

The Conference To Save The World with Chante Harris

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SPEAKERS

Greg Lindsay, Chante Harris


- G** Greg Lindsay 00:24
Hello, and welcome to threesixtyCITY by NewCities, a podcast delving into the future of urban life. I'm your host, Greg Lindsay. As the COP26 summit in Glasgow grinds toward the end of, hopefully successful negotiations, a draft agreement released this week calls for an end to fossil fuels ahead of the schedule originally outlined in the 2015 Paris Agreements. Achieving these goals will not only require the creation of a global carbon market, as originally outlined in Paris, but also the rapid and massive changes to the built environment, which in the US some of these changes will be financed by the passage of President Biden's \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill last week. But trillions of dollars in additional investment is needed, a sum beyond the scope of the public sector alone. This week, we're joined live from Glasgow by Chante Harris, Director of Climate Investment and Partnerships at SecondMuse to discuss how to make COP26 commitments a reality. Thanks for joining Chante.
- C** Chante Harris 01:16
Yeah, thanks for having me, Greg. It's always a pleasure to chat with you.
- G** Greg Lindsay 01:20
Always. Well, the first question is the obvious one, which is what's the vibe on the ground in Glasgow. Unlike Paris, and unlike even Copenhagen before that, the vibe from afar seems to be that of negotiating the Treaty of Versailles with the bureaucrats in one area, and then like having Davos all around it. So, you tweeted this week that you've met all these incredible people. Who are you meeting there? What are the kinds of side events, and what are the conversations and partnerships that are happening there?
- C** Chante Harris 01:45

 Chante Harris 01:43

Yeah, that's a great question. I've had a lot of conversations with folks here about the dialogue not reflecting all of the magic that's happening on the ground. Obviously, negotiations are taking place, and that's a huge part of why we're all here. We want governments committed to making sure that they are showing up in a way that is real for cutting emissions, and really fighting the climate crisis. And that is happening. We're all observing it, we're all watching the panels. We're part of the keynotes, right, we're seeing what's happening in real time. But I've really found so much value in all of the events, dinners, experiences with people outside of just the negotiations and the blue or green zone. And I think, perhaps those narratives don't always get told, when we talk about what is mainstream on the media. I've been meeting such incredible people, as you alluded to my Twitter feed, and some of those have included Indigenous leaders and communities. It's not every day that I get to sit beside elders within Indigenous communities and hear about what they're doing and their innovations. I think that opportunity for all of us who are in this work to have those conversations, to discuss nature-based solutions in a real way, it's been really, really promising. It has really opened my eyes to how innovation and tech can do a lot more to create value out of the nature-based solutions and the incredible practices of Indigenous people who still currently attend to 80% of the biodiversity that we need on this planet. So that's one group that I've just really found a lot of value in speaking with. I think other groups have included, elected officials who are here, many of the elected officials I've met are either working on local state government policies around climate. And while we're all here to talk about very big government commitments, we know that civic engagement and policy happens on the ground in our local communities. And so I've really appreciated the opportunity to talk about climate innovation with elected officials to get them thinking about not only the investment space, but also what it means to have creative ideas, and write policies for that.

 Greg Lindsay 04:01

Amazing. Who are some of the other people you've spotted there at the events that really stood out for you in terms of who's driving the conversation outside of the blue and green zones? I mean, again, there seems like there's so many collateral events happening, that it's hard to keep track of them all.

 Chante Harris 04:15

Yeah, there are a bunch. And honestly, I might mess up some of the names if I try to recall them all. A good friend of mine who leads Head of Cities over at TIER Mobility, Georgia Yexley, was speaking on a great Futures of Cities panel a few days ago. I was able to tune into part of that, and a lot of that discussion was focused on both how do you design better for cities, but then also, how do you leverage technologies and innovative solutions to think about what the future of cities actually can be? And making sure that it's also people centric. So hearing from the audience around what they want to see in their own cities. You and I sat on a panel pretty recently with NYU Rudin Center for Transportation, and I think sometimes what is missing in that conversation is the actual constituents themselves to say how they're experiencing their local public transportation options or how they are getting around the city, or what are their pain points? And I think it was really great to see community groups, be a part of that discussion. But then also, the innovators who are building solutions, as well as government officials. I don't know about dropping specific names, but I think I've met a lot of incredible people who are working across sectors, or at least thinking more about cross sector

