

Antarctica in/and the Anthropocene International Symposium

(28 May 2016, Santiago, Chile)

From 23 to 31 May 2016, delegates from over 50 countries and non-government organizations met in Santiago, Chile, for the 39th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting. One outcome of this year's meeting was the Parties' unanimous support of the Santiago Declaration, with which the Parties renewed their commitment to the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (1991).

To mark the ATCP meetings and the 25th Anniversary of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, a one-day international symposium was organized under the theme "Antarctica in/and the Anthropocene". The symposium conveners were Dr. Cristián Simonetti (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile) and Dr. Juan F. Salazar (Western Sydney University, Australia), and the event was held at the main campus of the Catholic University in downtown Santiago. It was co-sponsored by the Institute for Culture and Society (Western Sydney University) together with the Anthropology program at the Institute of Sociology (Catholic University) and support from the SCAR Humanities and Social Sciences Expert Group.

We live in times that are at once troubling and promising. This means the time is ripe for new conversations and new synergies. The symposium was therefore organized as an interdisciplinary event to discuss the notion of the Anthropocene as it pertains to the Antarctic, more precisely around the question of why we need to come to terms with Antarctica in the Anthropocene. The urgency of this current moment in time requires that we bring together a range of perspectives across a full spectrum of knowledge practices: from the arts, the humanities, all the way to the life and geophysical sciences, so we can think about the big picture when debating about the future of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean.

The year 2016 may prove to be significant at many levels when thinking about Antarctica in the context of the Anthropocene. Globally, February to June 2016 were the warmest months on record, continuing a long-term trend where 15 of the 16 warmest years on record have now occurred since 2001. This follows reports that show not only that 2015 was the warmest year since modern record-keeping began in 1880, but also that the past 12 months have been the hottest such months in 135 years of recordkeeping. On 22 April 2016 (Earth Day) the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was signed in New York following initial adoption by consensus at the 21st Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC in Paris in December 2015. The Paris Agreement was opened for signature on 22 April 2016 at a high-level signature ceremony convened by the Secretary General in New York. At that ceremony, 177 States and the European Union signed the agreement but only 15 States deposited their instruments of ratification. As of the time of this symposium only 17 States have deposited their instruments of ratification, acceptance or approval, and none of the ATCM Parties had yet ratified the Paris agreement.

In 2016 a proposal to designate a new geological epoch as the 'Anthropocene' is being developed by the 'Anthropocene' Working Group for consideration by the International Commission on Stratigraphy. This is the largest and oldest constituent scientific body in the

International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS), and this working group will decide this year whether the Anthropocene is recognized formally as a new geologic era.

Eleven speakers representing a range of organisations and a diversity of disciplines, including oceanography, palaeontology, philosophy, marine biology, anthropology, geography, environmental and polar history, as well as tourism studies, Antarctic policy, and science journalism, were invited to think aloud together in public, offering insightful presentations discussing how Antarctica is not isolated and is also affected by the impacts of global ecosystems changes, which will only intensify in the next 50 years. Some of the presenters spoke of the responsibility of an engaged citizenry and the role that Antarctic gateway cities play as they plan their urban futures in relation to the Antarctic. Other speakers also outlined their visions of how Antarctica can become a key object in a conversation about the Anthropocene. Thinking about the Anthropocene suggests a complex blend of socio-political and physico-material negotiations. The current problematization of planetary 'boundary conditions' is indicative of the need for new ethical engagements, but is also suggestive of a new kind of 'geo-logic politics'.

A total of 48 people, including INACH officials, ATCM delegates from NGOs, members of the Antarctic community, and members of the general public attended the day-long event. This was yet another indication for scientists and policymakers that Antarctica provides a unique opportunity to develop an affirmative relationship across disciplinary divides at a moment in history where non-state actors have an important role to play in protecting the Antarctic as a heritage for all humankind.

By late 2016 a short commentary on the symposium will be submitted for publication to WIREs Climate Change or Nature Climate Change, and the Chilean Antarctic Institute (INACH) will publish a short article about the symposium in their next issue of ILAIA: Advances in Chilean Antarctic Science (Vol. 3, 2017).

[Dr Juan Francisco Salazar, University of Western Sydney, Sydney, Australia;
J.Salazar@westernsydney.edu.au]