

Youth perspectives (and values) in relation to community institutions and forest resources in Mexico

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Introduction

Forests provide essential environmental services such as carbon storage, air and water purification, soil conservation, and habitat for plants and wildlife¹. Forests are also critical sources of sustenance and livelihood for local people; delivering food, building materials, and sources of income². Where a strong dependency exists between people and forests, community-based forest management, or community forestry, can improve income streams while conserving natural forest ecosystems. This is accomplished through participation, cooperation, and collaborative decision-making³.

While three quarters of the world's forests are held under public (state) ownership⁴, an estimated 13% are currently under the control of local communities, with this figure rising to 30% in low- and middle-income countries⁵. In some places, it is higher still. In Mexico, for example, rural communities have held legal rights over customary territories for over half a century⁶, and as much as two-thirds of the country's forests are found on community-controlled lands. As many as 2,000 communities in Mexico are known to be active in forest management⁷.

Yet recent trends suggest that forest communities can struggle to get the most from their forest commons⁸. In Mexico, national timber production has declined over the past 10-15 years⁹. A mismatch between community capacities and the demands of federal government regulations is

¹ Theodore Panayotou, "Counting the Cost: Resource Degradation in the Developing World." *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 14, no. 2 (1990): 270-283; Joe Landsberg, and Richard Waring, *Forests in Our Changing World: New Principles for Conservation and Management*. (Island Press-Center for Resource Economics, 2014).

² Sheona Shackleton, Charlie Shackleton and Patricia Shanley. *Non-Timber Forest Products in the Global Context*. First Edition. (SpringerLink, 2011); William D. Sunderlin et al., "Livelihoods, Forests, and Conservation in Developing Countries: An Overview." *World Development* 33, no. 9 (2005): 1383-1402

³ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation (FAO). "Forty years of community-based forestry: A review of its extent and effectiveness 2016". Accessed November, 2018 <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5415e.pdf>

⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). "Global forest resources assessment 2015: how are the world's forests changing?" Accessed November, 2018 <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4793e.pdf>

⁵ Reem Hajjar, Reem, and Johan A. Oldekop, "Research Frontiers in Community Forest Management." *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 32 (2018): 119-25

⁶ Leticia Merino, "Rights, Pressures and Conservation in Forest Regions of Mexico." In *Environmental Governance in Latin America*, 234-256. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

⁷ Grenville Barnes. "The Evolution and Resilience of Community-based Land Tenure in Rural Mexico." *Land Use Policy* 26, no. 2 (2009): 393-400; Gustavo A. Del Angel-Mobarak, "El medio forestal de México", In Gustavo, A. Del Ángel-Mobarak (Ed.), *La Comisión Nacional Forestal en la Historia y el Futuro Fde la Política Forestal de México*, Accessed February 2019 ; Ernesto, Herrera-Guerra, *Protecting forests, improving livelihoods: Community forestry in Mexico*. (FERN, 2015).

⁸ Hecht, Susana, Yang Anastasia, Bimbika Sijapati Basnett, Christine Padoch, and Nancy L. Peluso, *People in motion, forests in transition: Trends in migration, urbanization, and remittances and their effects on tropical forests*. FAO, 2015.
doi:10.17528/cifor/005762

⁹ Comisión Nacional Forestal (CONAFOR), "Estrategia nacional de manejo forestal sustentable para el incremento de la producción y productividad (ENAIPROS)". Accessed February 2019.
<http://www.conafor.gob.mx:8080/documentos/docs/50/6418Planeaci%C3%B3n%20ENAIPROS%202013-2018.pdf>; Benjamin Hodgdon, Francisco Chapela, and David Bray, *Mexican community forestry: Enterprises and associations as a response to barriers*. (Rainforest Alliance, 2013).

cited as one key barrier, affecting the competitiveness of forest enterprises and limiting needed investments in community forestry development¹⁰. External, market-related factors are also significant and well documented¹¹. Internal (within community) factors, however, are less well understood. For example, as rural village populations reduce in size and age, forest communities can be left short of collective labour, energy, and ideas to invest in forestry activities¹²— a reminder that community-based management regimes may struggle to simultaneously deliver forest conservation and rural development over time¹³.

This shines a light on the importance of ensuring inclusivity in community forestry structures; that long-term success requires broad community memberships invested and involved in associated governance and work¹⁴. Current structures in Mexican community forestry are often dominated by older, male community members, leaving several sub-groups underrepresented, including women, non-rights holders, and youth. With regards the role of youth, recent work from Latin America is pointing to community leaderships keen to get young people more involved in forest-related work and cultures¹⁵. Yet published research on community forestry, common property, and environmental governance has little to say about the nature of youth-forest connections, nor whether youth see community forestry as a viable and meaningful option for meeting work and life aspirations.

The research presented in this paper forms part of emergent work¹⁶ responding to such knowledge gaps. It is based around empirical work conducted in two forest communities in Oaxaca, Mexico that explored youth-held perspectives (and values) relating to community life, collective institutions and projects, and forest resources, and the current and potential roles of youth in forest work and associated governance. The paper first provides background information on study sites and data collection methods. Key study findings are then presented in accordance to four key themes: youth-held work and study aspirations; youth-held perspectives on community institutions; youth-forest linkages, perspectives and knowledge; and, current and potential roles for youth in community forestry. The paper ends with a brief conclusion.

Study Sites, Design and Methods

The study took place in two communities in the state of Oaxaca, southern Mexico (Fig 1).

¹⁰ Hodgdon, Chapela and Bray. *Mexican community forestry: Enterprises and associations as a response to barriers*.

¹¹ Klooster, Daniel, Romain Taravella, and Benjamin D. Hodgdon, "Striking the balance: Adapting community forest enterprise to meet market demands, a case study of TIP muebles (Oaxaca, Mexico)", *Community forestry case studies*. No. 7/10, Rainforest Alliance/FOMIN, 2015. <http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/case-studies/tip-muebles>

¹² Alejandra Aquino-Moreschi, and Isis Contreras-Pastrana. "Comunidad, Jóvenes y Generación: Disputando Subjetividades En La Sierra Norte de Oaxaca." *Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Niñez y Juventud* 14, no. 1 (2016): 463–75; James Robson, Dan Klooster, and Jorge Hernández-Díaz, *Communities Surviving Migration: Village Governance, Environment and Cultural Survival in Indigenous Mexico*, First Edition (Routledge, 2018).