collaboration. I've also spent a lot of time in conversations around investment. Since you know, a lot of what I've been doing is figuring out how to close the gap for early stage financing of climate technologies. And that's historically come from government, even though many people don't know that. Like some of Tesla's initial R&D came from government agencies at the federal level. And so I've been talking a lot about that, and what that means, not only terms of the role of what government can do, as we're all here talking about commitments, but also how we can be thinking about who else can play a role in filling that gap if we're going to reach our climate goals.

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Greg Lindsay 06:18

Great. I'm curious if you've had a chance to look at the Biden infrastructure bill, and if you have any thoughts there. I mean, obviously, we've been talking about this for nearly a year now, about this seemingly once in a generation effort to actually rethink that. And I'm curious, as a climate venture capitalist, what are the provisions of that bill? Or what are the areas to act most quickly? I mean, there's the global carbon markets, which Paris is talking about. But also huge potential, billions in subsidies for electric vehicles of all stripes, and I know mobility is a focus of yours. So how do you see the conversation in Glasgow aligning with where the money is going? And where are the best levers for action at this point when it comes to staying under 1.5 C?

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Chante Harris 07:09

It's no secret that you and I have talked a lot about infrastructure and the role of infrastructure. So overall, I'm excited that we finally have policies, but also dialogue around infrastructure as a solution, for many of the challenges that not only urban environments are experiencing, but really every area. Particularly in the US, where we haven't seen a large amount of investment go into infrastructure, we can tie that directly to how people are experiencing their quality of life, but also their ability to have upward economic mobility. And so I have appreciated some of the conversations around the role of infrastructure, particularly as an equity solution. And what it means to update our public transportation systems, our railways, our highway systems, to ensure that people can actually get around and be able to live a life that is allowing them to succeed in whatever it is that they choose to venture into. So that's one piece of dialogue that I know was also a big part of the infrastructure bill during negotiations. How do we actually talk about climate justice, and what it means for environmental justice to be at the center of some of these conversations. So I do think that that's been a throughline in discussions that I've had. I don't think there's been enough around infrastructure, though, to be honest. Maybe I haven't attended all of the millions of events that are going on, but I do think that there is a bit of a disconnect between the overarching conversations at the global level, and then how the US experiences climate. But really, I think, what it looks like to include development in the discussion around climate. And so I do think that that is something that might still be missing as a huge priority area at a global scale when we talk about what's happening. I have been impressed by the conversations around nature-based solutions, which is infrastructure. I think it's a really powerful dialogue that I wasn't even privy to prior to coming to COP. I think, besides that, global carbon markets are on everyone's mind. Even if you look at the investment space, we're talking about carbon sequestration, right? We're talking about carbon capture. And I do think there's a direct alignment between how we actually create real value through something like carbon tracing. It's been around for a long time, but has never had verified ways

of proving it's positive impact on the climate, or reversing the crisis. I've learned a lot from people who are really leading the charge around things like carbon pricing. One of my good friends Kylan over at Planet Forward has been actually meeting with elected officials to help push that forward and I really appreciated being a part of that dialogue. I do think that the infrastructure piece, the mobility piece, electric vehicles are everywhere. There's been some fun demos that I've seen. And I know that we're all talking about it. And as great as it is to see the actual vehicles, we have to talk about the infrastructure for the vehicles. And I think that's not quite what I'm seeing, but it doesn't mean that people aren't having that dialogue. Again, I would love to see people prioritizing it a bit more.

