

ATTENDING COP25

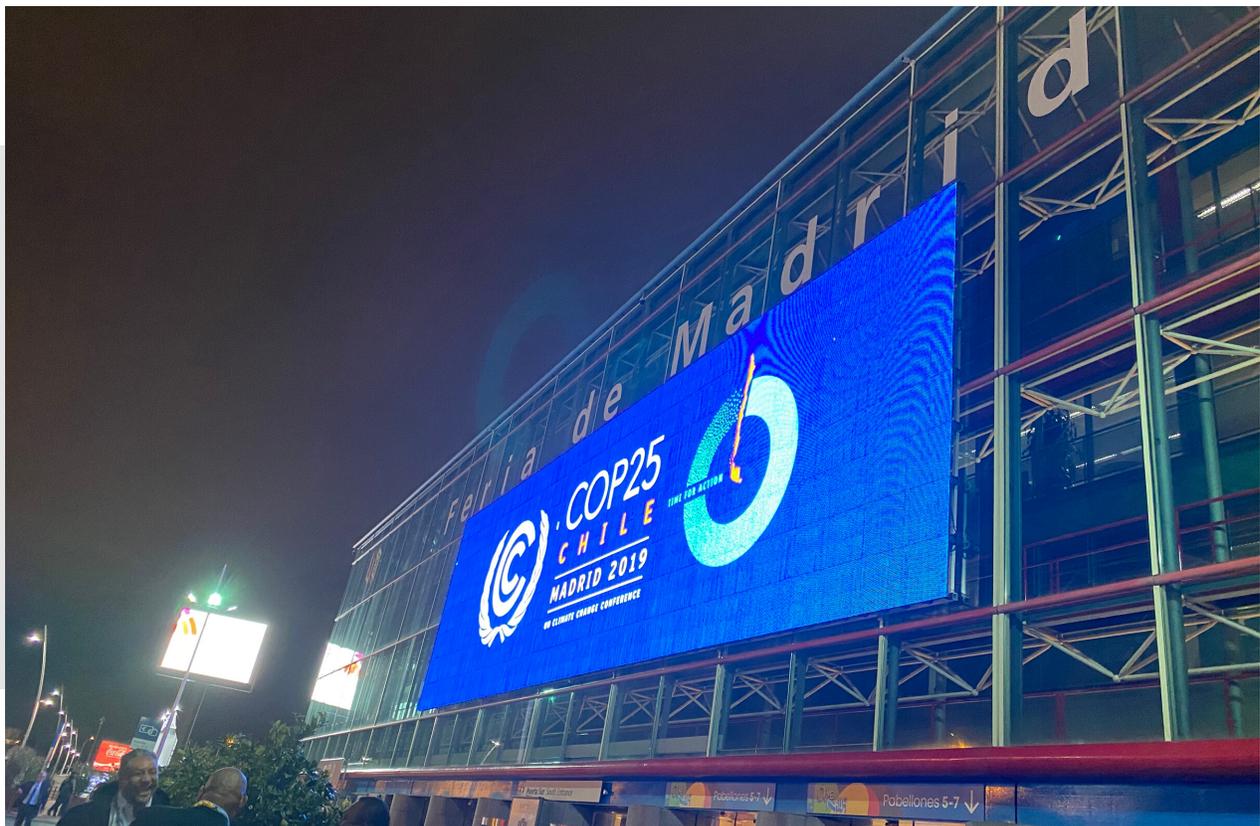
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The Road to Madrid

Considering the protests in the capital city of Santiago, Chile rescinded their offer to host COP25. While the actuality of the conference's happening was up in the air, I was feeling two distinct emotions: the first being hope, hope that another city would take the reigns and offer to host, and the second being disappointment, frustrated that the absence of this conference would cause the world's eye to turn away from Chile at a time when it seemed so essential to be watching. The through-line between

the protests in Chile and the protests regarding the climate emergency are clear - they're both based in the population's anger toward the neoliberal exploitation of both human, economic, and environmental systems. I respect the Chilean government's decision to not host for the safety of the delegates, but there was an activist synergy that was lost in the relocation. Thankfully, COP25 found a home in Madrid.