¹³ Merino, "Rights, Pressures and Conservation in Forest Regions of Mexico".

¹⁴ Robson, James P., and Daniel J. Klooster. "Migration and a New Landscape of Forest Use and Conservation." *Environmental Conservation* 46, no. 1 (2019): 1-8.

¹⁵ Robson, Klooster, and Hernández-Díaz, *Communities Surviving Migration: Village Governance, Environment and Cultural Survival in Indigenous Mexico*; Robson, James P., Fermin Sosa Pérez, and Michelle Sanchez Luja. "Exploring Youth-community-forest Linkages in Rural Mexico." *World Development Perspectives* 16 (2019): World Development Perspectives, December 2019, vol.16; James P. Robson, Sarah J. Wilson, Scott Francisco, and Ian Davinson-Hunt. "The future of forest work and communities". *World Development Perspectives*, (2019).

¹⁶ Robson, Sosa Pérez, and Sanchez Luja. "Exploring Youth-community-forest Linkages in Rural Mexico"; Robson et al., "Engaging youth in conversations about community and forests: Methodological reflections from Asia, Africa, and the Americas". *World Development Perspectives* 16 (2019): 1-4; Juilo Zetina, Roan Balas McNab, and Miriam Castillo. "Youth, forests and community in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, Petén, Guatemala". *World Development Perspectives* 16 (2019): 1-4; Julia Quaedvlieg, Julia, et. Al. "Youth perspectives in rapidly changing landscapes: Lessons from Peru". *World Development Perspectives* 16 (2019): 1-4.

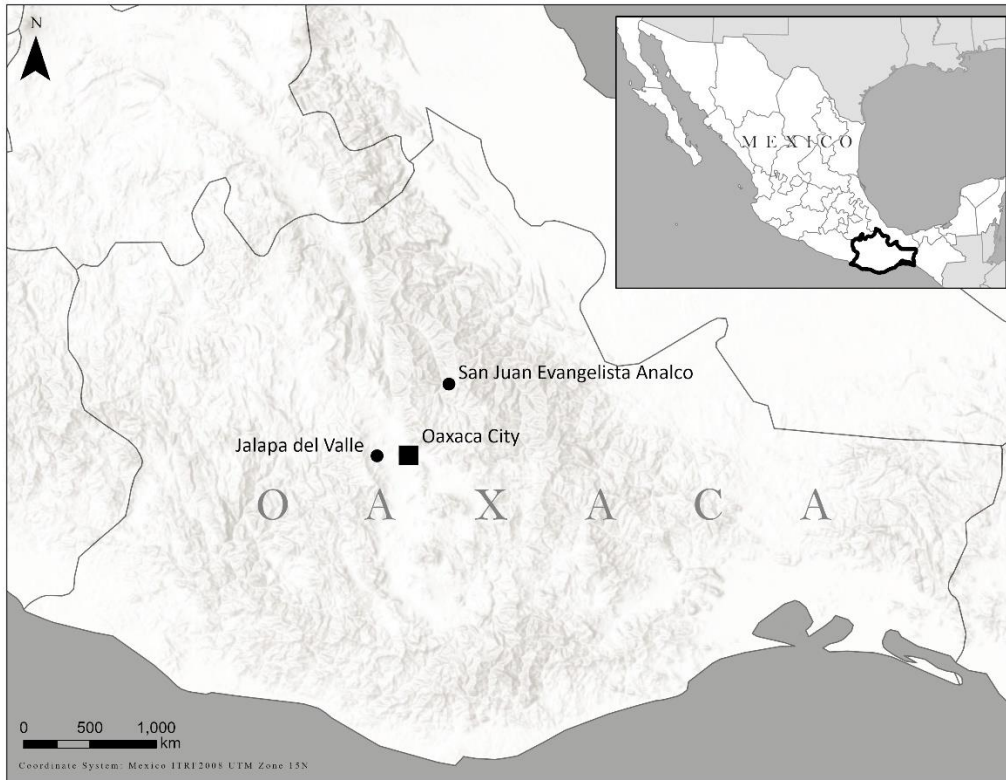


Figure 1: Location of study communities in Oaxaca, Mexico.

San Juan Evangelista Analco is located in Oaxaca's northern highlands (Sierra Norte) region, 60 km or 2 hours drive north of Oaxaca City (state capital). It had a population of 460 inhabitants in 2018, from a peak of 986 in 1970¹⁷. Over the past decade and a half, the community has placed increased emphasis on territorial resource use and planning. It began formal forest management in 2013, won a national award for community forestry in 2016, and has held Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) certification since 2017. Community leadership in Analco has been keen to hear the views of its young people in relation to local forests and community forestry.

Jalapa del Valle is located in Oaxaca's central valleys (Valles Centrales) region, 20 km or a 45 minute drive from Oaxaca City. The community had a resident population of 1543 in 2018. Local livelihoods were once strongly tied to local forests but in the mid-1970s Jalapa's Assembly banned logging, designating forests as conservation areas. The community won a national prize for nature conservation in 2013. It was not until very recently, following problems (mountain pine beetle, forest fires) associated with its "no-touch" forest policy, that some degree of formal forest management was proposed. In 2019, after several years of internal debate, the community began logging under a new formal forest management plan. Jalapa's communal authorities have expressed an interest in working with young people given the range of jobs that forest management could generate.

Primary data collection took place from May to September 2019 and involved participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and field visits and follow-up workshops. In both

¹⁷ Sistema Nacional de Información Estadística y Geográfica (INEGI). "Archivo histórico de localidades". Accessed July, 2020. <https://www.inegi.org.mx/app/archivohistorico/>

communities. Participant observation allowed for a better understanding of the dynamics at play in the two communities, how local governance institutions functioned, and the role of young people in these communities.

Key data came from 64 semi-structured (individual and group) interviews, conducted with a range of community and non-community actors.

34 interviews with youth covered five key themes or topics: aspirations (work, study, family, future plans, the meaning of success), community life (duties/responsibilities as community members, the assembly and community decision-making), forests (collective forest management, attachment to local forests and the land, interest in forest work), and community futures. Interviews with older adult members and community authorities focused on the themes of community organization (responses by communities to current challenges), importance and role of youth (current perspective of youth, their commitment to and role in the forestry sector), and community futures. Interviews with experts from academia, NGOs, and government focused on the state of forest communities in Oaxaca, the role of youth in community forestry, and community futures.

