



Proceeding Paper

# A Comparative Analysis of the Role of the Youth in Localizing SDG 11 at the Local Level in the Global North and Global South †

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**Abstract:** This paper analyzes the gaps in opportunities for the youth between the global north and the global south for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG11) and the challenges they encounter in their journey to support this goal. Data gathered from the Local Pathways Fellowship (LPF) program application and members distribution are studied in this paper and inform us about the demand for urban planning knowledge in these two regions. Additionally, this paper analyzes a conducted interactive exercise where youth from 24 different cities come together to analyze one of the targets from SDG11 and reimagine how cities can achieve SDG11 by 2030. This exercise helps us understand how the youth re-imagine their own social world and notably their urban spaces in times of crisis. Additionally, following the above pattern, this paper answers the following research question: Given the presumptions that youth in the global north have access to more opportunities than young people from the global south, one should ask: to what extent can we observe that young people globally, regardless of their city of residence, share common obstacles and opportunities when implementing SDG 11-related projects?

**Keywords:** urban; SDG 11; sustainable cities; youth; urban; global north; global south; cities



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## 1. Introduction

Despite their unfavorable position in the hierarchies of power, young people play a major role in the processes of change taking place in urban spaces [1]. (For sources on the marginalization of youth, check [1]). This social group, which is considered precarious, seems then to constitute an effective tool for analysis of politics and of the relations of contestation and domination, and most importantly, of development and change. Youth as a scientific object has been studied through the prisms of international organizations and think tanks that employ the logic of “empowerment”. This logic of empowering young people in most cases has not taken into account the societal configurations of the states from which they come. Therefore, a comparative meso-sociological study that conforms with the theoretical framework of the political sociology of the youth and the political sociology of public actions is needed.

The youth have little influence on the policymaking process as to how their cities are planned and organized. Therefore, the cross-generational aspect of integrating the youth in the policymaking process ensures a sense of belonging and continuity in cities [2]. SDSN Youth is one of the world’s biggest networks of young leaders working to accelerate solutions towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Its mission is to mobilize youth to shape a sustainable world for future generations. Founded in 2015, the network has expanded rapidly, with 750+ member organizations spreading across 127 countries and

four different programs on innovation and entrepreneurship, education, and sustainable cities that have reached 2600 members. It places young people at the forefront of achieving the SDGs.

The Local Pathways Fellowship is one of the four flagship programs by SDSN Youth. The LPF is a 10-month practically oriented training program, designed to enable young fellows to understand the process of localizing SDG 11 at the local level. Through the program fellows analyse the context of their cities and to then develop solutions to their local challenges from ideation to execution.

SDG11 is “Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. It has 10 targets to be achieved, and this is being measured with 15 indicators. These targets include work in mobility, housing, waste management, green public spaces, and participatory and inclusive planning [3].

When it comes to SDG11, the literature shows that by 2050, our cities will be home to 70% of the projected 9 billion people. Half of the world’s population today is under the age of 30, with a large majority of them already living or aspiring to live in urban areas, leaving no doubt that the achievement or failure of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be determined in cities and that the youth plays a crucial role in this [4]. Today’s large cities are concentrated in the global south and 60% of the urban growth by 2050 will be taking place in this region [5].

Over the coming decades, urbanisation will be a defining trend in many parts of the world, especially in East Asia, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, where the bulk of extreme poverty is concentrated [6].

This paper uses the Brandt Line visualization as shown in Figure 1 to describe what is referenced as the Global North and Global South.



**Figure 1.** Brandt Line.

The ‘Brandt Line’ is a visualization created to illustrate international inequalities and the socioeconomic gulf that separates regions of the world, popularised in *North–South: A Programme for Survival*—also known as the Brandt report. Snaking across continents to divide the world into the richer North and the poorer Global South, the Brandt Line has for four decades been one of the most recognizable and influential ways of visualizing world politics as shown in Figure 1 [7].

## 2. Materials and Methods

This paper analyses data gathered through the LPF program through its application process, cohorts, and an interactive exercise with fellows.

### 2.1. Distribution of LPF's Applicants and Fellows

This section compiles the number of applications received by the LPF between 2018 and 2020 from the global south versus the ones received from the global north. It also showcases the number of fellows that were selected for the program from each region.

The LPF opens a call for applications every year for 6 weeks and invites youth between 18 and 30 who are interested in SDG11 to be part of the LPF. The call is marketed through the LPF's, SDSN Youth's, and SDSN's websites, social media channels, and newsletters. Additionally, the program's partners and former fellows support spreading the word.

The application consists of completing two questionnaires. In the first one, fellows are asked to outline their motivation to become a Local Pathways Fellow, describe what makes them a good candidate to be an LPF fellow and how their background and experiences can help them become a successful SDG advocate in their city/community, and lastly talk about their vision and role for their city achieving SDG11 by 2030. The second questionnaire consists of submitting a writing sample and 3 videos one where they explain why they want to be part of the fellowship, a second one where they talk about an urban-related project they have participated in, and a last one where they analyse one of the sustainable development challenges that their city is facing and talk about possible solutions.

