



Invoking The Pause

CREATIVE COLLABORATION FOR CLIMATE CHANGE



By bringing together a diverse group of policy, education, arts, and storytelling experts to develop short-term outreach programs in conjunction with the December UN Conference of the Parties (COP), Human Impacts Institute Founder and Executive Director, Tara DePorte hopes to help the group facilitate and strategize on how to carry this work forward effectively beyond 2015. During the Pause, these diverse specialists will review the already-successful Creative Climate Communication programs of the Human Impacts Institute and to connect them to the local community of Paris, France, where the largest climate policy negotiation of our time is taking place this December.

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Human_Impacts_logo.jpg Inspiring people to change bad habits, consume less, and to accept that the status quo of human societies' just doesn't work with our planet's climate is a tough job. There are days when I'm reading climate science reports on the current and predicted impacts of climate change, like the recent article from world-renowned climate scientist James Hansen and 16 other top climate scientists about quickening sea level rise, where it can be paralyzing. The facts are clear: we are drastically changing our earth's climate with our consumption of natural resources, burning of fossil fuels, production of waste, and land-use change; the impacts are currently catastrophic for many communities and the impacts are only going to increase in the near future; and we aren't doing enough to stop it. However, there are also other facts to take into account: we can change our behaviors and develop social systems that work in alignment with our natural

systems; there are many solutions that already exist around the world; and a lot of people do want to take action.

So, the big question is: how do we get more people to take serious climate action? One answer is to bring new people into the climate conversation, which has often remained among environmentalists, activists, and the politically left or liberal. Fortunately, we have seen the climate movement grow in diversity and awareness massively in the past couple of years, including the 400,000 strong Climate March in NYC in 2014 and the July 2015 release of a heavy-hitting climate action manifesto from none other than Pope Francis. As we move towards getting a broader group of people to take action, a simultaneous step that we can all do is to start talking more about climate change in our daily lives.

Central to “activism” is the concept of “action”, which for many leads to a neverending to-do list of ways to act for our cause, goals, community, or whatever might be in the spotlight of our movement. As we’ve seen in so many important social movements exemplified by recent social media blossoming in “speak out”-themed hashtags like #sayhername protests against the police brutality of black women in the U.S. to the #notinmyname campaign of young Muslims speaking out against ISIS, there is no denying the popularity of “hashtag activism” in today’s social-media obsessed culture. Wherever they may occur, encouraging broader conversations on the often-toughest things to talk about: injustice, violence, and our own negative impacts, is a critical beginning to shifting minds and inspiring action.

As a person who prides herself on being action oriented--to the point of founding an organization, the Human Impacts Institute (HII), whose mission is to inspire YOU to take action--I have seen myself continuously undervalue and overlook a critical component of successful action--taking a “pause”. Conversations and pauses give us the time to open ourselves up to new perspectives, share ideas, to listen to new--and old--voices, and to reflect on where we’ve been and where we are going. However, as with our mission at the Human Impacts Institute, conversations aren’t enough: if we just talk and don’t act, then we don’t impact the status quo. So, our goal is to find ways to couple inspiration and conversation with action.

In the lead-up to this year’s much talked about international climate negotiations in Paris, COP 21, and with our ongoing work of bridging the conversation/action gap on climate, the Human Impacts Institute has begun a series of <<Climate Conversations>> or dinners in the style of Jeffersonian Dinners of specially-curated groups of diverse climate and sustainability actors with non-climate people that bring much-needed expertise to the movement.

In the manner of dinners organized by Thomas Jefferson, <<Climate Conversations>> aim to bring together personalities from various backgrounds (arts, theology, political, communication, literature, etc.) around a common interest. These dinners are a unique opportunity to enrich, to rethink and broaden the debate on individual experiences and behaviors face the challenges posed by climate change. For each individual meeting, we create a space for people to share skills and personal experiences around an intimate dinner. The evenings are an opportunity to share a friendly moment around a meal, and explore together ways that can inspire more to act against climate change --- with a hint of reflection and a lot of creativity!

