

Challenges and opportunities of cultural media education in international contexts

Das Projekt „Expanding Narratives“ bringt Jugendliche aus Tansania und Deutschland über die Rezeption und Produktion von Fotografien in den Austausch über Nachhaltigkeitsnarrative

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Abstract

Expanding Narratives. Jugend und ihre Bilder der Nachhaltigkeit ist ein partizipatives Forschungs- und Entwicklungsprojekt, in welchem den Fragen nachgegangen wird, wie Jugendliche in Deutschland und Tansania historische und aktuelle Bilder und Narrative der Nachhaltigkeit in (Sozialen) Medien wahrnehmen und verhandeln sowie welche Bilder einer lebenswerten Zukunft sie miteinander entwickeln. Dabei wird Storytelling als Möglichkeit angesehen, Perspektiven auf Nachhaltigkeit sichtbar zu machen und Veränderung anzustoßen. Das Projekt lässt sich in der Medienpädagogik mit Bezügen zu kultureller Medienbildung, postkolonialen Perspektiven und Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung verorten. Angelegt als hybrides Workshop-Format finden lokale und virtuelle Phasen parallel in Remscheid und in Dar es Salaam (Tansania) statt. Gemeinsam entwickeln die jugendlichen Teilnehmenden ihre eigenen Ideen und Zukunftsvisionen und übersetzen diese in fotografische Bilder. Diese Praxisvollzüge werden forschend begleitet, wobei teilnehmende Beobachtungen, Audioaufnahmen und Bildanalysen zum Einsatz kommen. Die Fotografien der Jugendlichen werden anschließend öffentlichkeitswirksam ausgestellt. Im folgenden Schreibgespräch geben das tansanische Praxis- und das deutsche Forschungsteam erste Einblicke in das laufende Projekt und reflektieren gemeinsam die Besonderheiten im Zusammenspiel von theoretischen

Annahmen und praktischer Umsetzung. Der Fokus liegt dabei auf den Chancen und Herausforderungen internationaler Medienbildungsprojekte, hier insbesondere der gemeinsamen Kolonialgeschichte und interkulturellen Verständigung, der Hybridität, dem Wissenschafts-Praxis-Transfer und der Bedeutung von Fotografie in den Lebenswelten junger Menschen in beiden Ländern. Die Arbeitssprache im Projekt war Englisch; entsprechend ist auch dieses Schreibgespräch in englischer Sprache verfasst.

Expanding Narratives. Youth and Their Images of Sustainability is a participatory research and development project dedicated to the question of how young people in Germany and Tanzania perceive and negotiate historical and contemporary images and narratives of sustainability in (social) media and what images of a future worth living they develop. In the context of the project storytelling is seen as a way of making perspectives on sustainability visible and initiating change. The project is based in media education with references to cultural media education, postcolonial perspectives and education for sustainable development. It is designed as a hybrid workshop format. Local and connecting hybrid phases take place in both Remscheid (Germany) and Dar Es Salaam (Tanzania). Together, the adolescents will develop their own ideas and visions of the future and translate them into photographic images.

These activities are accompanied by research, using participant observation, audio recordings and image analysis. The photographs of the participants will then exhibited to the public. This following written exchange provides a first insight into the ongoing project. Practitioners in Tanzania and researchers in Germany reflect together on the special features of the project and the interplay between theoretical assumptions and practical implementation. The focus lies on the opportunities and challenges of international media education projects, in particular the shared colonial history and intercultural understanding, hybridity, the transfer of science and practice and the significance of photography in the lives of young people in both countries. As the working language in the project is English, this written exchange is also written in English.

Written exchange - An introduction to the project

Expanding Narratives explores narratives and images of sustainability in a critical, creative and analytical way. Designed as a participatory research and development project, young people from Germany and Tanzania are invited to explore how they perceive and negotiate historical and contemporary images and narratives of sustainability in the media. In an intercultural exchange, the participants develop their own ideas and translate them into photographs of a sustainable future. Aiming at the participation in public discourses on sustainability, the photographs will be presented online and at various events in Tanzania and Germany.

The workshop approach will be published as Open Educational Resources, so that other media educators around the world can be guided in conducting hybrid intercultural workshops and/or using the image-

hermeneutic method to analyze pictures in heterogeneous settings.

