown in the observation notes of the CiCli-Labs, power-sharing and agency promotion processes are not taken for granted in participatory contexts. As reported in the literature, adultist biases tend to develop into structural barriers (Boldt, 2018) and everyday antagonisms (Malafaia, 2022) that hinder young people's participation and climate action. Our research shows that adultism significantly permeates practices and discourses, both tacitly and explicitly, even when participatory methodological designs are developed to promote youth-led decision-making processes.

We recognise that effectively linking rhetoric and practice poses challenges to local and regional policy-making processes. As Schlosberg (2012) emphasised, concrete political participation practices at the local level need to be promoted toward effective models of climate adaptation. Since our study's development is anchored in the limited setting of schools – where the CiCli-Labs were organized and carried out – future studies could explore the potential of participatory methods in community settings around the elaboration of politically consequential regional climate plans. Additionally, and because our project was focused on public school students, perhaps other educational settings, such as private schools from different regions, could be engaged, together with public school students, in transversal and cross-regional curricular projects to produce youth-led political recommendations targeting intermunicipal communities.

All in all, this article signals the need for further research to incorporate participatory methods and explore their role in effectively engaging youth in climate policymaking. This is particularly important, given the current tokenistic policy practices and the scarcity of participatory research that goes beyond mere consultancy or one-off events of youth-politician interactions. In addition, it is important to build bridges between civil society, science, and public policies, with particular emphasis on the valuing of young people's voices, anchored in a community perspective, to craft solutions at the local level for climate adaptation.

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