Bringing People Together

In order to begin our brainstorming for our <<Climate Conversation>> in Europe, with the support of Invoking the Pause, we brought together an unusual grouping of longtime supporters and advisors--a writer and editor, Lee Bob Black, a climate and development consultant at the United Nations Environment Program, Agathe Laure, and myself, Tara DePorte, an artist, educator and lifetime environmentalist. Our goal was to come together to take a “pause” and to look at the work we have been doing at the Human Impacts Institute to creatively engage people in climate action, and to see how we can more effectively grow our programs for new audiences. What we planned

to do was to develop a <<Climate Conversation>> in Paris leading up to the COP21 negotiations, to find “influencers”, or people from diverse sectors, not necessarily active in climate change, who could help us to shape the climate action narrative during and after Decembers policy-focused meetings. Our theory: no matter what the policy outcome is, we need to get more people to take action on climate.

Our first step was to brainstorm who would be the list of social “catalysts”, or people that would be most equipped to bring climate action to new audiences in the city of Paris. Our initial list of potential “invites” extended from academia to activism to the private sector and entertainment and from youth to those living with disabilities--with our idea being to have a mix of people who can inform the conversation with climate-relevant knowledge and others who can inform the conversation with new approaches to communication and social influence. Our approach to brainstorming potential influencers was twofold: there were no wrong ideas and diversity was crucial.

Building a Narrative

Just putting a bunch of diverse people in a room together doesn't always lead to impactful conversations. When looking at the many conversations around climate change going on, there are distinctive media-driven narratives that tend to repeat in many communities, including barriers to climate action like: “it's not us” or “it's not happening” climate-denial, “why should we do it, if they aren't doing it?”, and “we changed our lightbulbs and lower our thermostat”, which are all conversations that lead to either a sense of having already addressed the daunting issue of climate change with small actions or straight-out inaction. Although small actions in our daily lives are both important and impactful in many ways, we're at a junction where changing light bulbs just won't cut it. However, we also don't always react well to either alarmism or being “preached” to. Accordingly, how we tell the story of climate change--from the science and the policy to the impacts and solutions---is critical to whether we take the actions necessary to shift to a climate-friendly world. We also need to think about whose voices and perspectives are being heard, or are becoming more dominant than others to access the depth and breadth of climate impacts and solutions.

Meeting with the team from Place to B, was like meeting our french-doppelgangers. Here is a team of passionate people who are working to bring together diverse people to shape a new narrative around climate change. Specifically, they are working to build an “information factory” during the COP21 in Paris filled with specialists in communication from around the world (journalists, bloggers, filmmakers, artists and more) to “create a unique newsworthy momentum” for climate action. In our conversations, we immediately saw numerous points for partnership, both during and after COP21 and began to explore what tools are necessary to building new narratives around climate. As a result of our meetings, the Human Impacts Institute team has officially partnered with Place to B for helping bring a diverse group to the space and program during the COP, and Place to B worked with us to build our list of invites for our Paris <<Climate Conversation>> to include journalists, filmmakers, and other key people from the communications world. Additionally, their Founder, journalist Anne-Sophie Novel, agreed to co-facilitate the evening.

Connecting the Dots

One of concerns about driving action on climate is that it's hard to get people to care, much less take action on anything. When we start to think of a topic like climate change, which is both complex and huge, the communications challenge is daunting. However, if we are able to show the connections between climate change and other issues--health, education, justice, economics, you name it---then we automatically grow our audience. Similarly, you and I and everyone else tend to care about things more when it's about us and our close community--whether it be family, friends, or neighbors. Being able to make climate impacts and climate change solutions personal is also a key component to inspiring more people to take action.

When meeting with Tara Expeditions, a French non-profit organization that is a platform for environmental awareness and scientific research, where we discussed how to connect climate change to waste, consumption, and the health of our oceans. We explored how they bring artists and scientists together on scientific expeditions aboard their exquisite boat, Tara to build partnerships and research around environmental issues. Our conversation not only led to the potential inclusion of Tara's founder and well-known fashion designer, agnes b, to our first Paris <<Climate Conversation>>, but also to an invitation to bring programming and creative communication tools to their special public space during COP21, as well as contacts for other people to include in the conversation.