The project will be conducted from 2024 to 2026 by the [University of Cologne \(UzK\)](#) and the [University of Applied Sciences Cologne \(THK\)](#) in cooperation with the [Goethe Institute Tanzania](#), the [Academy of Arts and Cultural Education](#) and the [German Institute for Youth and Children's Films](#). It is funded by the [RheinEnergie Foundation](#). Kramer and Tillmann (2025) provide a brief introduction to the project.

The project addresses the following research questions: What are the perceptions of images and narratives of sustainability as represented in the media among young people from diverse global regions (Reception level)? What images and narratives of sustainability are developed collaboratively by young people from different global regions (Production level)? How have the images and narratives of sustainability among young people changed over the past few decades (Level of historical comparison)?

The core of the project consists of two workshop units, the first of which took place at the beginning of October 2024. The second will be realized in March 2025. Both units take place in a hybrid format: The 16 participants aged 16-21 meet in presence, eight at the *Goethe-Institute* in Dar es Salaam and eight at the *Academy of Cultural Education* in Remscheid. Part of the workshops take place on site and part via video conference between the two workshop locations. In the most recent event, the participants discussed and produced photographs on the topic of sustainability and reflected on their own ideas as well as the intercultural differences between the narratives and images of sustainability in both countries.

In the first phase of the project, the cooperation between the various partners in Germany and Tanzania was prepared and participants were recruited through open calls, which were distributed to youth associations and (art) schools via the project's-own Instagram channel and a digital flyer.

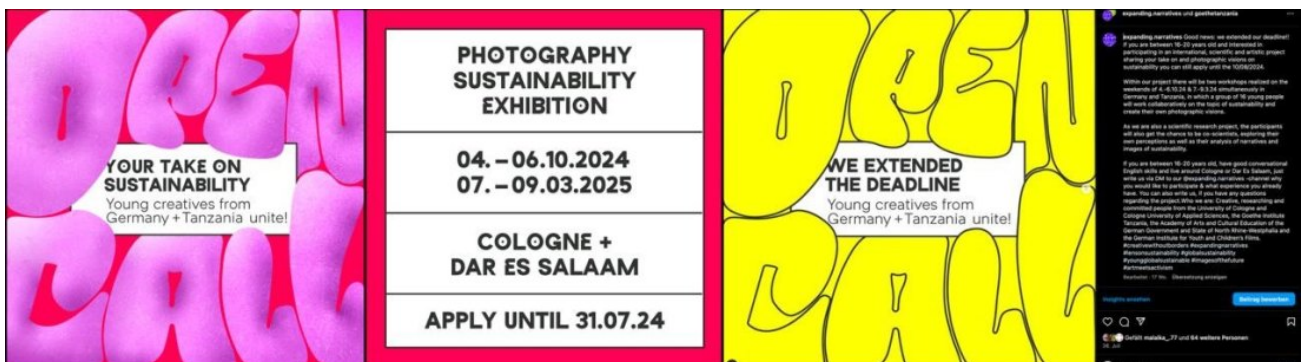


Fig. 1, Instagram open call, Alyssa Feick 2024

For practical implementation and pedagogical support, both groups, in Germany and Tanzania, are accompanied by a team of two, each consisting of an educator and a photo artist. In the following written exchange, our Tanzanian duo Remi Busch (educator, cultural curator, creative consultant) and Simon Luyenga (photojournalist, documentary photographer) provide insights into the realization of the first workshop unit as well as the associated preparations and considerations. Their practical expertise advised, for example, to hold a preliminary meeting with the participants before the first workshop and to accompany them (more closely) in the time between the workshops.

As part of the research team in Cologne, Alyssa Feick (UzK) and Johanna Fink (THK) reflect on these aspects, paying particular attention to the interplay of scientific, pedagogical and artistic expertise within the unique international and intercultural context of the project. The scientific perspective is supported by

observation protocols, sound recordings and the data collected by co-researchers. The co-researching role is adopted by a research team in Cologne and Dar es Salaam as well as by the participants themselves. The aim of this approach is to include the participants and their perceptions in the research process and to multiply the perspectivity of the collected data.

Expanding Narratives is a research and development project, and as such it constitutes a learning journey for all parties involved. Its special features include not only intercultural exchange, but also the underlying questions of colonial history, science-practice transfer and hybridity. Additionally, it emphasizes the topic of sustainability and the perspectives of cultural media education in photography. These features are the ones that we are going to take a closer look at in the following sections.