Supplementary Survey data from FoFW project

In this paper, primary field data (as described above) is supplemented in the results on a couple of occasions by survey data collected from youth in the two communities as part of the Future of Forest Work and Communities (FoFW) project, that took place in the summer of 2017. In both places, 16 young people answered a short questionnaire about their educational and work aspirations, mobility plans, and forest knowledge and forest use.

Study Findings

Youth aspirations around study, work, and migration

A total of 34 young people, between 14 and 29 years of age, were interviewed in San Juan Evangelista Analco and Jalapa del Valle. As Figure 2 shows, 14 participants, between 14 and 25 years old, were attending school at the time, with the other 19 working. 3 of the participants said they had completed their studies.

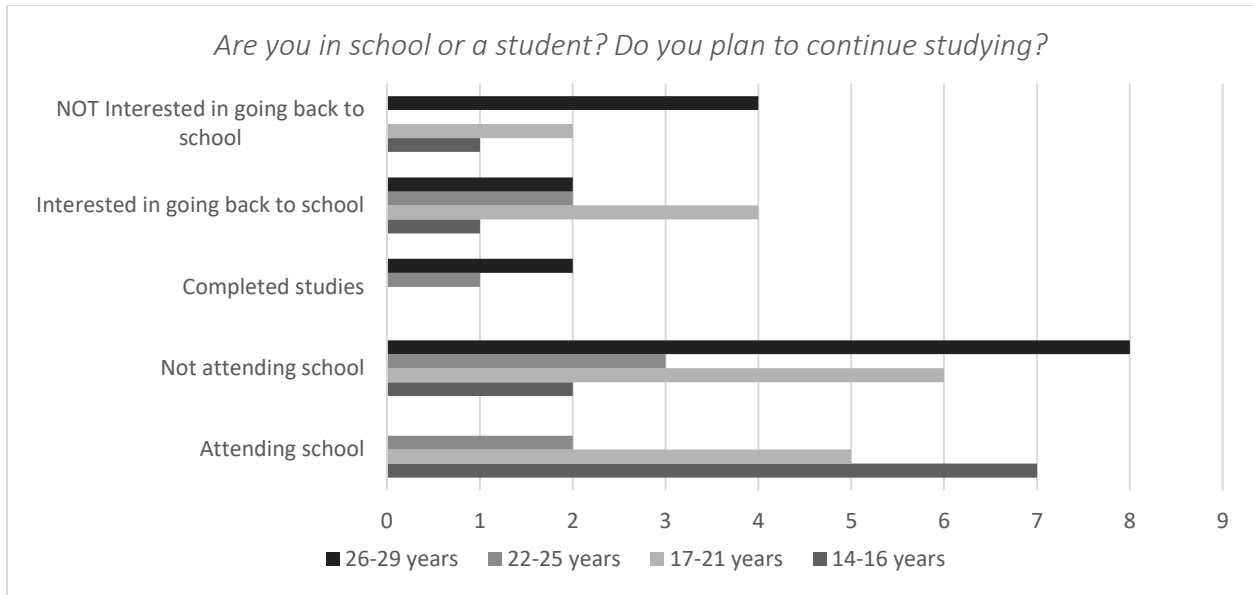


Figure 2. Educational status and aspirations of youth

9 of the participants attending school were in the 14 to 16 years of age range. Of these, 7 showed an interest to go onto high school and then university. As one 14 year old in Analco explained, *“I would like to be a biologist, I would also like to be a teacher, but I would like even more special education or maybe history, I would like a career in that”*. These youth had a range of degrees in mind, from psychology to computer science, agricultural engineering, and law. Not all in the 14-16 age group were interested in studying: *“I don't know; maybe as soon as I finish middle school, I'm going to work as a bricklayer and stay here in my town”*. (Noel Bautista, 14 years old, Analco).

In the 17-21 and 22-25 age ranges, there was some youth still studying or planning to, and then some who were looking to work. In Analco, there were more youth in the latter category, while in Jalapa a small majority of youth were still attending high school or had gone onto university; 6 participants were travelling daily or at weekends to Oaxaca City to attend college courses and degrees in business engineering, computer science, forestry, nursing, and psychology. It is notable that in both communities, only middle school is available locally, which means that young people need to travel to larger towns or into Oaxaca City in order to attend high school, technical college or university. With close proximity to Oaxaca City, such travel is easier for youth from Jalapa than from Analco. One female interviewee from Analco was taking nursing at the Universidad de la Sierra Sur (UNSISS), a 4 hour drive from her community.

From among youth in the 26-29 age range, two-thirds were either not interested in or planning on further study. For many, the idea of continuing their studies was unrealistic because of family and work responsibilities: *“Well, the truth is, I would like to, but right now with the family, it is a bit difficult. And, well, I say, with what I learned, with what little I know, I can already pay for the household expenses”* (Amador Jacinto, 27 años, Analco).

Educational attainment and study aspirations connected to youth-held work plans. Current jobs held by youth across the two communities are shown in Figure 3. Those not working are in school.

