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Contemporary artist and Chair of Art and the Environment,  
University of the Arts London.

# We Need to Think as World Citizens for the Paris Agreement to Succeed in Combating Climate Change

Posted: 17/01/2016 18:05 GMT | Updated: 17/01/2016 18:59 GMT

In December 2015 the outstanding results of the COP21 Climate Summit agreement to keep global warming under the 1.5C threshold were announced by the teary-eyed French foreign minister Laurent Fabius, who was applauded with standing ovation from the teary-eyed crowd of ministerial delegates from 196 countries.

As he recognized the tireless work of the UN and the negotiators, his voice cracked as he thanked members of the civil society, especially the militants who sadly couldn't be amongst the crowd to witness and partake in the historical moment, heralded by *The Guardian* as, "the world's greatest diplomatic success". But this euphoric moment marked the beginning of an even harder struggle.

Despite the universal good will of the COP21 Climate Summit, we have to confront the harsh reality of an increase in temperature above 1.5C, we have to fight it and above all we have to be creative and take risks. It will require the vision and voices of activists and scientists, artists and designers, to translate the agreement of ministers into an emergency call for action that reaches everyone in every walk of life. Action from all sectors of civil society will be equally as important as the hard won agreement of governments in securing a world for future generations, and so it will be down to creative individuals and groups to convey to our fellow citizens what threats and opportunities lie ahead if we don't succeed. This urgent action must begin in 2016 for the Agreement to have any chance of success.

In the two-weeks leading up to the COP21, as a consequence of the deadly terrorist attacks in the capital, a 'state of emergency' was enforced by the government, which led to the cancellation of all mass-gatherings. Despite this ban, an overwhelming sense of solidarity by imaginative citizen initiatives superseded these obstacles, in unprecedented collective participation, proclaiming an overarching consensus of creative activism.

It was these very voices which will now be so vital to translate and amplify the urgent need for individual and collective action required for COP's vision to succeed. I was lucky to be amongst the artists exhibiting at the Solutions21 exhibition, presenting the work 'Antarctica World Passport Bureau'.

The 'Antarctica' project stems from the very beginning of my practice as an artist back in 1992. Faced with the forced migration of the millions of Kurd refugees fleeing the first Iraq conflict, together with my partner Jorge Orta, we imagined a new Utopia.

This place would be a safe haven for populations fleeing conflict, and based on the principles of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, the first peace treaty to be signed during the Cold War, which bans all military activity and promotes scientific cooperation for the betterment of humanity. It wasn't until 2007 that our studio team was able to travel to Antarctica in the famous expedition to found the symbolic 'Antarctic Village -

No Borders' and raise the 'Antarctica Flag' as a supranational emblem of human rights. The 'Antarctica World Passport', an ongoing component of our artistic process, first printed on our return back to terra-firma in 2008.

It sums up the powerful participatory nature of Antarctica and this work couldn't have been a timelier project for the COP21. Faced with the increasing numbers of refugees displaced because of climate induced disasters directly resulting from warming temperatures, and the predictions of yet more horrific conflicts due to the scarcity of resources, it was evident that the 21st summit was the perfect forum to act at a truly cooperative global level, for the climate and for world peace.

Unlike the borders, frontiers and bureaucracy of passport offices around the world, especially draconian under present circumstances, the process of application for an Antarctica World Citizenship takes just a few minutes and we never turn anyone away. Our bureau is constructed with reclaimed wood and found objects including suitcases, water buckets, toys, life jackets and row boats that tower and bulge over the rudimentary architecture. The recipient simply has to agree to the obligations accompanying the Antarctica World Citizenship on <http://www.antarcticaworldpassport.com>, in return for a UIN (unique identification number), and they are invited to traverse the frontier thorough a small wooden passageway. The symbolic transferal of one's individual national identity, to that of the collective world citizen, is part of the artwork's overarching meaning. At the end of the tunnel a second passport officer stamps and signs the special edition of the passport, authenticating both the artwork and the world citizenship.

There are currently three passport editions in different languages totalling 55,000 examples. The online application boasts over 12,000 online citizens across the world, including some of the hardest hit catastrophe zones; the Interior Ministers of the Philippines, Alaska, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan, alongside militants, indigenous peoples, business men, entrepreneurs, activists, artists, government ministers, negotiators, journalists, and lawyers. All of these potential voices can be visualized on the website's Citizen Map, and this simple visualisation portrays the strength of the project; it's potential to unite and mobilise people around the world with common values.

Amongst some of the inspirational conversations were with the scientists working in both the Arctic and Antarctic, the engineer of the Antarctic schooner recently purchased by the fashion designer Agnès B and her son, to further scientific and artistic research across the oceans of the planet, the Jacques Cousteau Foundation who pledged to support a voyage to Antarctica for a lucky Antarctic citizen; but most of all it was the visit by great grand-daughter of the famous Antarctic explorer, Captain Scott, that most humbled us. On arrival at the Antarctica World Passport Bureau, she broke-down into tears. Of amongst all the pioneering, fearless, intrepid, visionary, ingenious, downright crazy of explorers, it is the will to succeed against all odds that Robin Falcon Scott sums up the results of this Climate Summit and its historic moment in the call for world-unity.

My time in Paris during this momentous and emotionally charged fortnight left me with a stronger conviction than ever that for the world's population to wrestle success from the teeth of disaster will only be possible if the Antarctica Passport Bureau's magical thinking is effected in reality around the world in the coming year, and we each begin to see ourselves not as citizens of individual nations, but as a humanity united for a common cause. In the words of Captain Scott's Antarctica diary in the week of his fateful final entry: "To-morrow last chance... For God's sake look after our people".

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**Paul Sawtell** · University of Wolverhampton

Another arty luvvie trying to sound off on issues that do not concern her.

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**Philip Brewbaker** · Streeeling University

The Wall Street Journal still thinks Climate Change is a hoax, 120 years after it was first raised as a concern by one of the greatest chemists in human history (for other work), and 50 years after a sitting President, on advice of his Scientists Advisory Board, first warned Congress that this was a critical issue.

So, at this point, I'll definitely take an Artists opinion over the more serious-types in the business schools.

Like Reply · 8 hrs



**Fiona Kirton** · Étudiant at Bath Spa University

As the Paris Agreement was not legally binding I do not hold out much hope for it being successful.

Like Reply · 1 hr

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