Special features: intercultural exchange - sustainability - media education & photography - hybridity - colonial history - science-practice transfer

Alyssa: Let's have a look and talk about the unique aspects of *Expanding Narratives*, an international project that brings together young people from Tanzania and Germany. The focus on intercultural exchange among the participants is a key part of the project. Another important element is the medium of photography chosen for this project. Through photography the participants will develop, translate and express their ideas and visions of sustainability. How do you - Remi and Simon - perceive the interest of young people in Tanzania in intercultural exchange and photography so far?

Remi: The youth in Dar es Salaam are eager to take part in intercultural exchanges. The city has a vibrant and dynamic community of young people who are politically aware and engaged. This reflects the wider context of Dar es Salaam as a diverse and rapidly growing urban center, where the need for intercultural dialog is growing. Many of these young people have valuable experiences with intercultural exchanges, which enrich their contributions to projects like this one.

Alyssa: Many of these observations of yours, Remi, can also be applied to the young Germans taking part in the project. For some of the participants, the intercultural exchange was one of the main reasons for joining the project. Some of the participants have already had international and intercultural experiences, some of which were particularly connected to Tanzania. The young participants see the international and intercultural context of the project as a valuable learning opportunity to broaden their personal as well as artistic perspectives and create meaningful connections with other young people who share their interest in photography and sustainability. We have seen how these common interests and the desire to engage in intercultural dialog are reflected in the exchange between the two groups. What is your perception? How have young people engaged in the conversation so far?

Remi: The youth in Dar es Salaam is very interested in intercultural exchange. Their eagerness to broaden their perspectives and experiences mirrors the dynamic nature of the city itself. With diverse backgrounds as photographers, activists, artists, and aspiring academics, they consistently demonstrate high levels of engagement. In fact, their enthusiasm often led to extended conversations that we occasionally had to cut short to stay on schedule and align with our partners. Given more time, these exchanges could have been even more enriching, allowing for a deeper engagement with their thoughts and ideas.

Johanna: That's really interesting, especially as the young people in the German group are less part of a single and incomparable urban art scene, as you describe it from Dar es Salaam. Most of them had a long journey to Remscheid, where we met for the first workshop unit. Nevertheless, they took part in this

exchange with great enthusiasm. At the end, some of them wanted to get to know each other even better. This shows that group meetings alone are not enough to establish deep personal contact. Other forms, such as the buddy system that was subsequently introduced, are extremely important in order to enable the young people to (co-)create a safe space for sharing. In the group Zoom sessions, we encouraged the young people to explore with their everyday visual practices, to decode visual representations of sustainability, and to criticize underlying narratives. This follows a long tradition in media education, where we focus on perceptual education or competence (as part of media competence, see Baacke 1996), which refers to the image as a medium. Niesyto (2024) has given an overview of international projects promoting perceptual competence in youths while Holzbrecher and Tell (2006) emphasize that pictoriality, especially in the form of photography, plays a vital role in the lives of young people. What significance does photography have for the young people in Dar es Salaam? How much experience do they have with photography (cell phone, camera, etc.)? How familiar are they with photography as a medium of expression?

Simon: Some young people are familiar with the camera and are practicing it, while others are not. However, all of them are familiar with the cellphone camera. During the first workshop after we purchased the digital powershot cameras, which have manual settings, I was able to illustrate some details about the technical part. I explained how the camera works and the different settings. These include how the camera functions, the exposure triangle (aperture, shutter speed, ISO), visual elements (lines, shapes, pattern), composition (the rule of thirds and depth of field), and focal point. I asked the participants to practice and play with these details. I could notice the challenging aspects of squeezing all that information into such a limited amount of time.

Johanna: Simon, what role do you think photography plays for young people in Dar es Salaam in expressing themselves, sharing their perspectives, or addressing grievances?

Simon: Photography is an important medium, suitable for addressing and reflecting on young people's perspectives, for example on sustainability. It can play a crucial role in the process of creating valuable content that questions, argues and informs the past, present and future. It is of great significance to create images that depict various perspectives on sustainability and contribute to a global conversation, while shaping our society either in physical, intellectual or emotional ways.

