

Tokyo, December 18, 2015

Paris Climate Change Conference Trip December 2015 - Report

United Nations (UN) COP21 Climate Change Conference and Sustainable Innovation Forum 2015
 Le Bourget, Paris, France, December 2-14, 2015

I. Introduction

My name is Kim Schumacher, a 3rd-year Ph.D. candidate of the Graduate Program on Environmental Sciences (GPES) at the University of Tokyo, Japan. My research interests revolve around Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) legal frameworks in Japan and other OECD member states, and their correlation to renewable energy (RE) investments and green growth.



This year I was honored to be selected as the official student delegate to represent the University of Tokyo (UTokyo) at the potentially paradigm-shifting “United Nations (UN) COP21 Climate Change Conference and Sustainable Innovation Forum 2015”, held officially from November 30 until December 11, 2015 in Paris, France. In order to attend said conference I first had to be selected through a competitive process administered by the UTokyo *Transdisciplinary Initiative for Global Sustainability (TIGS)* and the *Integrated Research System for Sustainability Science (IR3S)*. After being nominated as official observer by the University of Tokyo, I was able to attend thanks to a generous research travel grant from the Department of Multidisciplinary Sciences at the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, University of Tokyo.

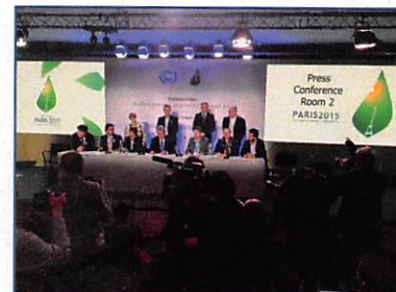
The main focus of this conference was logically on topics such as climate change, greenhouse-gas (GHG) mitigation, adaptation strategies, renewable energy technologies and their deployment. Since it was an official high-profile political event attended by all major political leaders of the world and a multitude of government officials, the character of this conference differed slightly from purely academic conferences in that the more scientific and research elements were complementary and occurred alongside the climate agreement negotiations. This

was a crucial aspect in that it lifted the appeal of the scientific presentations beyond the usually area-restricted outreach scope of climate change-related research. Many interdisciplinary research presentations and panels allowed political decision-makers to gain further knowledge about topics and projects that have the potential to influence our environment and ecosystems in fundamental ways.

I will present a brief outline of the impressions that I obtained from the events and sessions I attended during the conference as whole, as singling out individual days or particular panels would be too extensive due to the extremely large amount of side events, presentations, panels, talks and plenary sessions. Notwithstanding, I will indicate the name of those sessions or presentations that I found most memorable in terms of overall appeal and academic content. This general conference report will then be followed by a concluding paragraph that will summarize my overall perception of the conference.

II. Conference Details: December 2 to December 12, 2015

This conference was organized by the United Nations Framework Convention of Climate Change (UNFCCC), an official body of the United Nations (UN) dealing with the negative externalities of GHG emissions, anthropogenic climate change and global warming. The elements that were both unique and enriching was the tremendous amount of variety that this conference had to offer, with topics as diverse as the presenters, who hailed from all 195 UN countries representing the entire planet. It was a perfect opportunity to experience first hand the complexity of climate change negotiations, sustainability and environmental science research fields that deal with a multitude of aspects that pertain to contemporary environmental, ecological, cultural and socio-economic issues.

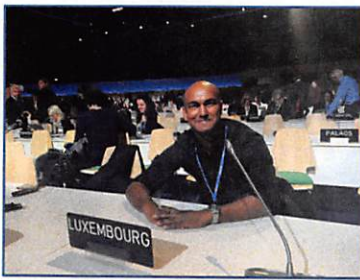


I was able to interact and communicate with researchers, government representatives, business leaders and students that were all connected to climate change, sustainability science or environmental science and renewable energy R&D. Having been able to forge a number of valuable connections, I intend to continue to pursue collaborative and interdisciplinary research efforts in order to extend the academic reach and

comprehension of environmental impact assessment (EIA) frameworks and RE development and promote further research in this field.

I left Tokyo in direction Paris on Dec. 2, 2015 and arrived on Dec. 3, 2015. The poster titled “Climate Change Mitigation Strategies and Proposals - Renewable Energy Policies in the OECD: Environmental Impact Assessment as a Climate Change Mitigation Tool” was presented and discussed during the Asian Youth: Climate Statement Panel event held on Dec. 3, 2015, which was the “Young and Future Generations Day” at the COP21. The poster focused on the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) of Japan and other developed countries in Asia, and the subsequent discussion revolved around the questions of how ambitious these national targets are and how they compare on a global scale. The discussion and information was of high quality and all of the statements demonstrated a genuine interest in the subject matter. The solutions that were presented contained valuable approaches in how to address the shortcomings of certain technological and scientific approaches; Henceforth the feedback obtained will be integrated into any future academic publications.

On the following days, the challenge was to make a selection from the immense catalogue of panels, talks, side events, presentations, and plenary sessions. As the conference premises and the area they covered were enormous in size, therefore the distances between the various conference venues was a non-negligible determining factor while choosing a particular event, especially because many interesting events happened simultaneously.



Among those that I attended were several ones organized by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the European Union (EU), the International Energy Agency (IEA), the Japanese Government Delegation, the United States Government Delegation and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Furthermore, following the daily developments of the COP21 climate change negotiations and the contentious points with the draft agreements was another major point of interest as this landmark follow-

up agreement to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol bore the potential to have a lasting impact on humanity and general environmental governance. When the agreement was final adopted on Dec. 12, 2015, a feeling of happiness overcame me, and was met at the same time with humility and gratitude for the University of Tokyo and the Department of Multidisciplinary Sciences for having rendered this trip possible, both administratively and financially.



V. Conclusion

In retrospect, I have to extend my thanks once again to the Department of Multidisciplinary Sciences of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, University of Tokyo; as I could attend this insightful and diverse conference only because of the support in form of the department’s travel grant. The “United Nations (UN) COP21 Climate Change Conference and Sustainable Innovation Forum 2015” was of extraordinary quality and in terms of research quality and topic variety quite unique in that it combined interesting presentations from a wide array of research areas under one comprehensive general topic, sustainability. As a student in the GPES program, I could experience first hand the importance of climate change negotiations, the interactions of scientific research and law-and policymaking and how interdisciplinary research approaches can contribute to the mitigation of environmental hazards such a global warming, deforestation and ecosystem destruction. Therefore, the attendance of this conference and the presentation of my research therein marked important steps in my Ph.D. research as well as enriched my life and perceptions also on a personal level.

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