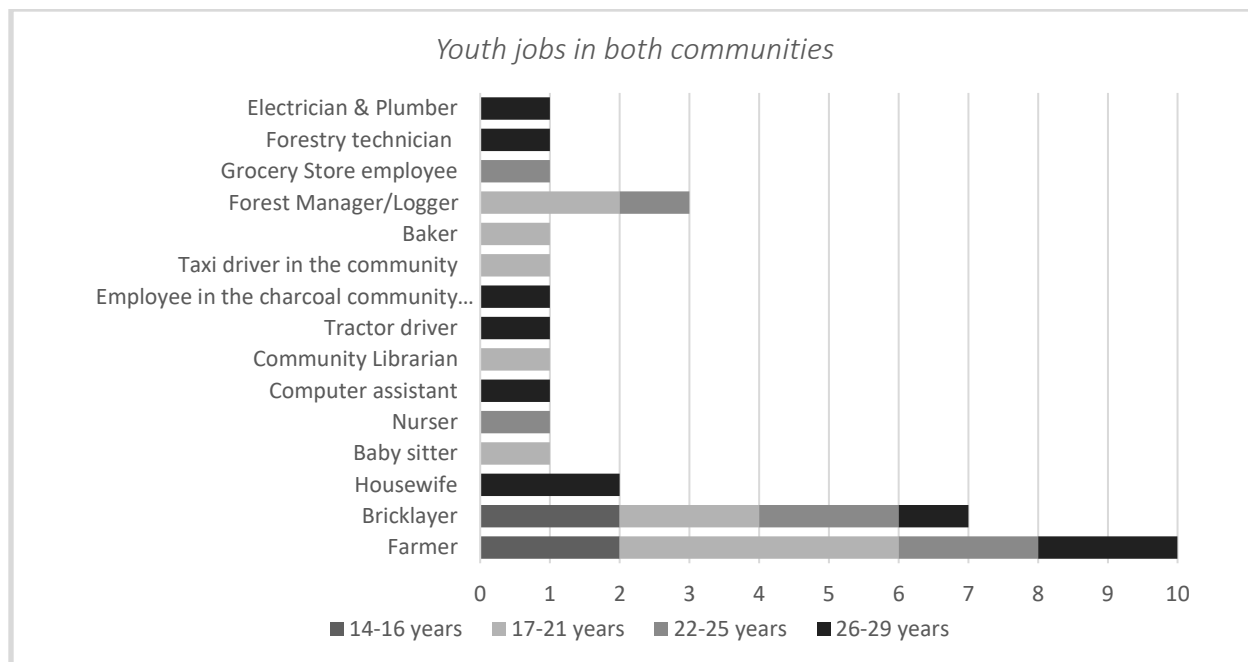


Figure 3: Current jobs held by young people in the two communities

In Analco, youth are working as bricklayers, farmers, community librarian, computer assistant, tractor driver, and in the community charcoal enterprise. Farming is the most commonly-held job (7 participants), although it is often supplemented by other work. Bricklayer was the second most popular activity (5 participants). In Jalapa del Valle, youth were working a wider variety of jobs, including bricklayer, baker, farmer, taxi driver, logger, grocery shop employee, forest technician, electrician, and plumber. As in Analco, some youth have two jobs at the same time, or work part-time or seasonally when not attending school. Farming was not as prominent an activity (3 participants). Notably, in Jalapa, 3 youth were being temporarily hired as loggers, while the community’s forest technician is only 26 years old. While no youth interviewed in Jalapa had jobs in Oaxaca City, those working in the trades (electrician/plumber, bricklaying) often travelled outside of their community for work.

Study and work status and aspirations appear to influence youth-held plans around mobility and migration. In both Analco and Jalapa, significant numbers of youth expect to leave their community for a period of time (Figure 4)

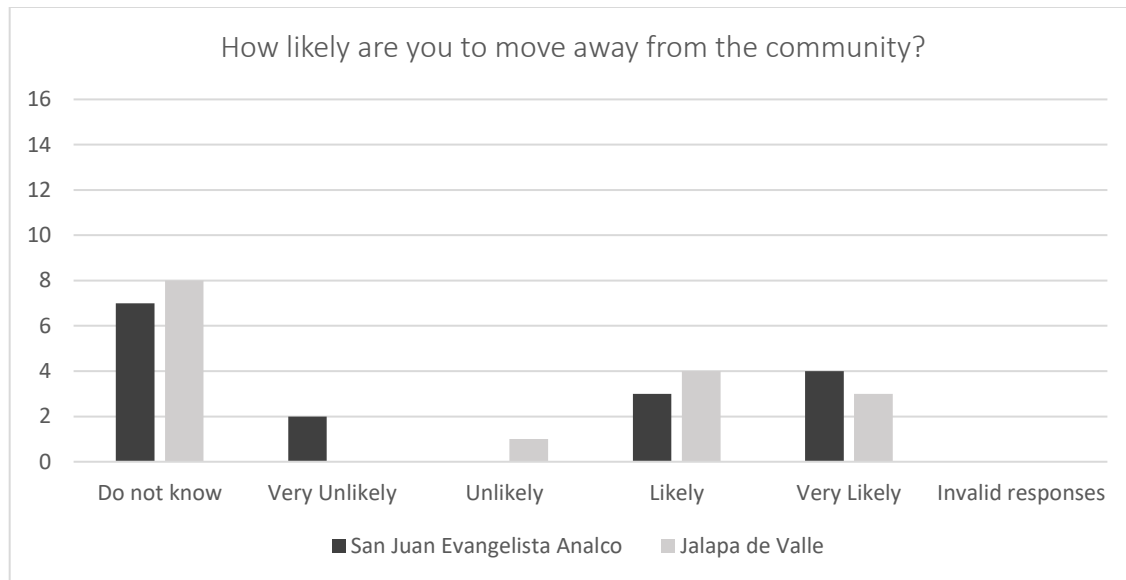


Figure 4. Likelihood of participants moving away from their community

Youth felt that this was necessary to pursue certain career and study aspirations, with cities offering more opportunities. However, interview data did point to some differences between the two communities, with Jalapa’s proximity to Oaxaca City enabling more youth to consider having a job in the city but to remain living in the community: *“I really like the place where I live, the atmosphere and the tranquility where I have grown up. I do not like to think of living elsewhere. I believe that if in the future I can work in a hospital and be able to return here every day, I would do that. It is one of the reasons why I do not rent a room in the city while I study because I like the atmosphere here and although I have to travel for two hours, it is worth it. My thing is to stay here”*. (Karla Sofia Vazquez, 20 years old, Nursing student, Jalapa del Valle)

However, while data suggest significant numbers leaving their communities, it was also clear that in both communities there are youth either not planning/wanting to leave or who will return after some time spent away. A third of youth (6 of 19) interviewed in Analco, and just under half of youth (7 of 15) interviewed in Jalapa del Valle expressed the desire to stay in their community. FoFW survey data showed that 10 of 32 youth participants expected to be living in their home community when they were 30 years of age. Among the older youth interviewed, several had spent time living elsewhere, but had returned with the plan to settle in their community:

“We went to live in Tijuana, and after 12 years, my father went to the United States and my mother and my sisters returned because they wanted to visit relatives. At first when I arrived in Jalapa del Valle, I wanted to return to Tijuana... in fact I returned for 8 months but it was not the same. Right now my plan is to build my house here in the community, maybe to visit Tijuana, but now I see myself here, I'm getting used to the idea”.

(Nahum Morales, 27 years old, Electrician & plumber, Jalapa del Valle).