Alyssa: Regarding the group in Germany one could outline that the relevance and role of photography vary widely. Some of the participants have a professional interest as well as experience in photography which motivated them to participate in the project, while others are more interested in building international friendships. However, all participants share a desire to learn more about and express themselves on the topic of sustainability as it relates to their everyday life and future. This unifying theme leads us to the next questions: How do the participants perceive sustainability and how have they discussed it with each other so far? What perspectives on and dimensions of sustainability have the young people in Tanzania and Germany expressed so far?

Remi: The participants' perspectives on sustainability were impressively broad, ranging from ecological concerns to the preservation of cultural heritage and traditional practices. It was evident that the participants' diverse experiences and cultural backgrounds shaped their responses. In Dar es Salaam, the Tanzanian youth offered deeply personal insights, reflecting their lived experiences and addressing themes such as class, race, and traditional values. Their thoughts often revolved around preserving what they

consider essential to their identity and community. There have been notable differences in cultural perspectives between the participants. These differences largely stem from their distinct lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and how sustainability is understood in their respective societies. For instance, the Tanzanian youth tend to focus on the preservation of cultural heritage and community practices, while the German participants often approach sustainability from a more environmental or systemic perspective. These differences in perspective are evident in the discussion surrounding the images researched on social media and those captured by the young people themselves, such as Vedasto's picture of "the fading" and Nova's shot of children playing football. How did you perceive that?



Fig. 2, *the fading*, Vedasto Emmanuel, and Fig. 3, *kids playing football*, Novatus Panda, both 2024

Alyssa: These broad perspectives in the Tanzanian group on sustainability integrating diverse dimensions that you mention here, Remi, did also stick out to the research team as well as the German participants. Regarding the German participants, one could state that in the beginning of the project their perspectives on sustainability focused largely on ecological aspects, such as environmental pollution (waste, overconsumption) or the effects of climate change (extreme weather events, droughts). This viewpoint is possibly influenced by the prevalent (visual) narratives in the media and political discourse in Germany. As Sighard Neckel observes, the public discourse on sustainability in Germany over the last decade often frames sustainability notions as an individual (consumerist) responsibility (Neckel 2021). As the last years also made effects of the global climate change directly perceptible in Germany (for example with events such as the *Ahrtal-flood* in 2021 or the *exceptionally hot summer* in 2018). The significance of sustainability has risen necessarily on both the political agenda as well as the personal level.

Johanna: I agree, as I recall the Tanzanian youth discussing topics such as female empowerment in rural communities, the circle of life and the protection of livelihoods. The German group initially placed significant emphasis on environmental aspects, although they were already familiar with other pillars or dimensions of sustainability. Over the course of the weekend, and I believe also as a result of the exchange with the Tanzanian group, this changed noticeably. It was really exciting to experience this shift in perspectives through mutual exchange even in this hybrid setting, as we conducted the online conferences via Zoom, as well as established a buddy program on Discord. To what extent did the digital communication channels contribute to the discussion of sustainability and the exploration of differences in cultural perspectives?



Remi: The use of digital communication channels such as online conferences, the buddy program, Discord, and online meetings has proven to be valuable in bridging these cultural differences. These platforms allowed participants to share their views and engage in deeper conversations about sustainability, creating a space for dialog across cultures. The hybrid nature of the project facilitated the exchange of ideas in real time, helping participants from both countries to reflect on how their cultural contexts shape their understanding of sustainability.

To foster further engagement and exploration of cultural perspectives, it would be advantageous to allocate more time in the future. Additionally, the implementation of more structured frameworks for tandem work between participants would be beneficial, as it would allow for more collaborative and in-depth exchanges. Ideally, future workshops could be supported by dedicated funding to ensure sustained dialog and to explore the nuances of cultural discernment in greater depth.

Johanna: As previously mentioned, our approach builds on a long-standing German-language media education tradition, particularly the concept of *active media work*. This approach empowers young individuals to articulate their needs, interests and topics independently of the “selection and control power” of the commercial and mass media. By facilitating access to technology and the public sphere, this method enables learning how to use media creatively and critically (see Schell 2003; Lutz et al. 2023, among others). In addition, media educators in Germany posit that young people can find a common language through photography (Niesyto 2024). To what extent can you align with this media education perspective? Alternatively, what further or different perspectives does cultural work with media, especially photography, offer in relation to the target group?

