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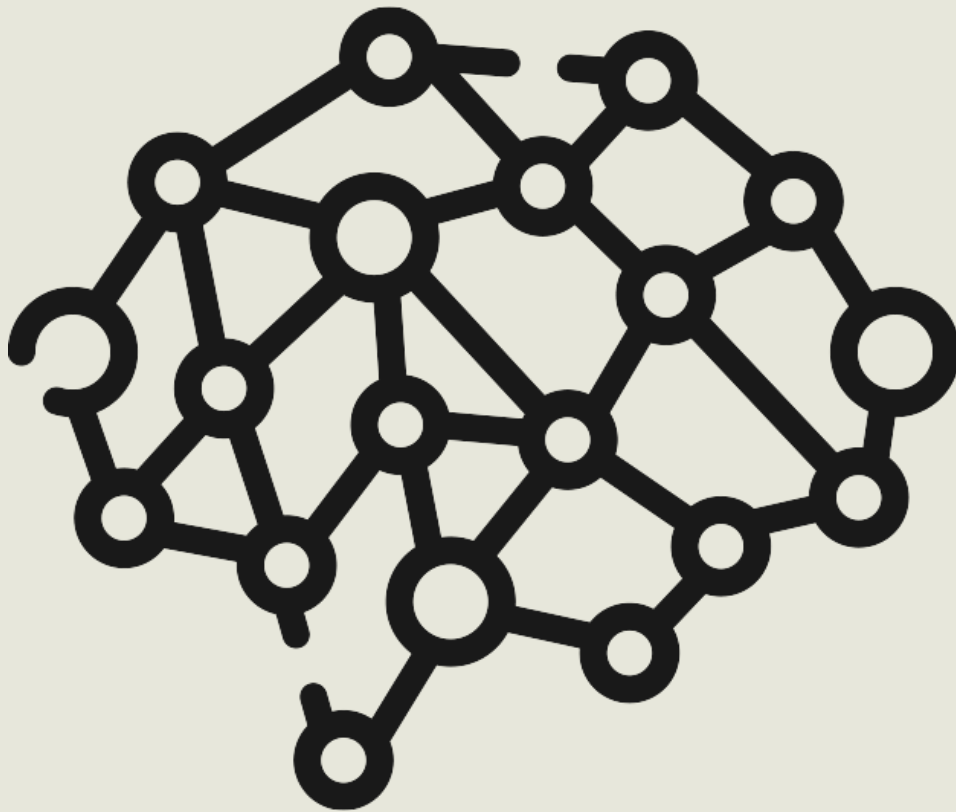
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After COP26, from disappointment to action

Post-COP26 Narrative Report



Indigenous Narratives for the Climate Conversation

The climate crisis demands a profound departure from the global hegemonic culture. We need new ways of knowing, being and feeling that can prompt us to rethink our relationship with nature. In other words, we need new epistemologies. And these alternative epistemologies already exist in the world. They exist within Indigenous communities and communities that have been defending their land, surviving and resisting the capitalist, extractivist and exploitative culture that originated in the Western world.

Given this, Culture Hack Labs has decided to bring its data technology and narrative expertise to the service of Indigenous land defenders and partnered with [Indigenous Futures](#) and [Cura Da Terra](#). Indigenous land defenders are indeed at the forefront of the climate crisis. They are in direct contact with nature, and they see firsthand the human actions that are imperiling our ecosystem. Their knowledge of the land, of the ecosystem and their lived experience can help awaken the rest of us and prompt the change that humanity deeply needs.

Culture Hack Labs therefore calls on activists, social justice practitioners, media professionals and journalists to listen to the voices of Indigenous and to amplify and center these voices in the climate change conversation. Only then, will we be able to spur a global cultural shift whereby life on earth is more valued than profit and power.