The selection process consists of a point-based system where fellows are rated based on their qualifications, experience, and proactivity. Secondary scoring criteria are geographical representation, volunteering experience, awareness of SDSN Youth's mission, and knowledge of SDG11.

### 2.2. Interactive Exercise

This section consisted of an interactive exercise where 27 fellows were split into groups of 3–4 people. There were groups with all global north residents, others all global south residents, and groups that mixed both. The cities represented in this exercise were Abu Dhabi, Caracas, Celaya, Chennai, Dublin, Ensenada, Gurugram, Hong Kong, Islamabad, Istanbul, Johannesburg, Juba, Lucca, Marseille, Meanjin, Monterrey, Pune, San Pablo Sula, São Paulo, Toluca, Toronto, Warri, and Yantai.

Participants were asked to describe one of their regular commutes including as much detail as possible, such as descriptions of sidewalks, crosswalks, public transportation systems, bus stops, express lanes, toll systems, etc. Then, they were asked to choose one of the commutes from the group and reimagine how it could be better. They analysed and listed approaches that could be taken to improve the commute.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Distribution of LPF's Applicants and Fellows

Table 1 shows a total of 2810 applications received between 2018 and 2021 where 2390 come from the global south (85%) and 430 from the global north (15%).

**Table 1.** Applications received from the global north vs. global south between 2018 and 2021 to be part of the LPF program.

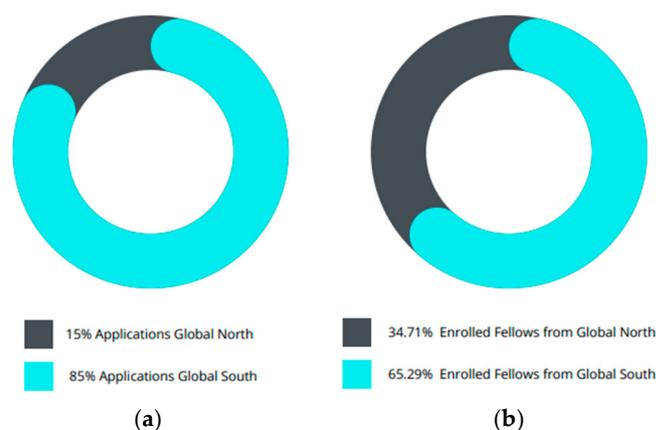
LPF Cohort	No. of Applications Received	% Applicants Global South	% Applicants Global North
2018	300	77%	23%
2019	330	86%	15%
2020	1191	86%	14%
2021	989	85%	15%

Table 2 shows a total of 363 fellows spanning across 4 cohorts, where 237 are from the global south (65.29%) and 126 are from the global north (34.71%).

**Table 2.** Fellows that were selected to be part of the LPF program from global north vs. global south between 2018 and 2021.

LPF Cohort	No. of Fellows	% Fellows Global South	% Fellows Global North
2018	63	57%	43%
2019	57	74%	26%
2020	138	65%	35%
2021	105	66%	34%

Applications received by the LPF between 2018 and 2021 show a distribution of 85% coming from the global south and 15% from global north (15%) as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** (a) Applications received by the LPF between 2018 and 2021; (b) fellows selected to be part of the LPF program for the 2018–2021 cohorts.

### 3.2. Interactive Exercise

This exercise showed that all groups encountered some overlap in the issues that appear in mobility systems regardless of their location. Fellows from different regions mentioned similar problems, including lack of connectivity in public transit systems, and lack of safety for pedestrians and cyclists, and concluded that private vehicles were the safest and fastest mode of transportation. It was agreed that public transport can be improved in most cities and that there are numerous initiatives and much work to be done to achieve sustainable mobility in cities both in the GN and GS.

## 4. Discussion

This paper found that the LPF program received a much higher number of applications from the global south (85%) than from the global north (15%). This informs us that the demand for free online content and communities in topics related to SDG11 is much higher in the global south, which is where urban growth will ramp up in the coming years.

The ratio of selected fellows reveals 65.29% representation from the global south and 34.71% from the global north. This speaks to more qualified applicants coming from the global north.

## 5. Conclusions

Youth in the global north has more access to knowledge and content to SDG11-related topics. The number of applications received confirms this presumption by presenting a much higher number of applicants coming from the global south where offerings of this type of content are not as available. This enables the LPF program to capture more applicants from the GS. The number of selected fellows shows that applicants coming from the global north are more likely to secure a spot in the fellowship as they become more

informed about SDG11 content and are more likely to count on experience on urban-related projects.

It must be noted that the LPF is receiving this distribution of applications despite the fact that this program is offered in English, therefore limiting the applications coming from the GS to people who are bilingual. The demand coming from the GS would be even higher if the program were offered in languages native to this region. It can be questioned: To what extent can we observe that young people globally regardless of their city of residence share common obstacles and opportunities when implementing an SDG 11-related project?

Keeping this in mind, it is recommended that content produced around urban development best practices is made available in languages native to the GS in order to address the high demand for knowledge on this topic in this region.

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**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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