Remi: Photography is an invaluable tool for media education, providing young people with a platform to visually articulate their thoughts, emotions, and viewpoints. From my experience, I can share the media education perspective, particularly its emphasis on creative expression, critical thinking, and self-representation. For the youth involved in the project, photography opens up a space for them to explore not only sustainability but also their personal stories and the cultural narratives they wish to preserve or challenge. The impact of cultural work involving media and photography extends beyond mere technical skills. It helps the participants become more conscious of how images influence perceptions and societal narratives. In this regard, photography serves as a vehicle for personal empowerment, enabling young people to articulate their visions of sustainability and engage in broader conversations concerning their cultural identity, social responsibility, and environmental concerns.

Simon: Photography is a great medium for facilitating dialog among individuals. It has the capacity to create a room for critical discourse and to stimulate debate among youth and the community. Tanzania is a multicultural nation. It is interesting to observe young people from diverse cultural backgrounds engaging in creative dialog and sharing ideas, as they explore their own voice or identity through photography as a medium of expression.

Remi: The power of photography lies in its ability to evoke emotions, provoke questions, and invite dialog. Whether through shared experiences or the exploration of contrasting cultural viewpoints, photographs can serve as a starting point for deeper conversations about society, identity, and the world around us. It encourages participants to not only reflect on their own views but also to engage with the ideas of others, fostering a collaborative space for intercultural exchange.

Alyssa: The experiences of the initial workshop already showed these potentials as the participants exchanged and shared their understandings and visions through researched or first self-produced photographs with each other. These conversations already revealed learning processes between the participants.

Johanna: Despite the distinct political and social structures in the two countries, the young people were able to communicate effectively through a common language and a shared passion for photography. It became evident that they use this medium to express their unique perspectives and take a critical stance. Given that this crucial interaction in the initial unit primarily took place in hybrid format, combining virtual and on-site components, we would like to inquire about the challenges and advantages that, from your viewpoint, virtual pedagogical work and exchange entail.

Remi: Virtual pedagogical work and exchange present both challenges and advantages. One of the main challenges is the limitation in building deep personal connections and the sense of community that can be more easily fostered in face-to-face settings. Despite the ability to see each other virtually, the lack of physical presence can sometimes create barriers to spontaneous interactions and hinder the development of a strong, informal bond among participants. Additionally, technical issues such as internet connectivity or access to the necessary tools can disrupt the flow of the exchange. However, the advantages of virtual exchange are significant. The ability to connect participants across borders facilitates a rich intercultural exchange that would otherwise be difficult to achieve. Virtual platforms offer flexibility in terms of time and location, enabling participants to engage in the project despite geographical distances. Digital tools such as Zoom, Discord, and WhatsApp, enabling continuous communication, make it easier to share ideas, feedback, and progress. Virtual exchange also fosters diverse participation by removing the constraints of physical proximity. While virtual exchange has its limitations, it offers immense potential for fostering cross-cultural dialog and collaboration on a global scale. What has been your experience with the various communication channels?

Johanna: I agree that the advantages significantly outweigh the disadvantages, particularly given the technological tools that have facilitated communication across distances. All young people in both countries use popular social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram, and the Tanzanian participants also use Discord a lot. The implementation of a buddy system has been well-received, fostering regular exchange of information as well as posting insights on Instagram. However, the multi-track nature of this initiative is challenging. We are exploring ways to consolidate the young people's presence on a single platform for announcements, though challenges persist, including the dissemination of information and data protection concerns. What are your experiences with the digital tools and their impact on collaboration?

Simon: In my experience, Zoom has proven to be a reliable platform for meetings, conferences and mentoring. It offers the functionality to share screens, enabling both parties to view the process simultaneously. Discord is well-suited for social sharing: you can create different channels depending on your needs. WhatsApp is the most effective way of communication in Tanzania.

