



World Climate Conference – a play re-enacting the COPs

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Last December, Paris was the host city for the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Representatives of 195 countries met to dispute a legally binding climate agreement – a highly complex process involving thousands of politicians, scientists and activists, that to date has taken over two decades.

The director ensemble “Rimini Protokoll” re-enacted this mammoth-scale drama of diplomacy in the play “Weltklimakonferenz” (World Climate Conference) at the “Deutsches Schauspielhaus” theatre in Hamburg, Germany. Since the opening night (21st Nov. 2014), the play has been performed 16 times, reaching an audience of over 9000. All performers in the play were experts and scientists at different stages of their careers, including PhD students, journalists and professors. Each spectator took on the identity of a delegate of one of the 195 participating countries. We will present the project and the performance, thereby highlighting the role of and the interaction between the spectators and early career scientists.

In a nutshell the play went as follows (<https://vimeo.com/137817619>); after an opening ceremony, the audience was divided up into seven groups, each of which was given advice by experts in several different briefings. These informed on country-specific challenges caused by the social and economic situation, possible future climatic changes and negotiating tactics. In addition, the delegations had bilateral meetings, enabling them to exchange views and experiences with one another. Towards the end of the play each delegation was asked to submit a national commitment to greenhouse gas reduction and a financial contribution to the Green Climate Fund. Based on these national commitments, the final plenum revealed whether or not the delegations had managed to submit reductions compatible with restricting global warming to 2°C compared to pre-industrial times.

Due to their direct personal involvement in the play, each spectator was confronted with the full complexity and challenge of a climate change conference: Revealing the “culprit” - in other words the causes of climate change – is all about facts. In contrast, when developing options for action, the matter at hand is ultimately values. Which risks should the world community take on? What cost is it prepared to accept to protect the population in areas menaced by droughts or floods? These are all decisions based on political, economic, and indeed ethical issues. Based on feedback from spectators both during and after the performance, we will discuss to what extent the performance managed to convey the complexity of the question at hand and to what extent the spectators actually took on the role of their given country.

The spectators were not the only ones to be put out of their comfort zone during the performance. Also the experts had to, in cooperation with the directors, think carefully on how to find the right balance between scientific integrity and a captivating dramaturgy, ultimately leading to a performance that would be informative, thought-provoking, as well as enjoyable.