In the past months, our work has consisted in gathering data to understand the state of the narrative space as it relates to climate change and to identify possible strategies to elevate Indigenous-centered narratives. In October 2021, we issued our first research findings in [a narrative brief](#) where we also amplified three narrative frames proposed by Indigenous land defenders to shift the current climate change conversation and move the attention to solutions centered on Indigenous knowledge:

- Indigenous land defenders are humanity's living solutions to the dominant extractivist and capitalist culture.
- The climate crisis is a consequence of colonialism whose logics continue to ravage the earth and exterminate populations.

- Global North countries share the biggest responsibility for the climate crisis.

In the same report, we identified the communities¹ that have the strongest influence over the climate change conversation. We found that Global North leaders, experts and activists currently dominate the climate change conversation. By contrast, voices from the Global South remain in the margin of this conversation, and the voices of Indigenous people are simply absent.

COP26 offered another opportunity to track and monitor the climate change narrative space. During the two weeks of the Conference, Culture Hack tracked online conversations to spot [influential communities during COP26](#) as well as the [narratives that emerged during the Conference](#).

The report that follows is a summary and analysis of what we found. If you are pressed for time, we invite you to read the last section of the report, [What is changing and what now?](#) We acknowledge the disappointments around COP26, and we also believe it is important to direct our collective energy and attention to what's next. At the end of this report, we outline a series of questions for collective brainstorming to continue building upon the advances we observed during COP26 such as transnational solidarity and the growing recognition of Indigenous leaders' leadership.

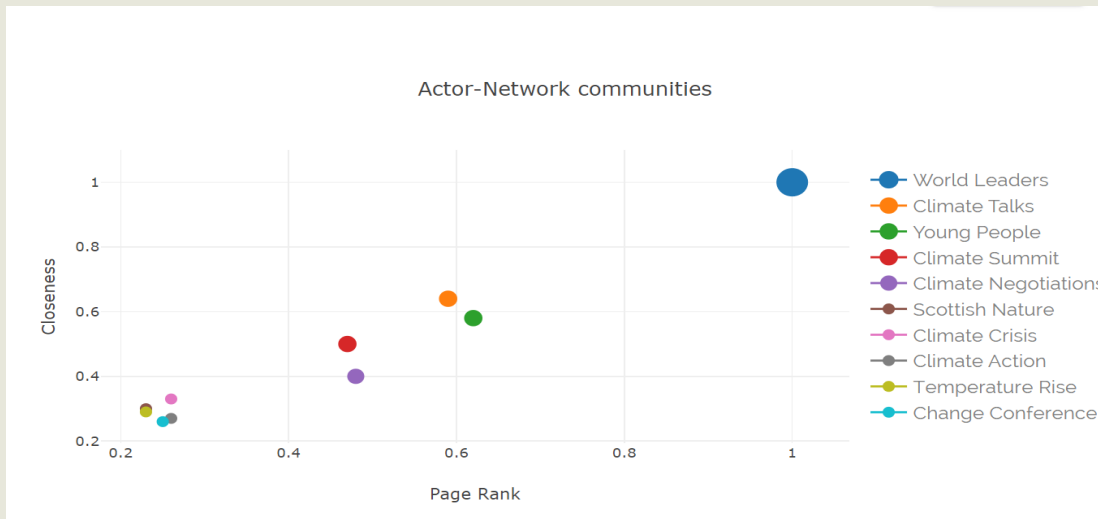
Narrative Communities during COP26

During COP26, we saw the same usual big actors, governments, and international institutions, taking the lead on the climate change conversation. However, we also noticed new actors that were not usually part of the conversation. Overall, three communities dominated the conversation during COP26.

World leaders and big traditional media

This is not surprising. As the Conference of Parties is a major international event, UN and state leaders occupied the narrative space. Traditional big media relayed official information issued by these institutions. However, as the days of the COP went by, the media shifted the attention towards protests and smaller events.