Remi: The digital tools we've used — Zoom, Discord, and WhatsApp — have been crucial in shaping the collaboration. Zoom has been great for virtual meetings and workshops, offering features such as real-time interaction and screen sharing that promote collective productivity. Discord has provided a space for informal, ongoing communication, enabling participants to share ideas asynchronously, a feature that has been particularly useful overcoming time zone differences. WhatsApp has been the most convenient for

quick updates and informal chats, particularly in Tanzania where it's widely used. However, these tools also present challenges. Access to devices is a key issue, as not all participants have reliable access to smartphones or computers, which can limit their participation. In Tanzania, power cuts and internet speed fluctuations also pose significant barriers to smooth communication, disrupting meetings or delaying tasks. These challenges highlight the necessity for enhanced support and infrastructure to ensure consistent access to technology and reliable internet.

Despite these obstacles, the digital tools have facilitated collaboration, provided platforms for sharing ideas, and helped us maintain momentum throughout the project. However, it's clear that addressing these challenges is crucial to ensure more inclusive and effective virtual exchange.

Alyssa: In some cases, the use of different platforms can lead to confusion, which necessitates a period of adjustment to determine the most suitable platform or medium for each collaborative activity. Some platforms that were initially introduced have proven to be impractical for asynchronous collaboration, while others have emerged later in the process, aligning more closely with the daily lives of the participants and the collaboration partners. The hybrid nature of this collaboration was essential to bring young people from both countries into the exchange, which a) live in the so-called global North and South and b) also share a common colonial history: Tanzania was part of the colony of German East Africa until the end of World War I. Do you perceive an awareness of the young people towards this aspect? Did they raise it during the exchange?

Remi: The topic of colonial history, specifically the history of German East Africa, is not frequently discussed openly among young people in Tanzania. However, during the course of our project, there have been more subtle indications of increased awareness and interest in this history. While the young participants did not always explicitly mention it, there were moments when conversations surrounding cultural identity, heritage, and the relationship between Tanzania and Germany suggested an underlying awareness of this shared colonial past. From an educational perspective, fostering understanding and open dialog is crucial, especially in a project that brings together young people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Given the shared colonial history between Tanzania and Germany, it's important to foster understanding and open dialog about how the past influences both the present and future. This helps to break down barriers, challenge misconceptions, and build mutual respect. From an educational point of view, it is crucial to create a space where participants can engage in an open dialog about these sensitive topics, explore their own identities, and develop a deeper understanding of each other's cultures. It is also essential to assist young individuals in recognizing the complexities of intercultural relations and how they shape their perspectives on sustainability, heritage, and global issues. By building bridges, we can encourage empathy, critical thinking, and greater collaboration, which is central to the objective of this: connecting young people and fostering a more profound and meaningful exchange between cultures. How did the young Germans address or deal with these issues?

Alyssa: Up to this moment in the project it is still unclear to which extent the German participants are aware of the colonial history. To explore and investigate the existent knowledge and self-initiated exchange of the Youth on (post-)colonial matters we decided consciously to not make it a topic in this first phase of the project. From a decolonial perspective, the existing world order and contemporary living conditions can be traced back to European colonialism as current global North-South relations (= neo/colonial continuities). To deconstruct powerful thinking patterns and systemic structures, it is necessary to point out and dismantle ongoing colonial dependencies by analyzing existing power and oppression relations in relation to European

colonialism and highlighting (in)visible processes of violence (BUNDjugend 2024). One challenge of the next phase of the project will be to initiate, support and accompany the participants in examining the colonial history of their home countries as well as ongoing neo/colonial continuities. What are your thoughts on the potential of media-cultural work with photography to facilitate understanding in this context? What are the necessary elements for this approach to be successful?

Simon: Practicing photography means being an eye to the broader public, and enhancing the ability of understanding the situation, whether as an expression or as evidence. We can only say what we see in the picture. What we need is more infrastructure, institutions, organizations and support.

Remi: Media-cultural work with photography can be a powerful tool for fostering understanding, especially in an intercultural context. Photography allows young people to visually express their perspectives on sustainability, culture, and identity, which can transcend language barriers and create a shared space for dialog. It enables participants to document and reflect on their personal experiences, offering insight into their worldviews and how they see the world through the lens of their cultural backgrounds. To ensure the efficacy of this approach, it is essential to provide both technical and conceptual guidance in photography, thereby empowering the participants to express their ideas clearly and creatively. Encouraging reflective discussions surrounding the photographs and the narratives they represent is also key. In this way, photography transcends its role as a mere medium for artistic expression, becoming a conduit for critical conversations concerning cultural differences, shared histories, and sustainability. To ensure the continuity of this process, it is essential to provide support, both in terms of access to photography equipment and a safe space for dialog. Workshops should focus on teaching the technical aspects of photography, but also on fostering an atmosphere where participants can explore and articulate their identities, values, and perspectives on sustainability through their images.