Following the meeting with Tara Expeditions, we met with both representatives of French academic institutions and the government to investigate how to best bring climate research and policy into the conversation. Conversations with representatives from the French Environment Ministry and the COP21 Secretariat demonstrated their interest in connecting with non-governmental groups and in partnering to build communication tools on climate around the world. Meeting with Laura Centemeri, a professor of sociology who specializes in "pragmatic approaches to environmental questions", emphasized the importance of diverse communications strategies that reflect local cultures and cultural systems. She pointed out that by approaching environmental issues as something that are a part of society and not a separate "over there" entity, it also helps us to continue to personalize the impacts and to care about implementing solutions.

Inspiring Action

Unfortunately, the most prevalent images and narratives around climate change that come to most people's minds are of drowning polar bears and melting glaciers. Both images can be poignant, but they have been so overused that many of us don't have an emotional reaction upon viewing or just simply don't care. As is discussed in a recent article in the Guardian, Why Climate Action Needs the Arts, artists and creative minds of all sorts work in the medium of inspiration, a component that is sorely needed in the climate movement.

When looking at creating <<Climate Conversations>> one of our first goals is to explore how we can build conversations with people bringing different perspectives, as well as diverse tools to the table. With each meeting to develop the project, came new ideas for who to invite to join us and a desire to take part in providing resources to action after our conversation.

In our quest to explore partnerships with groups that are creating climate inspiration, we met numerous times with ArtCOP21 and Live Earth. For COP21 in December, ArtCOP21 will stage in Paris city-wide cultural events that address climate as a people challenge and work to create a cultural blueprint of positive and sustainable change. By working with "creatives" ArtCOP21 is working to engage people in new ways with the subject of climate change, while also promoting the works of artists who are taking on climate change in their work. Our potential connection with ArtCOP21 was multi-fold as for the 5th year, the Human Impacts Institute is bringing our Creative Climate Awards to NYC to showcase artists creating climate-inspired, public works and actions. This year, we have selected 28 artists from around the world who are working in painting/drawing, installation and performance and short film. ArtCOP21 has not only offered to include the NYC-based events in their official calendar, but also proposed that we combine our programs post 2015 to make the competition NYC-Paris-London. Similarly, Live Earth works with well-known entertainers--from Pharrell to Metallica--to spread the word about climate change through music. We have become official partners of Live Earth 2015 and will also be working to bring a representative from the entertainment world to our Paris conversation.

From Conversation to Action

In the fall of 2015, we will have our <<Climate Conversation>> Paris in collaboration with Live Earth, Place to B, and ArtCOP21 and will bring together a group of 14 <<influencers>> who have

the potential to greatly spread the climate narrative in their sectors (academia, NGOs, private enterprise, government, entertainment, etc) to continue to build the collaboration and conversation on climate action. The proposed location for <<Climate Conversations>> Paris will be at the Institute des études avancées, Paris.

Following the success of our “pause” in Paris, our first <<Climate Conversation>> was held shortly thereafter in early June of 2015 in Marseille, France, with a group of 7 experts in communication (journalists, marketing professionals, etc) and 7 experts in climate change (climatologists, lawyers, decision-making scientists, etc) to explore how we can harness the concept of <<inspiration>> to move more people to climate action. Following the success of the Marseille <<Climate Conversation>>, in July of 2015 we brought together a group of performance artists in Berlin to explore how to use their craft to support the climate movement and to better engage people in science and technology.

Taking a “pause”, where we were able to come together as a small team and brainstorm, reflect, and meet with diverse groups to explore avenues for collaboration has led to a myriad of inspiration and action. From partnering to promote the arts as a catalyst for inspiring climate action to working together to shape the climate narrative during and after COP21 to bringing together diverse, international actors to brainstorm new ways to connect communities to climate action, the pause inspired more than conversation and even brought the conversation and action beyond NYC and Paris to Marseille and Berlin.

- See more at: <http://invokingthepause.org/humanimpactsinstitute.html?bpid=5584#sthash.LjZb4eeK.dpuf>

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