

The "Venice Agreement" - a call for the global protection of peatlands locally has been signed!

On 2nd June 2022, World Peatland Day, the Venice Agreement was ceremoniously signed and presented to the public in Venice. It emphasises the importance of local initiatives and communities for global peatland protection. To develop the agreement, 40 peatland conservationists from all over the world met for two days in Venice. The idea emerged from the transdisciplinary work of Ensayos, an international-transdisciplinary art collective together with the Wildlife Conservation Society Chile (WCS) and the Michael Succow Foundation, partner in the Greifswald Mire Centre.



Fig. 1: Ceremonial signing of the „Venice Agreements“ on 2nd June 2022, World Peatland Day in Venice. TBA21–Academy’s Ocean Space. Photo: Nicolò Miana

The group in Venice was mixed - interdisciplinary and international: scientists, artists, conservationists, representatives of indigenous communities and politicians. In a 2-day experiment, they used creative methods and discussions to create this new agreement for the protection and appreciation of peatlands and the people who live with the peatland ecosystem: The Venice Agreement. The Agreement aims to inspire wise, responsible, accountable action with peatlands. Two unusual A3 pages emerged from the conversations between people from different peatland backgrounds. On one side, a poem full of poetry and inspiration as well as concrete needs and values needed to protect peatlands worldwide. On the other, a map with wishes and solutions from local peatland conservationists around the world. This manifests the conservation and the relationship between people and ecosystems in a completely new way.

served on the editorial committee, described how, despite his initial scepticism, he was "amazed once again at how it is possible for people to reach agreements in such a process despite our language and cultural differences. We have managed to formulate a strong, poetic, political and practical demand for the local protection of global peatlands".



Fig.3: "For how many years have you been connected to peatlands?" This was the question Charo Lanao, facilitator of the Venice Agreement, asked all participants in the Venice Agreement workshop. When we added up the answers of the 38 participants, we came up with over 600 years of bog experience! Photo: Susanne Abel



Fig.4: Expertise on peatlands comes in many shapes and sizes. The Venice Agreement is therefore based on transdisciplinary experiential knowledge between practical conservation work, natural sciences, indigenous science, youth activism, land management, law-making, education and arts. Photo: Susanne Abel

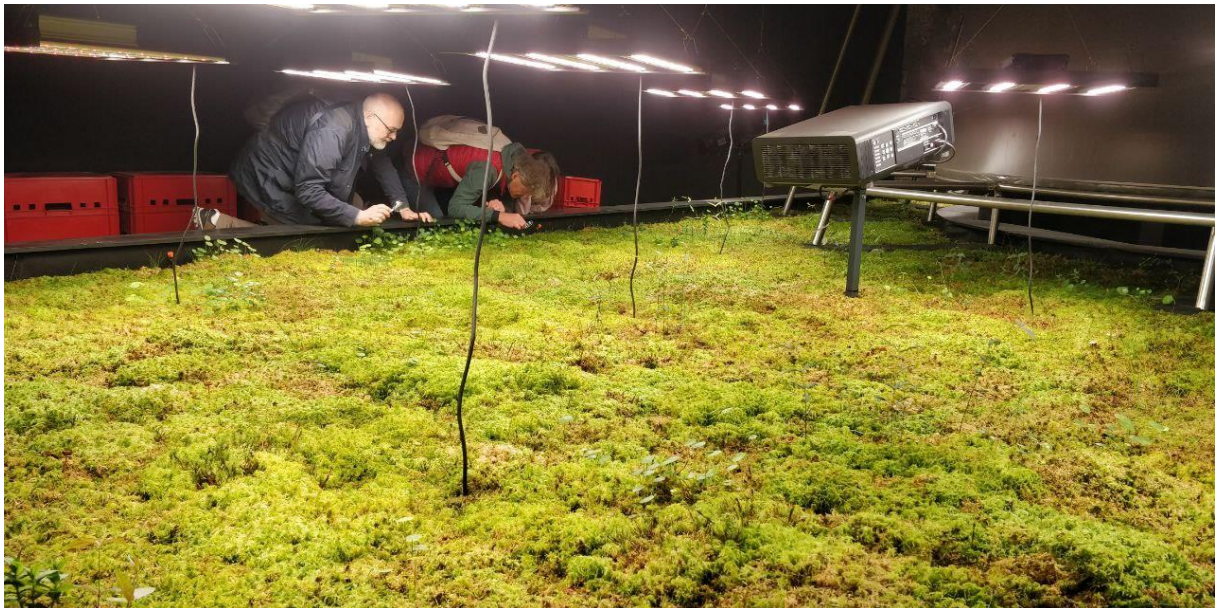


Fig.5: During the workshop, the group visited the Chilean pavilion "Turba Tol" at the Art Biennale. Here, an immersive installation with living peat mosses from paludiculture, sound and video installation and a bog scent provided a bog experience for the audience. Photo: Susanne Abel

The Venice Agreement represents a declaration of commitment by peatland conservationists from around the world to focus on and protect the ecological and cultural significance of these special ecosystems. It takes a bottom-up approach that recognises local initiatives as important actors in the international process of peatland conservation. The Venice Agreement recognises that the well-being of people and peatlands are intimately linked and that thoughtful, responsible and accountable action can protect and restore this unique relationship for generations to come.

At the same time, the agreement recognises that special requirements apply to effective peatland protection: it is crucial to establish active coordination from the local to the global level, multi-layered cooperation, immediate and effective protection of still-natural peatlands, and a new framework for recognising the cultural, spiritual and ancestral value of peatlands. Substantial resources are needed to protect and restore degraded peatlands through innovative solutions. As Dr Bárbara Saavedra points out, "the Venice Agreement invites us to break down the cultural, financial and social barriers and embrace the obvious ecological fact that we all depend on nature and the ethical and practical need to protect peatlands" because, as Reverend Houston Cypress (who calls the Everglades peatlands home) said during the closing ceremony, "...peatlands are our ancestors".



Fig.6: Graduation ceremony on 2nd June 2022 with Reverend Houston Cypress (Everglades, U.S.). TBA21 Academy's Ocean Space. Photo: Nicolò Miana

What's next? In the coming years, more local initiatives and signatories will be added. This goal is also in line with the work of the Global Peatland Initiative, whose coordinator at UN Environment, Dianna Kopansky, was present in Venice. In her words, "Strengthening relationships between local expertise and global decision-makers is critical for the future of peatlands."

The Venice Agreement was made possible through the generous support of Stiftung Zukunft Jetzt!, Hartwig Behrendt Stiftung Zukunft, the Global Peatlands Initiative led by UN Environment, the Office of Contemporary Art Norway and TBA21 Ocean Space.

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