After a red eye flight from Boston, we made it to IFEMA, COP25's venue, and it was overwhelming to say the least. I had a loose plan to follow events and negotiations regarding gender, finance, and the renewable energy transition with a bend toward energy justice. I quickly started following Article 6 negotiations as well, intrigued by the politics and negotiation styles of the various parties. Having just participated in Dr. Gallagher's climate negotiations, I had more respect and a more nuanced view toward the statements and discussion overall.



A LOGISTICAL MIRACLE: WHILE THE VENUE HAD ITS MINOR FLAWS, I WAS IMPRESSED BY THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN CHILE, SPAIN AND THE UNFCCC TO PULL OFF THE OPERATIONAL CHALLENGE OF HOSTING A CONFERENCE OF THIS SIZE WITH ONLY THREE WEEKS OF PLANNING.



A PACKED HOUSE IN MEETING ROOM 25. THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENS: THE FIRST OF MANY SEVERAL HOUR NEGOTIATIONS OVER THE BRACKETED TEXT WITHIN ARTICLE 6.

More generally, I felt the overwhelming set of complex emotions that comes with being an American within these settings. I set out to lean into this complexity, lean into as much knowledge as I could garner from my five days at COP25.

The Intersections and the Disparities

One of the first side events that I attended was entitled “Real Solutions - Real Zero: A People’s Centered Approach to Climate Solutions,” where I was promptly handed a sticker that said REDD with a red circle and dash through it and a postcard that extolled messages including carbon markets were committing genocide of Mother Earth and that the Paris Agreement was perpetuating the inequality of the fossil fuel industry.

This was a lot to take in right off the bat, and while I am sympathetic to concerns of equity and human rights within Article 6, this panel came in from left field for me. It was interesting to compare to this the first side event attended by a friend, Asgeir, entitled “Generating trust in carbon markets: Insights from academic research.” It was evident that this conference was going to be synergistic in myriad ways, but that there are definitely opposing voices on the climate policy stage, often dividing along intergenerational and latitudinal lines. We were all there to work toward a similar goal, but the roadmap to that goal was fraught with fractures and divisions.

These divisions were even clearer upon entering the informal negotiations; paired with my explainer text from Carbon Brief and the latest draft of Article 6, I was prepared to follow the negotiators’ comments, party by party.



OPEN GENDER INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS. WHILE THESE SESSIONS WERE LARGELY CLOSED TO OBSERVERS, I ATTENDED ONE DURING WEEK ONE. MOST ISSUES HAD CONSENSUS AGREEMENT, AND THE COMPLETION OF THE GENDER ACTION PLAN WAS A HUGE WIN AT COP25 OVERALL.

The co-facilitators were adept at moving the conversation, but it was clear that things were moving quite slowly. I was wary of hoping for too much by week's, or Conference's end.

Side Events, Pavilion Events, and Other Happenings

I definitely experienced a major fear of missing out while navigating the various events of the conference - there was so much interesting content to ingest, all happening at the same time! Here's a quick debrief on some of the notable sessions that I sat in on outside of Article 6 negotiations. Along with Dana and Carolyn from the Tufts delegation, I heard from a panel of climate financiers representing the GCF, the GEF, and the Adaptation Fund on how they integrate gender into their funding and programming policies.

I left this event questioning how gender can be mainstreamed in a more equitable way, one that recognizes folks along the gender spectrum and one that doesn't conflate gendered needs with women's needs. At the Nordic Cooperative pavilion, I heard from the lead Danish negotiator debrief on the day's negotiations and how the EU will leverage its power now that the US has left the Paris Agreement and as China plays a larger role in both emitting and mitigation. I attended a press conference with the IPCC working group scientists, where they underscored the importance of standardized scientific findings to lead the negotiations on Article 6 and within the greater Paris Agreement. I was a bit awe-struck being in the presence of many of the minds whose work I had read over my academic and working career. I attended interesting events on the synergies between the SDGs and the climate agenda, as well as events on the



ESPINOSA ADDRESSING THE OBSERVERS. WHILE SOME OBSERVERS MADE BENIGN COMMENTS, MANY BROUGHT CONTROVERSIAL ARGUMENTS TO THE FORE.

