



Graduate student Fernando Tormos with Christina Figueres, executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.



Indigenous representatives from Peru pose for a photo in front of the Peru pillar outside the entrance to the Le Bourget conference site in Paris.

From Presence to Influence: The Politics of Representation in Global Environmental Governance

The United Nations has identified indigenous peoples and women as two of the groups most affected by climate and global environmental change. Although indigenous peoples make up approximately 5% of the global population, they constitute more than one-third of the world's poorest and govern, occupy, or use nearly 22% of global land area, thus suggesting that effective representation of indigenous peoples, and indigenous women, in particular, in global environmental governance, like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), is key for more resilient responses to climate change.

Professors Kimberly Marion Suiseeya and Laura Zanotti, along with a group of graduate and undergraduate students, attended this year's UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP21), held in Paris, France. The team seeks to better understand how various networks and governance practices at COP21 engage in the politics of indigenous representation to shape the outcomes of the negotiations.

During the two-week Paris Climate Conference, the team used collaborative event ethnography—a team-based approach to study mega-events—to observe and analyze the process of negotiation and decision-making regarding forest issues by and for indigenous peoples,

examining how their ideas related to forest conservation and local livelihoods are created, promoted, contested, debated, and ultimately incorporated partially or wholly into global agreements. Because influence is increasingly understood as a phenomenon that unfolds over time and is not always measurable through specific decision outcomes, attention to the details of the politics of representation—which often emerge in fleeting moments—is critical to identifying pathways to influence. These pathways include actions that, for example, change the course of debate, undermine another actor's strategy, or insert an idea that is taken up in other rooms or venues. Using the PCCRC observer credentials, the team was able to sit-in on official COP21 negotiations, as well as cover civil society events.

The team also explored the use of digital ethnography to complement their on-site data collection. Thirty-three graduate and undergraduate students from Professor Marion Suiseeya's International Environmental Policy course followed key actors in the COP21 negotiations to examine how these groups use virtual worlds to influence the negotiations. The digital ethnography team used the same project analytics as the field team.

This work is part of a long-term research project to identify and examine the ways in which marginalized and underrepresented groups effectively influence governance processes that directly impact their ways of living. Their next effort will focus on the September 2016 World Conservation Congress. You can follow their work on Twitter at @COP21Research or visit the project website: presence2influence.org.