



Paris Blog 3 – Civil society in the Green Zone at COP21

For those not accredited as negotiators or observers, the negotiations themselves are out of bounds. But a large part of the site at Le Bourget was given over to civil society actors as a conference venue-trade fair. Here negotiators and observers could mix freely with civil society outside the negotiations.

As the negotiators and then the Ministers spent day and night horse-trading over bottom lines and lowest common denominators, the activities and mood in the Civil Society or Green Zone was entirely different.

From the metro stations, delegates were collected by articulated electric shuttle buses and dropped at the COP venue, where two “wind trees” greeted us each day.



The Green Zone was a rolling showcase of current and future actions by communities, local government, NGOs, businesses and institutions. It was a combination of trade show and civil society conference interspersed with protests that seemed to spontaneously combust. It was a magnificent juxtaposition of views from low, middle and high-income countries, from

grassroots actions to institutional change, and from descriptions of direct fights for survival to highly technical innovations.

Tuesday was Women's day at the COP. I took part in a discussion about how University campuses can incorporate sustainable development – where there was marked variability in the engagement of students in action even between Universities in the same country, and where the students from South Africa and Ghana were inspiring with their energy and creativity for engaging their peers.

In the afternoon I watched a film by Tom Heinemann called “Carbon Crooks” - the story about why we ended up with emissions trading and the failure of the European ETS. Poor security in electronic carbon unit trading allowed fraudsters to take over the scheme, undermining its credibility, while the initial flood of free credits meant that units were worthless from the outset. More recently there has been an absence of political will to lower the lid on emissions so the price of carbon has remained too low to make a difference to emissions. Sound familiar? There were certainly similarities to the NZ ETS and lessons to be learnt about the failure of a market-based approach to pricing emissions.

Every day in the Green Zone Google ran a series of lectures about their climate mapping projects, including some powerful 3D modelling of some of the world's great coastal cities under 2 and 4C temperature rise scenarios – making it clear that a 2 degree limit won't save many parts of cities like Rio and New York. One day I happened to walk past to see parts of Auckland under water, even in a 2 degree scenario.



Food for the mind was interspersed with delicious cuisine from the all day service of my favourite COP restaurant – an organic creperie serving fantastic savoury galettes, accompanied by music powered by delegates on stationary bikes. Others could charge their phones and laptops at similar stationary bike stations.



Food was also high up on the civil society agenda, with multiple presentations and workshops about the importance of dietary change, the comparative footprints of different kinds of diet and the crucial issue of tackling food waste. The most recent research suggests that for much of the world what is eaten is more important than where it comes from (in other words, eating much less meat is more important than worrying about whether your meat replacements are locally grown), though I'd like to see some NZ specific research – I suspect

there are special circumstances like extreme distance and low emissions meat production that may tip the balance the other way.

The messages from the Green Zone were ones of determination and optimism. Communities, cities (including Paris), the private sector and public institutions aren't waiting for governments to address climate change and combat fossil fuel extraction – even if it costs them their lives.