“Business Day” of Week One that highlighted the role that the private sector had to play within the climate agenda. While the majority of the informal consultations on gender were closed, I was able to attend one session.

Each midday, there was with a briefing with specific leaders of the UNFCCC and the observer groups, where the representatives of the various observer groups (RINGO, BINGO, YOUNGO, etc) could ask questions and comment on the Conference’s progress. I attended two of these briefings, one with Patricia Espinosa, the current Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC and one with the Chair of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), Paul Watkinson. These briefings were increasingly interesting, marking the time for the civil society of the Conference to bring their inquiries and qualms to the leaders.

All I Want for Christmas is Article 6

As Week One went on, I started noticing observers with pins reading “All I want for Christmas is Article 6.” Negotiations would begin with a backlog of parties nine-deep from the previous session, and soon point-of-order comments were being made, largely by Tuvalu, for clarification on how this process was supposed to move forward, since parties were largely repeating their positions but not conceding or negotiating specific points. I quickly became acutely aware of the positions of the different parties, notably the Arab Group, whose lead negotiator was vehemently against human rights being included in the text. The tension among the negotiators grew as the week went on, and the co-facilitator’s frustration was palpable. I learned more than I ever thought possible about the specific “legalese” of carbon market mechanisms within Article 6, though it seemed impossible to negotiate.

An Air of Activism

On Friday, I was taking a break outside, chatting on the phone with a friend back home, when I saw a hoard of press, observers, and students. It was almost immediately clear to me that it had to be Greta Thunberg, who had just arrived in Madrid that day. She had not planned to come to the COP venue on Friday, but I knew that no one else could be garnering that much attention. I began to follow them out of curiosity, watching young students climb on chairs to get a better view and older delegates chat excitedly as they gathered behind. I was taken aback by the people's response, by my own response to follow, and felt an inkling of hope about the younger generation's ability and passion. I hadn't been especially captivated by the Climate Strikes and Fridays for the Future movement, mostly because I fall prey to cynicism and these days I am usually knee-deep in the technical

particulars of climate change and energy policy. Obviously, I had realized activism is important, but until that moment, I hadn't realized its critical role in catalyzing the public to care, to pay attention, to organize en masse. Of course, studying policy mechanisms and learning the legalese of the carbon markets is important, but without the support of the greater public, we will continue shouting into a vacuum. We need their voices to orient outward, to persuade and motivate both parties and their governments at home to pay attention and act. To move the conversation from one about change to one about emergency.



A MUSICAL MOMENT. WHILE TAKING A BREAK TO WORK ON MY FINAL PAPER FOR ENERGY, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND FINANCE, A YOUTH ORCHESTRA CALLED "LA MUSICA DEL RECICLAJE" BEGAN TO PLAY. THERE ARE MOMENTS OF HOPE TO BE FOUND.



TUFTS DELEGATION PHOTO-OP. PICTURED, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, CAROLYN HOUSE, BECCA WOLFSON, DANA THOMAS, AND ME, EMELIA WILLIAMS.

Moving Forward

Attending COP25 not only fulfilled a goal of my inner high school Model UN nerd, but it allowed me to evaluate my future career options within the larger community and how I can have the largest impact. I made note of all the new things I need to learn more about and made friends and new contacts with interesting folks from other universities and organizations. Attending COP25 reinforced my passion to work toward global cooperation on this issue and reminded me to ask the difficult questions about equity and urgency. While I had my moments of cynicism, I left Madrid with a greater sense of purpose and clearer direction forward as I enter my second semester of the final year at Fletcher.



ART FOR ACTION. THE IFEMA VENUE WAS FULL OF MOTIVATIONAL ART, UNSURE OF WHO THE INTENDED AUDIENCE WAS - THE PARTIES? THE OBSERVERS? THE MEDIA?