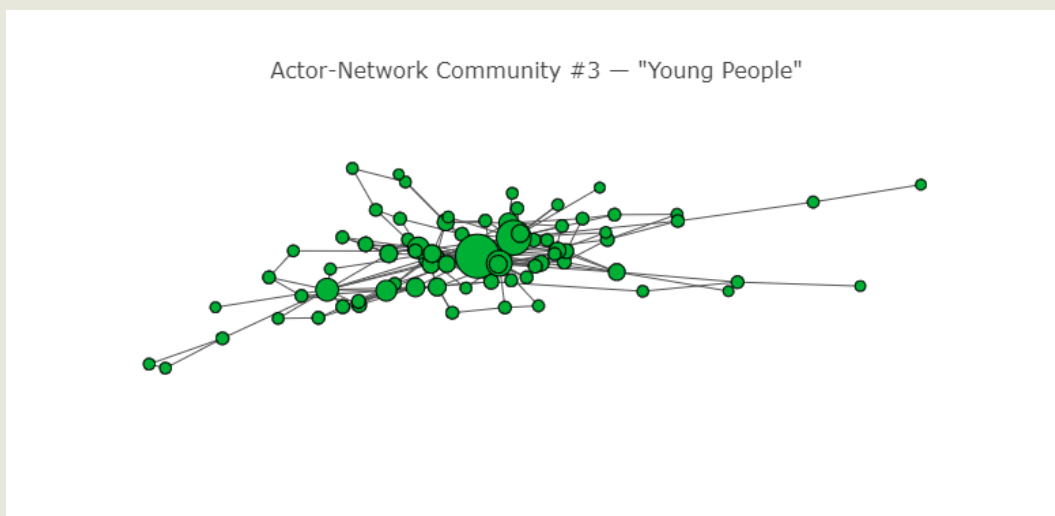
¹ We identified these communities thanks to our data-analyzing platform, which is designed to analyze the power structure of narratives.



The graph above shows which communities are most active when collecting data hashtagged #COP26. It exemplifies the social media dynamics throughout COP. Each dot represents a community segmented by narrative concordance & size. Its position refers to its relevance in the narrative space. We can see the stark separation between communities of world leaders and institutions versus youth activists (identified as “young people”) and communities whose conversations centered on climate action and the climate crisis.

Climate change activists, including young activists and science experts

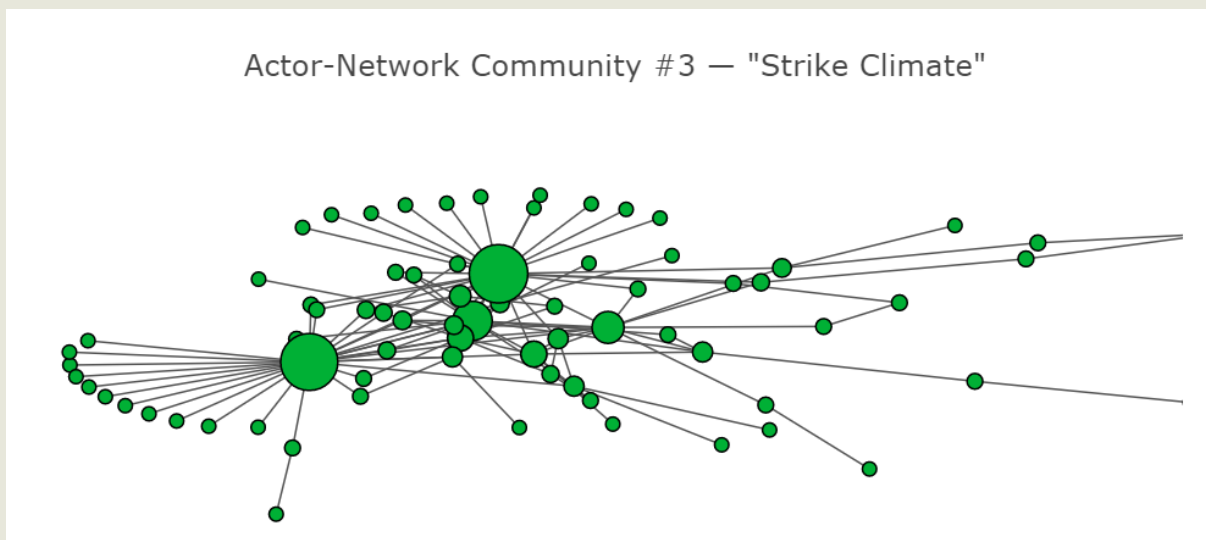
This community was already active before COP26, as indicated in our October report. However, it is worth noting the incredible mobilization of young and very young activists during COP26. The November 5 march (Fridays for Future march) and the November 6 march (the climate march) demonstrated that the youth, including children, are significantly involved in the fight for climate justice. However, as we describe below, the data also shows that communities that took part in the protests did not seem to be narrating what was going on from the inside. Rather, media coverage of the protests came from outside.