Another interviewee (female, 26 years old) from Analco was already planning to return to the community once she starts a family so that her children can grow up there. This spoke to a

commonly-held perception that while cities offer job and study opportunities, life there can be hard and often dangerous.

There were also a few youth who never really entertained the idea of leaving: *“The truth is that I don't want to continue studying. What I like to do is work in the fields and tend livestock ... since I was in sixth grade, my plan was not to study. Look, I never placed much importance on study... I always focused more on work in the countryside”* (Javier Manzano, 29 years old, Analco)

Because not all young people have the idea of permanently migrating away, they are interested in what their communities can offer. Some of the younger interviewees saw improved access to technology as offering an opportunity to stay; one middle schooler (Male, 14 years old) aspired to become an engineer in informatics or computer science so he could work from home. A number of Youth in Jalapa spoke about wanting better transportation links (buses, taxis, paved road) with Oaxaca City so that they could more easily live in the community and commute to work in the city. Several young people shared aspirations to start a small business in their community. In Analco, 6 participants talked about running a bakery, butchers' shop, stationery store, car wash, grocery store, or a food stand. In Jalapa del Valle, 2 participants had plans for a beauty salon and computer center, respectively. Although they also realised this would be challenging:

“Maybe as a young man, I would like to start a business. I don't know, maybe a butcher shop, a grocery store, something that can improve in the future. But since it is still a small town, we do not have enough people to start a business”.

(Arturo Bautista, 29 years old, Farmer, Analco)

This idea of finding a way to stay was picked up on by some of the non-community practitioners and experts that I spoke to: *“I feel like they want to have their own project, or be part of a project where they can dedicate themselves. There is that interest, but that project can be inside or outside, I think it does not matter. And on the other hand, there is a desire to be in the community. Those two things could come together and become an interest to stay in the community, but not necessarily ...”* (Francisco Chapela, Estudios Rurales y Asesoría Campesina, A.C)

Youth perspectives on community institutions

In both Analco and Jalapa, young people start to be given civic and communal responsibilities within their communities upon completing their studies, or upon starting a family. This means that youth in their teens tend to have limited experience of community institutions. It also means that the experiences of older youth (those in their twenties) from the same community can vary widely, dependent upon their life choices up until then. Figure 5 shows the number and gender of youth interviewed who had held a cargo in their community.

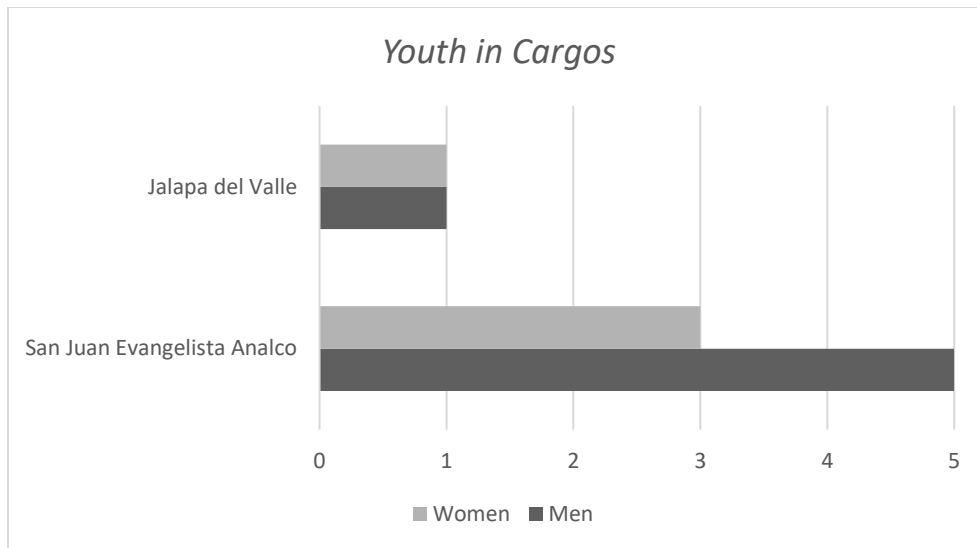


Figure 5. Young participants, males and females that said to hold a *cargo*.

Of 34 youth interviewed, less than a third (10) had held a *cargo*. However, considerably more youth in Analco (8) had performed such a role than youth in Jalapa (2). In Analco, these 8 youth had performed cargo roles in a range of civic and communal governance areas: Adviser to the Surveillance Committee (including the watcher of the forest management called “Jefe de Monte”), Secretary of the Surveillance Committee¹⁸. Clerk of the court of the Municipal Agency, Treasurer of the Municipal Agency, Councilman of finance of the Municipal Agency, Secretary of Municipal Agency, Councilwoman of Education and Commissioned of the Elementary School. In Jalapa, the 2 youth who performed cargos had done so in the areas of Commissioned of the Church and *Topil* (messenger boy): *“I made a cargo because my mother was ill; it was in the church. I had to clean, decorate and debris the church, and it was my first cargo. I liked my cargo because it was every Sunday, so in the mornings the mass and in the afternoons the children came because they gave catechism and I had to play with them”*. (Yesenia Pacheco, 22 years old, Jalapa del Valle)

When youth were asked if they had attended community assemblies, it was mainly older male youth (23-29 years of age) who said they had. However, in Analco, two older female youth (27-29 years of age) said that participating in the assembly and understanding how that process worked was part of their responsibilities as community members. Taking part in assemblies is something that inhabitants can do regardless of their status as citizens. In Jalapa del Valle, two young youth spoke about their experiences attending: *“We went to the assemblies to support the authorities, and hear what other people say, those in favour, those who are against some things, and discuss details. It was voluntary. We had never been to an assembly before, but we wanted to see how people reacted to the proposed new forest management plan”*. (Ingrid Monserrat Cervantes & Andres Cervantes, 20 and 17 years old, Jalapa del Valle)

¹⁸ According to SEDATU, the Surveillance Committee (Consejo de Vigilancia del Comisariado Ejidal o de Bienes Comunales), in accordance with article 36 of the Agrarian Law, is the body in charge of ensuring that the acts of the Commissioner for Communal Resources are in accordance with the Law and the Internal Regulations or Communal Statutes or the Assembly. Review the accounts and operations of the Commissioner for Communal Resources and make known to the Assembly the irregularities that it detects, call for Assembly when the Commissioner does not do it, and other tasks that the Internal Regulations or the Community Statute provide.

