

Social Mobilization as Policymaking Lever: A Trans-Atlantic COVID-19 dialogue on community action & decentralized governance

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Six research sites across four countries:



Southwestern Ontario et Montréal, **Canada**



Gießen und Bochum, **Deutschland**



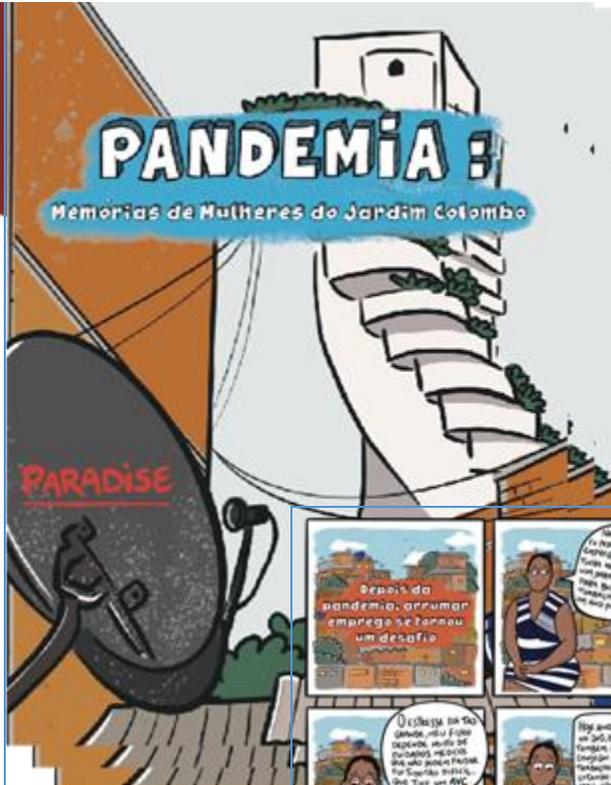
Chiriaco, Imaza, provincia de Bagua Amazonas, **Perú**



Jardim Colombo, São Paulo, **Brasil**

Funders





Brasil

Book, Video, Comics

Pandemic: Memories of Women from Jardim Colombo

- In Jardim Colombo, a favela in São Paulo, community members & solidaire scholars created a repository of resident narratives in book, video, and comic book formats.
- The voices and complex experiences of residents who mobilized collectively during the pandemic for their families' and neighbors' survival are preserved as a form of community memory of resistance that belongs to the people for their own purposes.



Brazil's G20 leadership offers glimmers of hope for global health equity

Our collective SMAPL article published in the BMJ

Global south leadership must advance the idea that geopolitical challenges are intertwined with, and can be informed by, local experience and innovations.

Canada

Migrant agricultural workers in **Ontario** during the COVID-19 pandemic: Can social mobilization serve as a policymaking lever?

1. The power of the agricultural lobby shaped COVID-19 policies to favour employers.
2. Pandemic policies failed to protect migrant workers.
3. Amid government inaction, worker-focused advocacy groups addressed workers emergency needs and filled policy gaps.
4. Existence or absence of institutional structures in place directly shaped crisis response capacity.
5. Pandemic crisis temporarily brought socio-politically imagined alternatives, such as “status for all on arrival”, into the realm of policy possibility.
6. Media coverage raised public and policymaker awareness of the structural conditions and lived realities facing MAWs.
 - UN Special Rapporteur’s description of the TFWP as “a breeding ground for contemporary forms of slavery” further raised public and international awareness.
7. Tensions between more “revolutionary” calls for status for all vs. reforms around housing.



- Meanwhile, provincial authorities in **Québec** blamed the most exposed, racialized, and made-marginalized immigrant neighbourhood residents for resisting rules and vaccines, rather than addressing innumerable structural obstacles to care and longtime austerity.
- In **Montréal** the pandemic offered a strategic opportunity for local organizations working with immigrant communities to shape public policies. The Covivre project served as an effective institutional lever for this process, as well as allocating resources for nimble bottom-up initiatives.
- Yet the health crisis also highlighted tensions generated by the accumulation of decision-making power in the hands of private actors, who increasingly displaced the traditional role and responsibilities of the state.

