

11-29-2015

Paris Talks: Local - Global Issues

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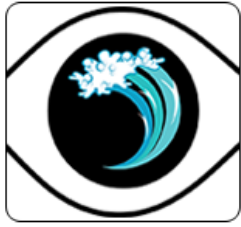


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Eyes on the Rise

Paris Talks: Local-Global Issues

NOVEMBER 29, 2015 / TED GUTSCHE / 0 COMMENTS

This special series of posts is produced by [Juliet Pinto](#) (Florida International University) and [Phaedra Pezzullo](#) (University of Colorado-Boulder)

In collaboration with [International Environmental Communication Association](#), FIU's [Sea Level Solutions Center](#), and [eyesontherise.org](#). Both Pinto and Pezzullo are attending [COP21](#) in Paris.

By Juliet Pinto, from Paris

The week before I left for the COP21 talks, I spent a considerable amount of time driving around my local neighborhoods in Miami and watching water pool on the streets. It bubbled up rapidly through storm drains, spreading across streets, turning green grass into yellow stalks, sloshing across roadways as cars splashed through and people held their shoes in their hands

to gingerly tiptoe across.

No, it wasn't a water main break or a storm: It's higher sea levels, combined with a rainy year and the passage of annual king tides, which together mean that the infrastructure that was constructed decades ago to deal with flooding is simply being overwhelmed. And it means a glimpse into our future, as seas continue to rise at accelerated rates, when such flooding will be the new normal.

So more than ever, as a scholar who studies interfaces of news media and democracy, as well as a citizen who experiences climate change at a local level, I wonder: What will the news narrative of the COP21 talks be?

If you view, as I do, news as a social construction, then how media translate these talks for global audiences has particular urgency. It certainly does for those like me, who live on coastlines that are rapidly transforming, as it does for others, who live where the forests are disappearing, or where the rain has gone away, where the storms are more ferocious, or where once ubiquitous species are disappearing at alarming rates.

And having just landed in Paris, the question for me now is:

- How will media coverage frame these talks?
- Will it be in nationalistic terms, as 147 heads of state come to negotiate?
- Will it be conflict, as U.S. President Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping, for example, will attend?
- Will it be much ado about nothing, even for these historic talks, if a treaty isn't reached that is meaningful in terms of mitigating the world's carbon output?

Missing from international news coverage of the climate talks in particular lately have been the scaling down of these enormous challenges to the local

communities who experience them. These variables are fundamental when discussing environmental challenges. After all, to paraphrase Tip O'Neill, all environmental politics are local. We experience them on the ground, in our own spaces, through our own filters.

And in journalism, in particular, too often that can be the anecdotal lede and then that's it. Or a story that does not provide the audience with any sort of agency, of voice, of sense of hope or of community. I have certainly learned this lesson from my own work with communicating impacts of sea level rise and other issues.

On the plane ride over, I read the *International New York Times*, with a front page story on the security issues for Paris in hosting this historic event, as well as lead stories in the World section on security challenges, fear and terror, certainly forefront in everyone's minds, given tragic recent events and the scope of the talks.

But a few pages back was another story about hope and local action in an age of rapid climate change. Titled, "Guatemala's grass-roots effort to halt deforestation," the thesis was, simply, that the best way to protect natural resources is to empower local communities to care for them. A message of hope and of agency and of local action to meet global concerns.

So I will be looking to hear at these climate talks from media coverage not only what the international, powerful heads of state will be saying and doing, but also an effort to bring these issues down to local experiences, scaling of the coverage, an effort to bring the talks to those, like me, who live at the front lines of climate change with messages of agency and explanation.

Climate change and its impacts are global issues that don't respect geopolitical boundaries, but they are experienced locally. Connecting these talks to what people all over the world are already experiencing would go far in bringing climate change from an abstract, secondary issue to the forefront,

where it belongs.



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