However, not all youth share such opinions or sense of curiosity. One female interviewee (26 years old) from Analco was reticent to go because she thought this would be interpreted by others as meaning that she wanted to be more involved. A majority of older youth acknowledged that fulfilling (unpaid) *cargo*¹⁹ and *tequio*²⁰ responsibilities takes up a lot of energy and time and can be challenging financially. A male interviewee (27 years old) felt that half of his time was given up for his community. The topic of *cargos*, left youth conflicted; while performing them provided a service to their community, it took away from time dedicated to livelihood activities. A number of the older youth felt overloaded balancing community, work and family responsibilities:

“Being a community member implies many responsibilities across community life. If they give us a service to do, we have to fulfill it, and we have to make tequios and attend assemblies. So sometimes, for a young person, it is not that the work is complicated, but it’s hard to fit everything in ... I am single, and it could be seen as an advantage because I have time to participate, but at the same time to have so many responsibilities... it’s complicated”.

(Zaira Méndez, 28 years old, Analco)

Not all youth felt this way, with one male youth from Analco arguing that his community needed to place emphasis on (re)building a sense of commonality; noting that many community members in their 40s and 50s were no longer interested in community work and that youth needed to take up the mantle.

Youth-forest connections

Youth in both communities were asked, *What do you like the most about the forest?* Their answers ranged from the smell, the fresh air, the sense of tranquillity that the forest provides, the possibility of seeing and hearing different animals, the feeling of freedom, the trees, the cool climate and as a space to meditate. As one 14 year-old from Analco explained, the forest made him feel, *“Free....free to do whatever I want and not listen to any noise. Only the noise of nature.”* A youth from Jalapa said when she was in the forest, *“I feel very calm because there is like a silence. And then if you go without making noise, the animals come out ”* (Rubi Solis, 20 years old, Jalapa del Valle). Another youth from Jalapa said, *“The view is beautiful because you see all Oaxaca. I feel very calm, it is relaxing, I feel that I am finding myself and it gives me time to think about what I want and how I see myself in the future ”* (Michel Mendez, 22 years old, Jalapa del Valle)

Such data reveal that often strong and positive attachments that youth hold about their forests. Youth also spoke about the different services that forests provide: *“From the forest we get many benefits, water for example or air, plus there are animals and fruits. You can practically live in the forest without going to the city”* (Luis Alberto Cortes, 19 years old, Jalapa del Valle). However, it was notable that when asked about the importance of forest from an environmental standpoint, most talked about the benefits locally in terms of clean air and water, and as wildlife habitat, with fewer cited the role that forests play in combating global environmental crises such as climate change.

In terms of forest use and management, youth identified a wide variety of associated tasks and activities implement by community authorities (Figure 6), although most youth knew mainly

¹⁹ Cargo: Post or obligation that citizens must comply to live in the community.

²⁰ Tequio: An obligatory labour day levied mainly on adult able-bodied men and, more recently, women.

about logging and reforestation, and to a lesser degree firebreaks and sanitation (post-logging). Most other activities listed were only noted by a small minority of the 34 participants.

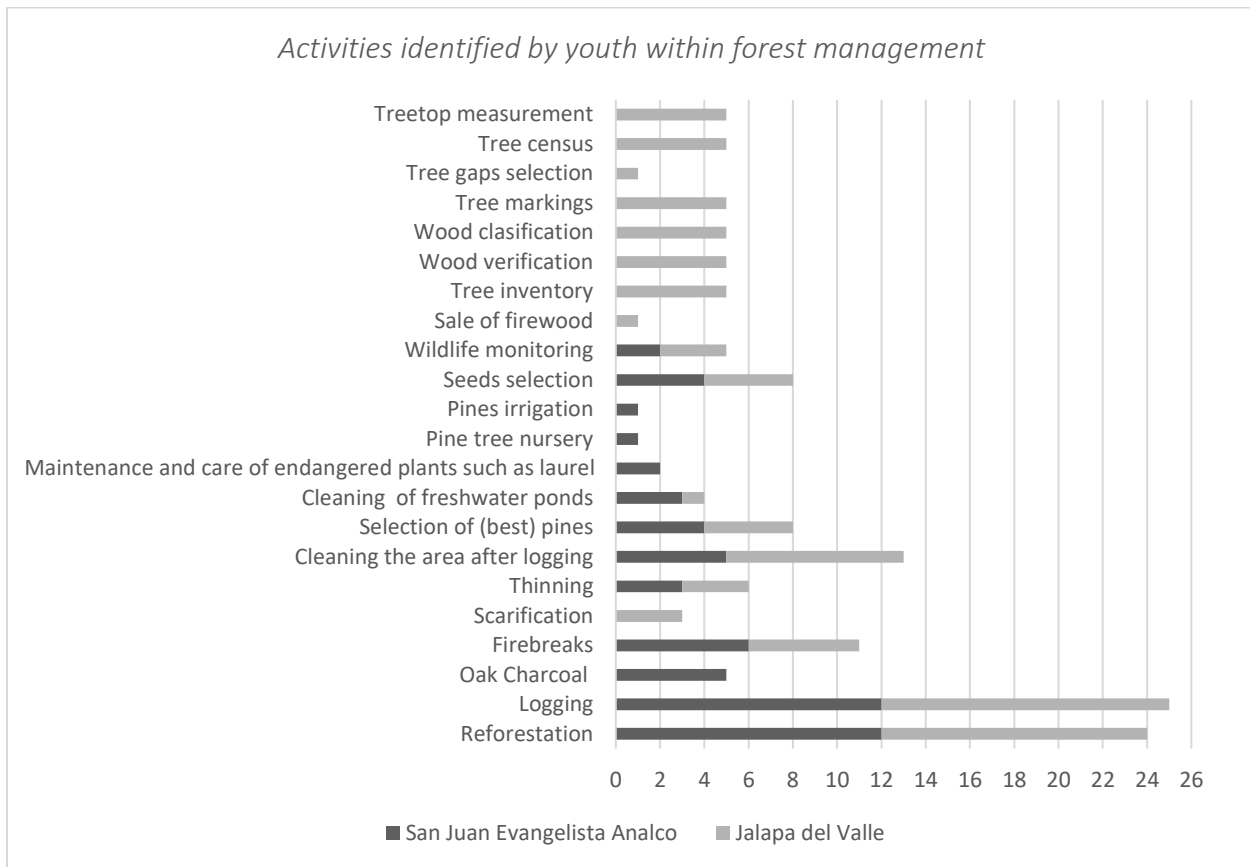


Figure 6. Activities identified by young people regarding the tasks that community authorities do in terms of forest management

Among the most knowledgeable youth, several had learnt about forestry through *tequios* that they had done and cargos that they had held. In Analco, Oscar Hernandez, a 23-year-old, talked about insights gained through his current role as ‘Jefe de Monte’: *“yes, that’s right... I am involved in all these activities right now because I have a very important role, and I am the one in charge”*. In Jalapa, 5 youth (all in the 17-25 age range) had taken part in a forest inventory in 2016, which had been a formative experience for them. Four were currently involved in forest activities in the community (forestry technician, loggers, and forest manager), which had given them additional knowledge.