SMAPL core team Ontario: Prof. Anne-Emanuelle Birn, Megan Botha, Prof. Andrea Cortinois, Prof. Denise Gastaldo, Stephanie Mayell, Krizia Paylago, (U of Toronto); Prof. Janet McLaughlin (Wilfrid Laurier U); Prof. Jeannie Samuel (York U)

SMAPL core team Québec: Prof. Laurence Monnais (U de M; Lausanne), Dr. Rabih Jamil (U de M), Dr. Mylène Fauvel (McGill; Paris-Nanterre)

Germany

(Bochum-Hustadt, Giessen-Nordstadt)

- Systematic neglect of the lived realities, particular needs and resources (e.g. knowledge, networks, solidarity) of made-marginalized communities during COVID-19 in Germany:
 - e.g.: no official communication of pandemic-related information and rules in languages other than German, no systematic engagement with communities.
- High relevance of pre-existing social support structures (both from state/government and civil society, e.g. local NGOs, faith-based communities, etc.) during pandemic:
 - Significant mutual support at local and – via social media – transregional levels, e.g. for communication of pandemic-related information and rules in multiple languages.
 - Importance of individual and collective commitment and decisions by social workers, teachers, local government representatives, etc. (some decided to keep serving even when breaking rules during lockdown, other decided to close).



Community researchers at *Poverty and Health* conference
March 2024 (Photo: Theresa Martens)

Major conclusion resonating across all SMAPL projects:
communities provide critical infrastructures of care and must be sustained by local governments through dialogue and support

SMAPL-Core Team Germany: Prof. Dr. Michael Knipper, Theresa Martens (JLU Gießen), Prof. Dr. Christiane Falge (Hochschule Bochum), Prof. Dr. Franziska Satzinger (Hochschule Fulda), Prof. Dr. Iris Dzudzek (Münster University)

Perú

- ❖ Diverse responses and solidarity networks were sustained by relations of trust, prior experiences, and strategies in dealing with the health system. These included local organizations involving young students, family self-help networks, and the use (recuperation) of Indigenous therapeutic practices.
- ❖ The communities' lived experiences of “state abandonment” were shared with health personnel, fostering health worker rapprochement with communities and the sharing of knowledge to confront the pandemic.
- ❖ Our dialogues across SMAPL sites identified parallels between the cases of Amazonas and Montreal in the experiences and fears around vaccination campaigns and the strategies employed in each of these settings.
- ❖ In methodological terms, community involvement in the project's distinct phases, from its design, to flexibility in defining objectives to reflect local priorities, to diffusion/sharing of findings in accessible formats serve as essential strategies for decolonizing public health research.



Archivo del proyecto. Comunidad de Shusung



Archivo del proyecto. Comunidad Wachapea



Archivo del proyecto. Centro de Salud Chiriaco

Equipo Perú - Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia

Prof. Ruth Iguíñiz Romero, D. Helen Palma Pineda, Lucero Diaz Gomez, Ximena Gutierrez y Sandra Flor Tsajuput Apikai

Collective Approach & Findings, Knowledge Mobilization, and Trainee Network

In carrying out our project (nicknamed SMAPL) through dialogical (per Paulo Freire), non-extractive approaches, we have aspired to re-take 'global health' as a field of engaged activist research, South-North collaboration, and community-academic learning.

Although public health governance was decentralized in each of our cases –and **organizations on the ground crucially stepped in to address government failures**– community members and researchers alike pointed to legal, health and social policy responsibility residing on multiple governance levels: global, national, regional, and local.



Integral to our research design and project is a trainee network, comprised of 19 emerging scholars across all sites

"Exploring International Pandemic Responses through a Social Science Lens: Decolonial paradigms and solidarity networks"

02-03 October 2024

Hybrid conference at the University of Toronto

Featuring panels on food justice, social/political resistance and much more, with speakers from Brazil, Peru, Germany and Canada.

A keynote address on "COVID-19 as an issue of memory, truth and justice" will be given by renowned health and human rights scholar, Professor Daisy Ventura.

This knowledge has been mobilized and returned to communities through local and international meetings, multiple articles, reports, blogs, presentations, videos, webinars, comics, and town halls.

Together, and in dialogue, the experiences of solidarity among community-researchers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate the resistance and impact of bottom-up struggles, individual **agency**, and the shared values and principles underlying co-produced knowledge and community-led social and health justice transformation.