The graph above shows which communities are active when we collect data associated with a particular hashtag, in this case the hashtag is #COP26. The biggest nodes (or circles) represent the most active communities. The central nodes are the communities that gather the most attention from other communities (they generate the original posts that get to be retweeted, re-posted, etc.). The algorithm identifies two keywords that are most often repeated throughout data collected by the platform. When collecting data using #COP26, the most active communities are formed around youth activists and local Scottish movements' twitter accounts.

Global grassroots and digital climate organizers - many of whom are from the Global South

Climate activists and organizations from the Global South, including alternative & local news media as well as Indigenous organizations, stepped into the online conversation throughout COP26. This is a shift from the first report where the data showed that Global North activists were taking most of the narrative space. We observed that much of this community's conversation was held in Brazilian Portuguese and on Instagram. On Twitter some of the most active communities were also from the pacific nations (New Zealand, [Tuvalu](#), Philippines, Hawaii.)



This graph shows the most active communities when we collect data associated with the hashtag #COP26 and #uproottthesystem. They revolve around twitter accounts owned by youth and climate activists particularly from the global south.

Key Findings on Media Coverage

During COP26, digital organizers and independent media from both Global South and Global North organized through [a COP26 collaborative group](#) to coordinate actions and share information to amplify alternative narratives and stories on climate. However, the data shows that these narratives were relatively self-contained. Stories from “the inside”, from within the protests, did not always make it to the mainstream media. This is possible due to a fragmentation of the conversation. Indeed, the data shows a multiplicity of media strategies with many different hashtags, #ForaBolsonaro, #LandBack, #StopCambo #IndigenousFutures

#EmergencialIndigena. Though these campaigns added narratives and stories to the general conversation, they did not converge, which may explain their limited reach. It is also possible that those on the ground did not have the capacity to both organize and broadcast their actions.

It's also significant to note that as weeks went on, smaller communities and smaller conversations around local issues emerged. For instance, local media used the opportunity of COP26 to link local issues with the negotiations in Glasgow. This had an impact on the types of narratives surrounding COP26.

The Narratives of COP26

Through our data collection and small listening², we identified and highlighted below some of the narratives & conversations that shaped the debates during COP26. We note that certain ideas that used to be considered “radical” such as linking colonialism and climate change have now become commonplace. Yet, this major advance is overshadowed by the failure of COP26 to bring real solutions to the crisis.

The Global North is responsible for the climate crisis and must compensate Global South countries. This became a central topic during COP26. Climate finance, loss and damage were big talking points. Global South countries, especially the most affected countries (the “frontliners”), and activists across the globe demanded that rich countries - the biggest polluters - compensate and financially help developing countries.

COP26 is a “greenwashing festival”. Greta Thunberg's words captured the sentiments of many climate activists from both Global North and Global South. Among these greenwashing measures is the creation of a carbon offset market. Activists also denounced so-called “techno-based” solutions and some of the “nature-based” solutions like reforestation and biofuels which accelerate biodiversity loss and keep laying the burden of climate change on the most affected communities.

Indigenous issues were highlighted. Global North activists, leaders and even some mainstream media amplified the voices of Indigenous people. Their leadership was recognized. In addition, Indigenous activists used the opportunity of COP26 to bring attention to the ongoing violence – in particular, in Latin America - against Indigenous land defenders and climate activists. A memorial was held to commemorate the 1,005 Indigenous land defenders that were killed since the Paris Agreement.