It was the youngest group (14-16 years of age) that struggled most with their answers. In Analco, just 2 mentioned reforestation, 1 added logging and another said reforestation, logging and producing charcoal. The one participant (male, 16 years old) who mentioned additional activities such as cleaning logged areas, seed selection, thinning, and making firebreak trails, was attending a Technical High School, specializing as an Agricultural technician. This included learning about forestry. Similar findings were produced in Jalapa del Valle.

Roles for youth in community forestry

According to academic, NGO, and government experts working in or supporting community forestry, the sector could provide significant work opportunities for young people. They talked about jobs in reforestation, pest control, environmental education, ecotourism, agave management, oak charcoal production, copal management, non-timber forest products (palms, resins, mushrooms), logging, and marketing, among others.

In a similar vein, authorities in both communities recognized the role for young people in the sector, and how they could contribute to a lot of the work that community-based forest management demands:

“It is very important for us, that we have a large area of forest, and we have the need for technical advice, that young people get training in this and take a lead”

(Artemio Cervantes, Communal Authority, Jalapa del Valle)

“Right now, the community is growing, it is generating alternatives to be able to live within the community, and one of the great opportunities is thanks to the forest. Forest management is generating opportunities. For example, we have a community forestry technician, who year after year, has been supporting us with management activities to such an extent that he is now an expert. He also supports us as a tour guide. He has developed many capacities skills. And we would like to have more young people like him, but there is also little interest in young people”.

(Eugenia Santiago, Communal Authority, Analco)

However, and as Eugenia points out in her final remark, it is not clear that youth themselves are thinking along similar lines. Across the two communities, only 7 of 34 youth interviewed were either working in the forestry sector or had aspirations to do so. When youth were asked how they would like to be involved, it was hard for them to be specific about what they wanted to do or were interested in. Reforestation was the activity that youth most commonly cited, especially the youngest. While a majority of young people valued forests and forest activities, few saw forestry as an obvious livelihood opportunity or pathway.

This was picked up on by a few of the ‘experts’ interviewed, concerned by the mismatch between the sector’s potential and current reality. They saw greater knowledge mobilization and education as essential to bring more youth into the fold. When asked whether youth needed to be shown the opportunities that forestry could offer, Francisco Chapela of Estudios Rurales y Asesoría Campesina, A.C. responded, *“Yes, or support them to go and find things out themselves. I mean, to do it alone, alone [by themselves] it’s really complicated”*. Similarly, Francisco Rosas, a forester hired by Analco, argued that:

“Technical forest providers should also provide environmental education to the communities where they work... and with that, attract those who might be interested, because I feel their [apparent] lack of interest is because they don’t really know what forest management involves”.

(Francisco Rosas, External forestry technician in Analco)

Some efforts have been forthcoming. As noted, a number of older youth (over 20 years of age) have been given temporary work in the forest. In Analco, youth got paid experience thinning

pinos, creating fire breaks, and pruning. As noted, a number of youths in Jalapa participated in a forest inventory and several currently have jobs/roles tied to new forestry activities.

And these youth have come to appreciate those opportunities, and for a variety of reasons:

“Yes, I would like to get more involved because it is nice, in fact, there was a time when they [local authorities] gave temporary employment, and I went when I was on vacation. And it was to go to take care of the small pines that grow on their own, to clean them around so they could continue growing. Then also to pruning and all that ... and I liked to go then yes, I would like to continue doing it”.

(Jazmin Mendez, 20 years old, Analco)

“I liked going because I enjoyed el “relajo” [fun time with jokes] with my friends”

(Andrés Cervantes, 17 años, Jalapa del Valle)

“Especialmente para las mujeres, nos sentimos muy motivadas porque nos sentimos muy útiles, ¿verdad?... Los hombres están acostumbrados a ir a las montañas a atender los tequios, así que para ellos no es un gran problema. En el caso de las mujeres, fue algo realmente motivador para seguir adelante. No queríamos que el trabajo terminara porque aparte de sentirnos útiles, nos pagaban y así podíamos contribuir al hogar. Así que las mujeres fuimos las que siempre estuvimos listas y a tiempo. Quiero decir, si nos decían que a las 5:30, nosotros estábamos esperando el autobús a las 5:20”

(Yuridiana Ramirez, 28 years old, Analco)

Community Futures

Such views support the contention that if they are involved in community initiatives such as forestry, and provided work opportunities, then some of those youth will respond positively. And that can only be beneficial for communities moving forward. The future of these communities may well be shaped by decisions being made today.

With regards to the future, youth were asked about what they anticipated. In Analco, several envisioned a place that might struggle as people were left to choose between staying with what they know or leaving in order to make a life for themselves:

“With fewer people because there is less work here, and just the way the town is, people will start going to the cities. Because they are developing better there, they are going to go there, and we’ll be left all alone”.

(Emanuel Manzano, 14 years old, Analco)

“Well, it’s calmer here, I’m more comfortable. The environment is healthier, more relaxed, but the bad thing is that there is not much work, there are no job options”

(Adali Sosa, 26 years old, Analco).

Analco may be facing a future that some of the academics interviewed felt was inevitable for many rural communities in Oaxaca: *“In the next 10 years, I think that you will see communities that look much like they do now. They will have a lot of old people. They will have a very small*

population of young people. There will be middle-aged families who visit but do not live there [in the village]" (Dan Klooster).

In Jalapa, however, youth envisioned something different, with the community's resident population continuing to grow; proximity to Oaxaca City would enable local people to work in the city whilst remain living in the community. On the other hand, compared to their counterparts in Analco, youth in Jalapa were more vocal in demanding improved services, from transportation (taxis, buses) to internet and medical services.