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Greg Lindsay 10:28

So you've mentioned some of the financing stuff around this. I mean, obviously, governments are making their own commitments here, but I'm curious to hear your thoughts around ESG portfolios. Just before this was the G20 Summit in Rome, where we have the spectacle of President Biden pushing for decarbonisation, but also asking the Saudi's to please pump more oil, because energy markets are in a turmoil, which may or may not be related to the end of the oil industry in sight. have you had any interesting conversations about financial mechanisms and how can we hasten the flow of all that private capital on the sidelines into this? I mean, there's all sorts of discussions that there isn't enough good ESG investments as of right now. So I'm curious your thoughts on how that's continuing to evolve?

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Chante Harris 11:16

It's interesting you say that, because right now there's a big discussion around what ESG means to climate investment and climate tech. I think everyone understands the alignment. But I don't think most of the industry knows how to bridge that gap between how we've defined ESG and then what it looks like to invest in climate technologies or solutions. And so I'm seeing a bit more of that dialogue overlap, having been in a lot of different rooms and having a lot of different conversations. I think there's an acknowledgement that we have to talk about climate investment and climate tech within broader ESG goals, or even in line with the UN SDGs. There are a lot of frameworks out there that are meant to be guideposts, oftentimes however, they can end up confusing the industry when they don't know which one to follow. I mean, I think the reality is all of them and we're all hopeful that they'll align, but there needs to be a simpler way to tell the story around ESG, and then what that means for companies. And so there are some really interesting technologies and ideas coming online to help do that. I have met a lot of people who are in the impact measurement space, and are really thinking through new and simpler models. Just how do you take some of those discussions and really refine them in a way that makes them accessible? Some companies are just now starting to set these larger goals around sustainability. They may not have even released what their goals are and what their timeframe. What we do know is that oil and gas is present at COP. I don't think that's a secret. And so there is a big discussion around what their role should be. I think the reality is that an industry that has been around for decades is not going to disappear overnight. And so I think it's a bit naive not to involve them in some of those conversations as it relates to the existing industry. I think we just also have to be careful of greenwashing and what that means for how we actually identify solutions and move forward. And there was a big call out this week at a big PR agency that represent oil and gas, I don't feel like I need to name them, because you can just Google them and it'll come right up. A lot of activists on the ground are calling out the

reality of messaging, and how messaging plays a role here. And while you can say, hey, we're working on our ESG portfolio internally, and we care about x, if your messaging is actually meant to almost take out the real technical solutions and the real commitments that are needed, the folks here know that because we work in the space. But I think more importantly, the people who live on this planet deserve to have real discussions around how we are going to fight the most challenging and pressing problem of our time. A lot of youth activists, but also many of the business people, if you're in this space, you understand that what we're facing is dire. And that if you're doing it right, which I do genuinely feel, again, having met so many people with amazing stories. The desire to do things is here and present. And I do think there's a sense of both accountability and exploring how to open up the dialogue to have some of those tough and difficult discussions? This has been my experience. I can't say what other folks are experiencing but I tend to like to be in rooms where people are not just talking about problems, but also talking about the solutions to those problems. And I felt lucky enough to be at COP and in spaces where that's happening.

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Greg Lindsay 14:59

Let's double back for a second on some of the transportation stuff, because today is transportation day at COP26. And I've seen the criticism by others that the official language of it is almost purely focused on electric vehicles and that cycling has been left out. In the conversations you're swirling in, I'm curious about some of the thoughts being pushed forward on lightweight personal electric vehicles versus this big national agendas to prop up their auto industries by doing the transition to EVs. Recently, there's been papers put out that say France would lose 70,000 workers, Japan would lose a huge number as well. There's some fear at the national level about the shift to electric and sustainable mobility. But obviously, the cities must be excited about it. So again, is there anything particularly exciting that's been unveiled at COP when it comes to the future of mobility?