Colonialism is now part of the climate change conversation. The most striking narrative shift of COP26 is the recurrent mention of “colonialism” in the mainstream conversation on climate change. For this, we can certainly credit the efforts of Indigenous activists. Colonialism is denounced as a root cause to the climate crisis. Measures like the carbon offset market that

² Small listening involves searching and reviewing manually social media networks and media outlets to refine the findings of the big data collection done through the platform.

benefit the fossil fuel industry or the systematic exclusion of Indigenous people from global spaces of decisions like COP26 are all evidence that colonialism continues.

Climate justice means social justice. During COP26, climate activists repeatedly emphasized how climate change, poverty, racism, and other forms of exploitation and oppression are all connected. They share common root causes: capitalism, white supremacy, colonialism. The system is the cause. In fact, #Uprootthesystem became a rallying cry for young climate activists from Global South and Global North.

Local issues are global issues. COP26 created an opportunity for local and global movements to connect and highlight how they are all part of the same struggle. Networks of solidarity were strengthened in Glasgow. Marginalized people in the Global North linked their struggle to marginalized people in the Global South. Climate activists joined the refuse workers' strike in Scotland. The #stopcambo campaign gained further attention during COP26. Climate activists protested police action against socialist groups during the march.

People's power is the real power. During COP26, climate activists, in particular the youth, contested the power of world leaders and big institutions like the UN. Global leaders were mocked for sleeping during meetings and called out for their unwillingness to take urgent actions. Greta Thunberg's famous "blah blah blah" became a meme. By contrast, the climate march of November 6 showed the power of people organizing outside of the confines of bureaucratic institutions. COP was discredited. For activists, COP is not where change can be made.

COP26 is a failure. As COP26 neared its end, there was a distinct feeling of defeat and powerlessness from activists and other actors who saw little progress in the decisions taken during the Conference. COP26 was blatantly described as a "failure." COP president Alok Sharma and UN SG Guterres admitted to the same. For the countries and communities that will be the most impacted by the crisis, the failure of COP26 is equivalent to a death sentence.

What is changing and now what?

While COP26 ended with a general feeling of deception and frustration. From the above, we can still celebrate some advances.

The voices of Indigenous land defenders are being amplified. The presence of Indigenous and Global South activists at COP26, even though outside of the conference rooms, was unprecedented. The climate marches were led by Indigenous groups. We must also highlight the growing presence and participation of young Latin American activists. Their efforts paid off because, as we noticed above, some of the narratives defended by Indigenous groups were pushed to the mainstream.

Transnational and intersectional solidarity. While COP26 ended with much criticism for its failures, the conference at least created an incredible momentum where climate activists from

the Global South and the Global North joined forces and connected their struggles. We must celebrate the growing discourse coherence among climate change activists. There is no hesitancy to point out that racism, economic inequality and poverty share common root causes with climate change.

However, these progresses are indeed tainted by a reality that resists the necessary profound and radical change.

The power to decide remains within the hands of Global North leaders. This is the community that keeps leading the climate conversations. In fact, while the Indigenous delegations had never been so present, many were not able to make the trip. Those who were at Glasgow were not included in the official conversations, let alone the decisions. In fact, except for Youth and grassroots movements like Fridays for Future, the Global North activist space did not actively include nor center Indigenous land defenders and activists.

Indigenous narratives and stories were not made sufficiently visible. There were many more stories and many more narratives pushed by Indigenous and Global South groups during COP26. We know this thanks to our partners at Indigenous Futures and Cura da Terra who were present on-the-ground. However, these stories were not covered by mainstream media, which instead highlighted Global North leaders. It is also possible that the narrative fragmentation (through a number of hashtags) we described earlier may have limited the reach of these stories.