Discussion

In the context of rural Mexico, Aquino-Moreschi & Contreras-Pastrana and Robson, Klooster, & Hernández-Díaz²¹ have stressed the key role that youth can and should play in community life and governance. At the same time, Schusler et al.²², argue the need to explore what motivates communities – their leaderships and organizations – to involve youth in local governance practices, structures and initiatives, how youth themselves might want to get involved, and how youth could affect environmental and social change through their actions. This paper explored such questions in the context of community forestry. In the two study communities, local authorities have expressed a desire to get local youth involved in forest use and management.

The research suggests that communities cannot expect positive results without first engaging with youth to understand their lived realities, their aspirations, and invite ideas from youth for greater involvement in community initiatives including forestry. Significant numbers of youth from both communities will likely leave their communities, at least for a time. Many may stay away or make only sporadic visits back. This is a reminder that the potential for community forestry to deliver rural development cannot be taken for granted²³, with mobility now an established social phenomenon among rural populations in Mexico. This is even the case in 'model' communities with secure forest tenure, such that rights may not be enough (in and of themselves) for forest use and management to drive local economy and prosperity²⁴.

At the same time, we see that youth are connected to community, territory, and local forests – places where much of their culture and identity remains rooted²⁵– suggestive that it would be wrong to assume that youth hold limited interest in local forests and the livelihood opportunities they may afford. It is notable that in both communities, a sizeable minority of youth would like to remain in their community and thus looking for ways to make that possible. Some have already had work experience in forest-related areas and valued these experiences.

What is lacking is broader knowledge among youth about what is happening in their communities, what is possible, and knowing how best to take up potential opportunities. The research highlighted a gap in perspective between what youth see their communities offering them, particularly in terms of land- and forest-based work, and what community authorities may

²¹ Aquino-Moreschi, and Contreras-Pastrana. "Comunidad, Jóvenes y Generación: Disputando Subjetividades En La Sierra Norte de Oaxaca."; Robson, Klooster, and Hernández-Díaz, *Communities Surviving Migration: Village Governance, Environment and Cultural Survival in Indigenous Mexico*.

²² Tania M. Schusler, Marianne E. Krasny, Scott J. Peters, and Daniel J. Decker. "Developing Citizens and Communities through Youth Environmental Action." *Environmental Education Research* 15, no. 1 (2009): 111-27

²³ Merino, "Rights, Pressures and Conservation in Forest Regions of Mexico".

²⁴ Little, Jane Braxton. "Forest Communities Become Partners in Management. (includes Related Article on Forest Communities' Participation in Policy Debates)." *American Forests* 102, no. 3 (1996): 17; Daniel Klooster, and Omar Masera. "Community Forest Management in Mexico: Carbon Mitigation and Biodiversity Conservation through Rural Development." *Global Environmental Change* 10, no. 4 (2000): 259-72.

²⁵ Robson et al., "Engaging youth in conversations about community and forests: Methodological reflections from Asia, Africa, and the Americas"; Robson, Sosa Pérez, and Sanchez Luja. "Exploring Youth-community-forest Linkages in Rural Mexico".

be expecting and what a number of expert outsiders (academics, external forest technicians, NGOs, governmental authorities) want to see happen and are actively looking to promote. Oaxaca has been heralded as a model of commons management and community forestry²⁶ which can often paint a picture of vibrant, active communities that use and manage their forests to generate work opportunities for local people and to provide wide-ranging social and economic benefits. Yet this image does not appear to resonate with, or is easily recognized by, young people living in such places. Despite having won national prizes for forest management and forest conservation in recent years, neither study community has seen their forestry “success” readily translated into forest jobs and youth retainment.

Greater efforts to involve and educate youth appear needed, and for that to start at a relatively young age when children are still in primary and middle school. This is something that Lane et al.²⁷ argued as being particularly important for maintaining investment in natural resources management over time, and probably becomes doubly true in light of the different work and life aspirations that young people in rural communities now hold. During my research, I was able to observe the value of getting youth and children involved at a relatively early age; through participation in school visits and follow-up workshops, youngsters had their curiosity about local forests awakened and had ideas to share. Youth are not uninterested. They showed attachment to place; to local forests and the communal territory as a whole. They understand the cultural value of territory and the importance of forests for the varied products and services they provide. Moreover, besides education, it is essential to create spaces for youth to speak and design new strategies and new ways of governance and types of institutions. For young people find a balance between their personal life and their role in their community have still a big impact in their relationship with the community and daily life. Thus, in some cases, youth prefer to leave or migrate from their community

It seems crucial, as Zurba and Trimble²⁸ have noted, for youth to be engaged but also empowered to frame how they would like to participate and shape their role in life on land and associated governance. This means communities giving space to youth-held aspirations, opinions, and ideas and creating appropriate opportunities for youth to get involved, feel invested in their communities, and take a lead. This may be a harder sell in Analco compared to Jalapa, where more youth see their community with a bright future; where proximity to Oaxaca City provides greater scope for community forestry initiatives to benefit from established rural-urban linkages.

Conclusion

Youth will play a key role in shaping the futures of the communities that they belong to; through the opportunities that they are presented with, and the choices that they go on to make. In deciding where to make a life for themselves and their families, youth will have to consider their own aspirations, opportunities at home and beyond, and the pull or push of entrenched community institutions and cultural norms. In this, community leaderships and members-at-large will play an important role, in deciding what changes might be needed to create the right kind of

²⁶ David Bray, Leticia Merino, and Deborah Barry. Los bosques comunitarios de Mexico: Manejo Sustentable de Paisajes Forestales. CCMSS, SEMARNAT, INE, 2007.

²⁷ Ruth Lane, Damian Lucas, Frank Vanclay, Sophie Henry, and Ian Coates. "Committing to Place' at the Local Scale: The Potential of Youth Education Programs for Promoting Community Participation in Regional Natural Resource Management." *Australian Geographer* 36, no. 3 (2005): 351-67.

²⁸ Melanie Zurba and Micaela Trimble, "Youth as the Inheritors of Collaboration: Crises and Factors That Influence Participation of the next Generation in Natural Resource Management," *Environmental Science & Policy* 42 (2014): 78–87

inviting, enabling, and empowering setting so that those youth who would like to stay do stay. This can include strengthening and promoting youth links to community and territory, including local forests.

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