

Live from COP26

Nov 4 - 6

As I write this, I'm preparing for the trip back home, leaving the rest of the team here for the final week of COP. It's a marathon! and they are doing an extraordinary job. I'll send another update on week 2 with help from the team.

Week 1: What just happened?

For newcomers like our AIA group, the first week of COP26 was overwhelming and confusing, but also powerful and rewarding. The giant COP Blue Zone was like an anthill, busy and complex, but with everyone contributing their little bit to something bigger.

The World Leaders Summit stole headlines the first two days, as new commitments were rolled out and headline speakers took the stage. Attendance at these events was extremely limited, but they were live-streamed so we were able to hear the exhortations of Sir David Attenborough, Prince Charles, and UN leaders to act quickly and comprehensively.

The real work began in earnest the latter part of the week, as official delegates from the parties to the agreement locked themselves in negotiation rooms to hammer out final details and address sticking points. That work will continue through next week. A key topic of conversation will be pieces of the Paris Agreement that still haven't been fully settled, chief among them a mechanism for putting a price on carbon. Again, these deliberations happen behind closed doors, though observer organizations like AIA are occasionally invited to meet with negotiators.

Against this backdrop of earnest statesmanship, the COP facility was abuzz with panels and talks and events and pavilions hosted or attended by NGOs, by government leaders, and by the UN itself. This proved to be a great place for AIA members to speak directly with US Senators and Representatives, cabinet members, mayors, environmental leaders and partner organizations.

Glasgow was also busy playing host to myriad side events, as well as the many celebrities sited throughout week 1. The city was alive every day with street protests, from small sit-ins to the big youth march led by Greta Thunberg and Vanessa Nakate, to the giant march on Saturday that drew up to 100,000 – a seemingly unstoppable people's movement of all ages, nationalities, faiths and backgrounds, coming together around the most urgent issue of our time.

AIA delegation connects with elected leaders.

The AIA team has been impressively persistent and opportunistic in taking advantage of our time at COP. The US Climate Action Center pavilion was particularly fertile ground for connecting with US leaders. Julie Hiromoto FAIA spoke for the record about AIA's priorities at an open meeting with official COP delegates. Individual conversations included Sen John Ossoff, Sen Reuven Carlisle, Sen Dick Durbin, Sen Susan Collins and others.

COP theme: Regeneration and nature based solutions

The ecological stability we all depend on is breaking. Sir David Attenborough

The land is the ultimate technology. What nature teaches us is the power of banking on diversity and collaboration. Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm, Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation in the Yukon Territory

Threading throughout COP has been the message that our climate emergency is much broader than fossil fuel emissions. Loss of biodiversity, habitat destruction and ocean acidification also imperil our fragile atmosphere. Destruction of nature is both caused by and a contributor to global warming. This is equally as important for urban places as it is for rural and natural places. RIBA's Built for the Environment report addressed the twin emergencies of climate change and biodiversity loss as they relate to buildings.

Conversely, nature-positive principles are critical for regeneration of the planet. Restoring and reconnecting habitat, sequestering carbon, and rebuilding the connection between human beings and nature have a critical role to play in addressing our climate crisis.

Learning Opportunity: [Cities and the Circular Economy](#)

If you are interested in learning more about circular economy principles as they relate to the built environment, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation has an excellent series of video trainings online.