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Chante Harris 15:54

There was actually one today that I was invited to, but I wasn't able to make it because getting around has not necessarily been the easiest. The irony. Someone did introduce me to the biking system here. So that was nice. Just a stranger, who came up and said, hey, do you know how to use the bikes? And so we talked about that. But now to answer your question, I think there are some micro mobility conversations happening. I met the founder of a company called Bambuu, and she's creating bikes out of bamboo and creating a very unique model. It's all about upcycling and circularity. She is based in Portugal, if I recall correctly, and she was actually demoing her bike here. To your point, it's important to talk about big industry and the auto industry as well, and electric vehicles. And I think there has been a lot of conversation around that. I do think that there is a lack of focus on public transportation, and then also on all these other solutions that are popping up. And unfortunately, I think that's a norm when we talk about how the dialogue moves with the innovation. You and I were having very similar discussions I feel recently, right? We have to think about all of the solutions. EVs are great, but I think the future that a lot of us want is not one that's reliant on cars. And so if we're going to say, hey, this is how we're going to reach our goals, particularly around what it means to cut emissions from the auto industry, we should also be talking about all of the other alternatives that people have, and we know they are using, especially in cities. Micro mobility has not been at the forefront, but it really should be. At least on the investment and innovation side, we've

seen a lot of dialogue around micro mobility solutions and prioritizing their investment. Unfortunately, public transportation is just never sexy enough, I suppose. I haven't heard much about events or talks going on that are focused on public transportation even though we know that it's critical. I think mobility as a service has come up a bit in conversation. I was talking to a guy I met, he runs a think tank across the globe, and he was telling me about a few of the CTOs here in Europe. And that's not my wheelhouse, I don't know much about cities in Europe other than having visited. He was essentially saying that many of them are thinking through mobility as a service, but to your point, it wasn't a big framing piece.

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Greg Lindsay 19:12

Great. Well, you mentioned nature-based solutions several times, could you talk a bit more about what you're seeing there in term of innovation. NewCities did an event this spring on rewilding cities. There's always a lot of discussion around biomimicry and thinking about more natural solutions to dealing with some of the climate problems. Is there anything in particular that grabbed you, or where is the conversation going when it comes to applying, not just high tech solutions, but Indigenous knowledge and low tech solutions to these problems?

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Chante Harris 19:42

Yeah, that's a great question. I know I keep coming back to it, but I've just really appreciated that being a focal point of my discussions and experience here at COP. When we talk about carbon offsets and carbon pricing and how are we going to ensure that corporations don't just use that model, especially as we add more credibility and validity to it, as a default right for what it means to be sustainable. In reality, we don't want offsets to replace the idea of actually transition your company to being less harmful to the planet. So part of it is about moving the goalposts away from, hey, I'm going to offset most of my harm, which means you're still doing it, right, but there's a neutrality that we're creating, and I think that's questionable to a lot of people in this space. One piece of that has been, well, if we talk about what it means to have a price or value on carbon, then why aren't we also including the value of the incredible Indigenous practices that preserve our planet that have been at the forefront of making sure that big projects that could continue to actually move us backwards aren't moving forward. People who've attended previous COPs, have told me that there are larger discussion around how we are going to add the biodiversity and ocean pieces into the conversation of what it means to preserve. If we're offsetting, but then we're still not protecting rainforests or moving forward even more with harming rainforests, then we can say we're offsetting through a system that we've created for corporates who have historically done a lot of harm to the planet. But the reality is that we actually want to be moving the conversation towards what it means to stop these actions altogether. And I think it's made me expand my thinking around technology and innovation. And maybe there are new innovative platform software solutions that we can be thinking through as well as systems.

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Greg Lindsay 21:59

There's been a lot of talk around carbon reporting. Have you had any particular conversations about holistically understanding what this means, not just measuring in terms of tonnes of carbon emitted but larger changes in our lives like land use and other conversations that get

left out of the narrow focus on technologies like EVs, which assume that we can carry the status quo forever. Have you talked to anyone particularly inspiring around a broader rethink post-COVID about how we should live and how city's should look that doesn't fall back on us doing less. Similar to classic Amory Lovin's like, how do we conserve, but yet have abundance? I believe he uses, we don't want electricity, we want cold beer and hot showers, and that we can design systems to deliver that. Has there been any of those conversations while you're there?