Alyssa: To (pedagogically) engage with violent events or experiences – as they were performed by colonial forces during the German colonial rule in East Africa – can be limited by difficulties of imagining or *finding words* to describe them (Emcke 2016). Visual means can assist in transforming historical, abstract information to a concrete event. For example, photographs capture single specific moments in the past. Furthermore, engaging with pictures can facilitate a conversation (*finding words*) about it, as one can start to describe what is seen in a picture. This can function as a starting point to a pedagogically guided re- and deconstruction as well as discussion of the historical background, political and social structures of a picture. As a form of expression, visual media, such as photographs, can serve as a means to visualize internal processes or to convey values and ideas on a specific topic (see: Jan Schmolling „Fotografie in der Kulturellen Bildung“). With regard to global social issues, such as persistent colonial power relations and un/sustainability, media-cultural work with photography can serve to illustrate, affect and initiate discussions and reflection processes.

Johanna: Those colonial power relations also influenced how we, as researchers from Germany, approached the collaboration with you, the practitioners in Tanzania. Another unique aspect of the project is of course the cooperation between academics, practitioners and young people. It is challenging that the researchers designed and planned the project and the practice partners were only asked and involved during the implementation phase. This means that the researchers set the topic, created the setting, structured the phases of the collaboration in terms of time and observed the participants. Concurrently, science must also engage in the practical activities that are structured by the educators. They in turn have only limited influence on how the young people accept their program, as their actions remain idiosyncratic and

unpredictable. How do you experience the interplay between science, pedagogical practice and young people's life worlds?

Remi: The dynamic interplay between science, pedagogical practice, and young people's life worlds in this project can be challenging at times. On one hand, the scientific aspect provides a structured framework for the project, ensuring that we gather data and insights that contribute to understanding sustainability through the lens of young people from both Tanzania and Germany. On the other hand, the pedagogical practice allows for a more flexible, participatory approach, where the young people's lived experiences and perspectives guide the learning process. However, it's necessary to have the right support on-site to conduct the research without disrupting the flow of the activities. While scientific and pedagogical aspects are crucial, the presence of the right facilitators, mentors, and technical resources ensures a seamless research process that allows for creativity and meaningful engagement. The challenge lies in finding the right balance—ensuring that the scientific objectives do not overshadow the authentic voices of the young people and that the educational practices are grounded in their real-life experiences. This interplay is essential in creating an environment where the young participants feel empowered to share their ideas while also contributing to a broader, more global conversation about sustainability.

Johanna: Absolutely. The balance between these three parties can be challenging at times. In consideration of the project application and the aim of answering our research questions, we had to provide a certain framework. We also introduced the role of co-researchers, for example, and asked the young people to actively participate scientifically. However, we have left the exact implementation to you and the leading team in Germany. This resulted in a balancing act in which the freedom for pedagogical implementation and respect for the voices of the young people had to be balanced with the conditions of our scientific framework.

Outlook

Johanna: Which photo(s) in the project made by the young participants have been most surprising or impressive thus far and what situations are you curious about for the second half of the project?

Simon: Developing concepts is always challenging, as you want them to be unique. During the research phase the youth actively brought up impressive ideas and I'm curious to see the outcomes of the conceptualization and visualization processes, as well as the collaborative conceptualization between the two groups.

Remi: What has impressed me the most is how deeply engaged the youth are with their own topics and cultural perspectives. One participant, for example, chose to portray her family's story, highlighting their origins from an endangered area, and belonging to a special tribe, the Maasai. She emphasized the threat to their homes due to land preservation efforts. The emotional and cultural significance of her images stood out as she used photography to document and share a story of struggle that many are unaware of, making the personal political. Another participant focused on the preservation of old buildings in Dar es Salaam, reflecting the challenges of urbanization and development. As the city expands, new buildings often replace older structures, and the participant's photos showed how these developments ignore the sustainability of nature and the city's heritage. Her ability to capture the tension between development and preservation was both insightful and thought-provoking. These examples demonstrate how the young people are

thinking about sustainability in global terms and how they are questioning and addressing it within their own communities. I am curious to see how, over time, their concepts and interactions with their communities will evolve. As they continue refining their ideas and deepening their understanding of sustainability, I believe their ability to connect with and communicate their concerns will become even more powerful. I'm especially excited to see how their concepts develop in the second half of the project and how they will engage even more with their local environments and communities.