Campaigns, stories, and the narratives they contain have the power to shift culture. We saw glimpses of this at COP26. Writer and activist George Monbiot, [in an article following COP26](#), notes that to change culture and social norms, a critical mass of 25% of the population is needed: a critical mass who has adopted and embraced the alternative narratives. That's why, more than ever, as we face humanity's ultimate existential threat, and as Indigenous leaders are being threatened into silence (already in the days that followed COP26, land defender [Irma Galindo Barrios](#) disappeared and [Txai Surui](#) received death threats for her speech at COP26), it is of the utmost importance to tell the stories of Indigenous people. These stories tell solutions that already exist within Indigenous communities. They contain narratives that protect Life.

Now what?

What can be done despite the failure of the Conference to bring urgent solutions to the Crisis? As we take stock of the wins and losses of COP26, we see the need for Global South and Global North activists who hold a common goal of systemic change to unite around a shared narrative strategy. Bearing in mind the lessons of COP26, this strategy must address three urgent questions.

- How to increase the global visibility of Indigenous narratives?

For this, it is key to identify ways that do not rely on big media, but rather help build a common media and narrative strategy for all actors in the climate justice movement that can cross-weave, amplify and consolidate the different narratives pushed by Indigenous leaders.

- How to effectively change the locus of power from government to people?

This is to continue what was started at COP26: a people-driven movement which can reverse current power dynamics, challenging old views on how policies & decisions are made. What can this look like?

- How not to lose the transnational solidarity that was built during COP26 and transform the general anger and frustration into further actions?

Transnational solidarity is the connective tissue that is most likely to help achieve a global & united narrative strategy and challenge power.

Pursuing our efforts to elevate the voices of Indigenous land defenders, at Culture Hack Labs, we would like to open the space for allies and activists to consider these questions and collectively decide on what must be done next. While the leaders of this world sit atop a burning house, it is urgent we muster our efforts to design and support the strategies that can stop the destruction of our planet.

Living Solutions

Below are a few examples of campaigns and initiatives that were organized during COP26 and contributed to building solidarity across movements and amplifying alternative narratives. Yet, they did not get mainstream media coverage.

“There is no solution to the climate crisis without Indigenous Peoples and their Lands” | Brazil - APIB & Anmiga. This campaign highlights the importance of land ownership and demarcation for Indigenous people.

Defenders of the Earth “Living solutions to climate crisis” | México & Guatemala - Futuros Indígenas & Legaia & DJCC. This campaign promotes the narrative that Indigenous peoples, who defend 80% of the planet’s remaining biodiversity, are living alternatives to the climate crisis.

The Climate Crisis is a Racist Crisis | USA - Black Lives Matter

Representatives of Black Lives Matter came to COP26 to recall the connection between the climate crisis and racism, and that climate justice also means racial justice.

Fridays for Future MAPA (Most Affected People and Area) | International - Fridays For Future
MAPA joined the fight and demands to Global Leaders at #COP26 to include voices from the

Most Affected Areas, to stand with Indigenous communities and to make ambitious compromises putting the people and the planet first.

[#CopCollab26](#) | International - Media Ninja

COPCOLLAB26 was the collaborative coverage of COP26 whose goal was to disseminate counter-narratives and perspectives from the Global South during COP, including the views of Indigenous people, black people, socio-environmental activists, media activists, etc.

[People's Summit](#) | International - A platform holding 150 sessions to bring together movements from across the world for system change.

[Our Village](#) | International - If not us then who? During the COP26 at Glasgow, If Not Us Then Who? with partner organizations will ask a series of questions intersecting climate change, indigenous peoples and the effects of the crisis around the world.

[Climate Clock](#) | International - Inspired by the efforts of warning how much time humanity has to stop climate change to remain below 1.5°C, and also keenly aware that the world needed a climate clock that was more than an isolated website or one-off art-experiment, the New York Climate Clock crew put together an ambitious proposal for synchronized climate clocks all over the world. Which was ignored. For a year.

[Re-Earth Initiative](#) | International - Youth for climate justice. An initiative that seeks to bring climate action to the masses, by hosting informational [webinars](#) and writing toolkits, and provide alternative and digital avenues for people to participate in the climate movement.



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