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Complex issues inherent to the debate on sustainable development have posed the challenge of transcending throughout organizational levels and bringing engagement of different social actors, knowledges, and practices. It means reconnecting the individuals with the planetary boundaries, considering contexts of distinct vulnerability and knowledges, and promoting social and cognitive inclusion through ecology of knowledge. In that direction, the water-energy-food nexus is explored as background, and social practices and common sense are considered to deal with resource constraints and scarcity. The proposal is to explore insights from ethnographic and participatory research carried out in an urban periphery in São Paulo state, Brazil (2017-2019). Thus, evidence contributes to reinforcing the role of local practices to manage scarcity, but it is not necessarily aligned with the global magnitude of unsustainability. Moreover, anti-dialogical structures remain an imposing reproduction of an oppressive model, hindering the natural ability of individuals and communities to self-organize in the process.