



Scott "signs in" at the Climate Summit for Local Leaders in Paris

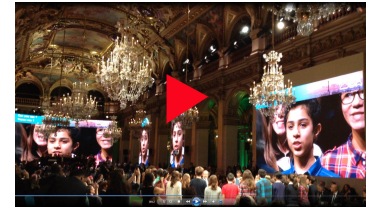
## THE SANDBOX BLOG

### Making connections at COP21: Cities, forests, and Pilot Projects at the climate talks in Paris

Scott Francisco — December 11, 2015

I just returned from the City of Light, having joined tens of thousands of leaders from around the world gathered there to participate in COP 21 (the [Convention of Parties on Climate Change](#)).

I was there with [Dr. Sarah J. Wilson](#), representing Pilot Projects, Kean University and our partner the [Wildlife Conservation Society](#). Crisscrossing the city on Paris' renowned [Velib'](#) bicycles, and sustainably-fueled by the world's best baguettes and croissants, we attended an array of conferences, workshops, meetings, and receptions, including the [Climate Summit for Local Leaders](#), the first annual [FLARE \(Forests & Livelihoods: Assessment, Research, and Engagement\) Conference](#), and the 2015 [Global Landscapes Forum](#).



A children's choir wraps up discussions at the Climate Summit for Local Leaders



The Climate Generations area at Le Bourget (the main COP21 site) was one of the main temporary buildings constructed for the event. It hosted dozens of breakout sessions, exhibitions, and film screenings, as well as musicians, organizations, activists, and businesses.



Scott & Sarah on the green carpet at Hôtel de Ville (Paris City Hall) where the Climate Summit for Local Leaders was held

Amid all the complexities and convictions these events presented, one idea stood out as both the most hopeful, and the most pointed:

The big solutions to our global environmental problems—including deforestation and species loss—will be

found not in rural areas, but in cities.

Although cities consume a growing majority of the world's energy, they are also uniquely poised to respond effectively to climate change. Their relatively small size (compared to other governing units) means they can act quickly to design and implement new policies and pilot projects that can be replicated, scaled, and shared widely. As cultural leaders, they also establish behavioral patterns and values that others adopt. In many events and conversations in Paris, these ideas took center stage.

At the December 4th Climate Summit for Local Leaders, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon declared: "Cities are where the people are, cities are where the pollution is, cities are where the solutions are."

The Summit was the largest-ever global convening of mayors, governors, and other local heads focused on climate change. Its goals included showcasing this unique ability of cities to respond to climate change challenges, and reaching a legally-binding agreement that will enable local leaders to act swiftly and effectively on climate change.

Speakers at the Summit contended that as cities grow in both size and global influence, what they do matters now more than ever. As featured speaker **Jeffrey Sachs** commented:

"After the agreement is reached, who's going to be the first to start implementing that? It's going to be the mayors at their desks the next morning... They have to make contracts... They have to decide where the next road is going to go, how public transport's going to work, what kind of vehicles are going to be riding on the streets of the cities. So literally, where the rubber hits the road is the world's cities."



We lived by the bike: Scott pedals for his juice at a COP21; Sarah rides a Velib' inside Paris's Hôtel de Ville. It's amazing how much pedal energy (if converted to electricity) is required to juice some fruit: about the same as biking a 1/4 mile up the Champs Élysées! Reducing our dependence on electric appliances is one way to dramatically reduce carbon emissions.



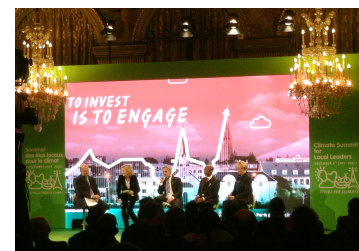
All this echoes what we've been saying for years, and was the founding principle of our two proactive procurement sustainable wood initiatives launched in partnership with the Wildlife Conservation Society: **Wood at Work** and the **Brooklyn Bridge Forest (BBF)**.

**Wood at Work** convenes influential architects, foresters, policy makers, ecologists, and urban planners to develop the link between sustainable wood use in an urban context, and the practices that make sourcing this wood truly beneficial to global forest conservation. The **BBF** proposes replanking the aging icon's wooden promenade with sustainably-sourced timber from a zero-deforestation, community-managed forest. An innovative public sponsorship model would virtually eliminate the cost to New York City while refurbishing this world-renowned public space with a durable, historic, low-energy building material.

These initiatives embody the philosophy upon which Pilot Projects was founded: cities are centers of creativity, and co-creation is needed to solve our most pressing environmental and cultural problems. Ergo, cities are perfectly poised to lead climate change mitigation efforts through creative participation.



Entrance to COP21: a "forest of flags" representing the 190 participating countries



Closing panel at the Climate Summit for Local Leaders



Maya Biosphere Reserve carbon talk, hosted by Rainforest Alliance, on the importance of rainforests for carbon sequestration. The Brooklyn Bridge Forest is located in the heart of the Maya Biosphere Reserve!



Forests and deforestation issues were on everyone's mind at COP21. This image, part of an aerial photo exhibition, shows the deforestation due to agriculture that is common in developing countries. Our work seeks to provide livelihood alternatives.





"Sidewalk Ballet" outside the Palais Garnier, a Paris icon



President Obama speaking from an OSB wood podium. Much of the infrastructure at COP21 was made of wood, given the well-understood carbon benefits of building with it. (photo by Reuters)



Paris boulevards are best travelled by bicycle!

Another common thread joining the Paris events we attended was forest conservation, which COP leaders now recognize as a key strategy for mitigating climate change. Yesterday's *New York Times* reported on this trend, and the day before, **Alec Baldwin presented the 21 winning initiatives of this year's UNDP Equator Prize**, an award that recognizes outstanding work of local people to reduce poverty, protect nature, and strengthen resilience through forest conservation. Community forest management is at the heart of the BBF, aligning it squarely with the current impetus on community-driven climate change solutions. In fact, Uaxactún, the BBF's community-managed forest partner, **won the Equator Prize in 2002** for its globally-outstanding forest management.

The importance of forest conservation and how cities can support it were also key take-home points presented at the Summit by **Laurent Fabius**, France's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development and President of COP21.

Reports on the Summit's outcomes are still coming in, but it's clear that cities are taking leadership on climate change and forest conservation like never before. It's a new and exciting chapter, and one that needs investment in effective and inspiring pilot projects to reach its potential.

As **Andrew Steer**, CEO of the World Resources Institute, summed up at the Local Leaders Summit: "The demand for solutions will increase after COP21, and we'll need better funding models and new projects. Examples are fundamental. Cities need to lead with cheerful, creative, positive responses."

This is our mission. As the French would say: *Allons-y!*

Tags: **brooklyn bridge forest, sustainability, wildlife conservation society, guatemala, wood at work, innovation**

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