Alyssa: What impressed me most was that, after realizing that the current visual and narrative discourse in the media mainly focuses and tells stories about unsustainability, the participants developed ideas and wishes to add something to this discourse which actually represents and tells stories about sustainability. Right from the beginning of the project one could perceive an activist notion and motivation to change something in the world for the better. I am really curious about how the participants will transform and translate their individual notions and perspectives into photographs. Nevertheless we will have to bear in mind and reflect upon the composition of our participant group: the majority already brings what Bourdieu (2012) would call *cultural capital* along with them. In the context of our project this means that they have been socialized in a rather privileged social group, which equips them with a certain set of knowledge, attitudes, values and motivation that facilitate their participation and engagement in the project. *Who did we address? Who has the resources to participate? Which barriers for participation exist in both countries?* These are some of the questions we will have to explore to identify preconditions for access and its restrictions.

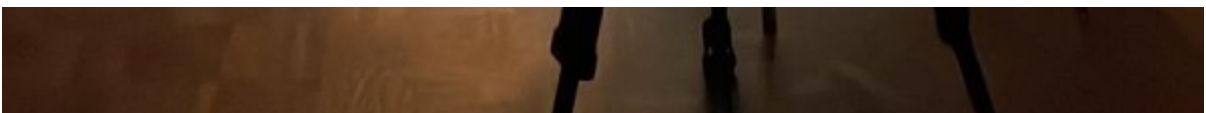
Johanna: The activist notion was also what particularly impressed me. We saw how narratives shape the way the young people make sense of profound societal changes. In times of upheaval, such as when contradictions, tensions, and (climate) conflicts become evident, narratives offer frameworks for interpreting the world and orienting oneself within it (Schachtner 2020). This is especially true for today's adolescents, who are actively engaging with ecological transformations and sustainability issues. Our participants are not merely just observers but active contributors, creating and challenging narratives in significant ways. They criticize hegemonic stories, and introduce new ideas into public discourse, such as the call for intergenerational justice. What is remarkable is how these young people are embedding themselves in emerging social structures through their storytelling, making sustainability a deeply personal as well as a collective issue. Social media plays a pivotal role in this regard, serving as a platform for global networking, self-expression, and communication about sustainable development challenges (Eckert/Grünberger 2024). Through our Instagram channel and Discord, these young people amplify their voices, facilitate connections and bring inequalities into focus. Furthermore, I was impressed by their creativity. In Remscheid, we had many opportunities to use costumes and various technical equipment. One participant in particular tried out an overhead projector and a special printer and via trial and error achieved results as colorful as they are meaningful:



Fig. 5, color layers, idea and realization Rosa Jakobi 2024

I am very excited to see what other topics and creative ideas they will come up with and the impact they will have in their communities.

Remi additional thoughts: If I were to add anything, I would emphasize the importance of the collaborative aspect of this project. The exchange between cultures, perspectives, and ideas—especially between Tanzania and Germany—has been a key part of the success so far. It's not just about the technical skills the participants are learning, but also about broadening their minds and understanding of sustainability, both locally and globally. This initiative is giving them a voice in shaping narratives that are meaningful to them and relevant to the challenges they face in their own communities. The role of photography as a tool for expression and empowerment should also be highlighted. It's been amazing to see how these young participants not only use cameras to capture images, but also to narrate stories, challenge narratives, and reflect on their personal experiences. Overall, the project's potential to foster critical thinking, cultural exchange, and a more nuanced understanding of sustainability is something I'm excited to see unfold in the coming months.



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Anmerkungen

Dieser Beitrag entstand als Schreibgespräch im Kontext des *kubi-online* Anliegens „[Im Team Praxiswissen heben und vermitteln](#)“. Die Verantwortung für dieses englischsprachige Textformat „Written exchange“ liegt bei den Autor*innen.

Zitieren

Gerne dürfen Sie aus diesem Artikel zitieren. Folgende Angaben sind zusammenhängend mit dem Zitat zu nennen:

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