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Paris Talks: A Tale of Two Narratives

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Eyes on the Rise

Paris Talks: A Tale of Two Narratives

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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

In his remarks today at COP21, the former U.S. vice-president, Al Gore, placed the climate crisis in a historical context. “When a choice becomes clear, the outcome is inevitable,” said Gore. “The climate crisis is the latest in a long string of social struggles, from abolition, to women’s rights, anti-apartheid; I could go on. But the world is increasingly recognizing that it is

immoral to put 110 million tons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere every day as if it were an open sewer.”

The meeting, open only to civil society groups, was a clear indicator of the important role that NGOs and civil society groups are playing in the effort to bring the planet to sustainability. Gore underscored his own sense that the Paris talks will result in a meaningful agreement. Indeed, the urgency to act on climate is seemingly palpable everywhere and with everyone at the COP.

However, contradictions abound, as ambition, mitigation and decarbonization are colliding into climate finance at COP. At a panel regarding fossil fuel subsidies, panelists noted that G20 countries from 2013-2014 on average provided fossil fuel producers with over \$450 billion dollars in subsidies. They discussed research that demonstrated that subsidies provide major incentives to keep producing fossil fuel energy, including almost 40 percent of coal production in one U.S. case study. They also discussed how those monies could be easily used to transition to clean energies, level the playing field for investment into clean energies, and better monetize the chief fund for mitigation/adaptation and decarbonization for the G77, the Global Climate Fund.

Yesterday, the mayor of Copenhagen was on a panel for the U.S. Center, discussing his city’s strategies to become carbon-neutral. Indeed, Copenhagen is a model for world urban centers. However, today, the NGO newsletter ECO (co-produced with the Climate Action Network) announced that Denmark would win their daily “Fossil of the Day Award” for working to throw out their carbon reduction target of 40 percent by 2020, as well as cut the budget for climate finance, which is designed to help developing countries finance their own mitigation efforts, as well (<http://www.climatenetwork.org/node/5444>).

Another criticism emerging today from CAN is that certain countries—

including Saudi Arabia and Argentina—are trying to dial down text in the finance section of the agreement that would phase out international support for dirty energy (called “high emissions investments.”) In COP parlance this maneuver is called “phasing out ambition,” and would be a step away from mitigation and decarbonization paths (<http://eco.climatenetwork.org/cop21-eco5-5/>)

Gore, owner of Generation Investment Management, said today that he knows asset managers are very aware that the writing is on the wall for fossil fuel investment. However, he said, “There is still momentum in fossil fuel economies,” meaning there will still be investment in those industries.

So in the current absence of a current global massive shift away from fossil fuels, mitigation strategies, are, as analysts point out, have been fragmented, but are growing. One such success story has been the California-Quebec carbon market linkage, which was just joined by Manitoba. One reason for the mandatory carbon pricing program’s success is that the two regions’ high energy seasons are opposite (summer and winter) and therefore the transfers of mitigation outcomes don’t conflict. By the way, in case you were wondering, “mitigation outcomes” are the new official words for credits and allowances, which apparently are no longer acceptable terms.

In the United States, Department of Interior Secretary Sally Jewell discussed programs at the U.S. Center pavilion that incentivize farmers to protect high-carbon sequester ecosystems, such as wetlands, by paying them not to use them for agriculture or livestock activities. The DoI also works to rewet peat systems, which naturally trap high rates of carbon.

As I prepare to leave the COP21 experience, I am thankful to be able to bring all of this knowledge into my own classrooms in Miami. Indeed, teachers, in the words of speakers on a panel for climate change education “are essential actors of change” for empowering communities globally to make a difference. From one study presented by World Wide Views on Climate and Energy

(#WWViews), longitudinal surveys have found that respondents point to education as the most important factor to combat climate change, and this strong preference for education is linked to a strong will to act. In short, citizens want more agency to act in the climate crisis, and they crave the information and understanding that we can provide.

As a journalism educator, I will bring the information I have absorbed here into the classroom, to infuse my teaching with the information my students will need to navigate their careers and lives in the 21st century, strengthening my efforts in what my fellow Eyes on the Rise colleagues and I call “public service journalism & journalism education.” We bring climate change into our classes, educating our students and teaching them how to cover it as mass communicators, how important it will be on the media agenda, how to pitch it as a story, and how to build their careers around it.

I tell them each semester that there is no bigger story than climate change for the human race in the 21st century. Our challenge is to continue to educate and prepare our students and communities for what is happening now, and what lies ahead. Attending COP21 not only has better equipped me to understand these complex issues, but also all those in my community that I will be able to reach. I’m grateful for the opportunity to have attended these historic talks and look forward to attending many more.



Uncategorized

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