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Chante Harris 22:46

Yeah. Honestly, there's been many, which is why I feel really grateful for this experience. The Project Drawdown team is here. I've been spending a lot of time with Chad, who really is the brainpower behind all of this work. Their entire framework is how do you actually think about all of the stakes? And what does it look like to have solutions for all of the different types of ways we can be addressing this challenge? And so I do think there are people who are having a lot of these nuanced discussions. I sat on a panel yesterday for an event that was focused on women across climate. Just being able to speak to incredible woman who are not only delegates, but were like, hey, I was at COP1, I've been doing this work for decades. And I think they really understand this holistic approach. On the climate finance panel, we were thinking through how to talk about philanthropic dollars role in this, what does it mean to increase the asset classes so that we can get more institutional investors investing in climate. But really the day was so nuanced, in that there was activism, finance, policy, we even looked at not only cities, but just generally communities. Questions like how do you create local economies around climate and creating different value systems around climate, depending on where you are geographically. So I do think I've been, again, lucky enough to just be in rooms and having conversations with filmmakers, and I've met so many filmmakers. I don't know that I've ever talked to filmmakers before this but now being able to say hey, they are really a huge part of the storytelling piece behind this. One piece that I'm really taking away is the power of telling stories effectively, and telling stories through a lens that people can actually consume and feel a part of. I think climate has been very science heavy and technical to date and most folks still feel like there's not a role for them. And I think being in discussions at COP, it's been interesting to see that there are a lot of people out here who are trying to make the information palpable to the average person. And I think that's a very, very important piece that a lot of times has gone overlooked.

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Greg Lindsay 25:14

Well, one last question before you go, because you do, in fact, have places to be there. Which is, how does it feel to be at probably the largest event that is being held on the planet since post-COVID? And you're having it in the sense of you and everyone else there had to fly, had to emit carbon to be there. These are the kinds of events that during the pandemic, many said would never happen again, that Zoom and other technologies would eliminate it. Yet, it sounds like you're having a good time and a tremendously valuable, insightful time there. And I am curious, your thoughts on perspective about the necessity of having events like COP? At NewCities, we believe in convening and bringing these conversations together. And it sounds like this kind of event is more necessary than ever, personal carbon emissions aside, so how is that cognitive dissidence feeling there? It seems like it's all been worth it.

C**Chante Harris 26:00**

Yeah, I appreciate that. A part of it is that we've all been stuck inside for so long. I don't know that I've had this much social interaction in maybe two and a half years. So I'm honestly tired, but in a good way, because I feel like I've had so many incredible conversations, and also just met so many people who know different angles of climate, which I think is important. You know, I talk a lot about cross sector collaboration and breaking out of our silos. And I feel like I've been able to do that having been very much focused on tech and investment over the past year. So being able to make sure that I'm talking to other folks in other spaces is important. I do question the necessity of this amount of people. Also the accessibility not only from a price standpoint, but also where we choose to host these things and who's reflected in the room. I don't think many of the rooms that I've have been in have reflected the diversity of thought needed, but also just the diversity of the world. And I think that is a problem. And I know many people have called that out. I was lucky enough to go to Afrodiaspora event, and I found that to be really incredible and rewarding. But to your point, my hope in the future is that perhaps we could figure out how to do some convenings maybe regionally or locally, and then also make it collaborative virtually. It's one thing to watch the talking points that have been given to very important people in this space, but it's another thing to like, catch them running to the restroom and have a discussion about what they're working on. And what they're fearful of, or what they're excited about. And I think that that's the power of building trust and connection that I do think is needed in this space. Although, I think we can be more innovative about how we do that moving forward and maybe not omit as much carbon in order to get to in person events like this.

G**Greg Lindsay 27:59**

Well, thank you so much for joining us today. I know it's getting late there and I can hear the hoarseness in your voice after so many days and so many great conversations. Safe travels on your return and to all those who are listening, thank you again, as always for joining us. We'll be back next week with another episode of threesixtyCITY. Until then, take care.