

Artistic Engagement in International Policy Responses to Disaster Displacement: Ways of Working and Potential Impacts

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Introduction:

This research explores artists' and art's potential to influence and contribute to the various stages of developing international norms (minimum standards for state behaviour) on disaster displacement. It examines the modes of practice and collaboration employed by contemporary artists and others involved in the production and experience of art to engage in intergovernmental fora.

Abstract:

Artists increasingly develop and exhibit artworks in collaboration with intergovernmental organizations like the United Nations (UN), building upon their longer history of working in relation to government institutions at national and local levels. Current literature exploring artists' and art's impacts on social change, including as part of transnational movements, has not significantly engaged with international relations research on how international norms emerge and change. Building upon current debates in these two fields, this research examines four case studies of art practices engaging with UN institutions to better understand how art organizations contribute to intergovernmental processes.

Background:

Between 2008 – 2018, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) recorded the displacement of 265 million people in the context of sudden-onset disasters in 144 countries. While people displaced by disasters within their own countries are protected under national law and international human rights law, their rights under international law are less clear if they need to flee across an international border. This gap in international law has resulted in strong calls for greater protection for displaced persons fleeing disaster impacts, commonly referred to as "climate refugees."

Research questions:

- What forms of collaboration exist between contemporary artists, intergovernmental institutions, non-governmental organizations, and other actors to engage contemporary art within intergovernmental processes?
- Why do these forms of collaboration exist?
- How could these forms of collaboration support international efforts create stronger legal and policy frameworks for disaster displaced people?

Methodology:

The research uses an abductive approach to describe and understand the underlying motivations, processes, and institutional arrangements that drive current efforts to bring art within intergovernmental contexts based upon a theoretical framework developed from literature in the fields of international relations, contemporary art theory, and psychology, as well as my personal legal training and experience as a policy expert on displacement in the context of disasters and climate change and curator of the art project DISPLACEMENT: Uncertain Journeys.

Sample:

Very little research or documentation addresses the role of art in international policymaking. Case studies allow the research to draw on a diverse set of data sources, including interviews, artifacts, and direct observations to better capture this contemporary phenomenon. The research examines four case studies presently active art organizations or projects that:

- Focus on the work of the United Nations, and whose audience includes international policymakers at global intergovernmental conferences
- Facilitate the introduction of contemporary artwork within the sphere of inter-governmental meetings, processes, or non-public spaces
- Intend to contribute to policy issues related to displacement, climate change, environment and human rights, rather than cultural policy or art as form of exhibiting cultural identity and diversity

The case studies currently include: The UN Palais des Nations' art collection, Art for The World, TBA21- Academy, and my personal practice DISPLACEMENT: Uncertain Journeys (www.displacementjourneys.org).



International delegates to the Global Forum on Migration and Development tour Lucy + Jorge Orta's *Antarctic Village-No Borders* as part of the DISPLACEMENT: Uncertain Journeys exhibition in Marrakesh, Morocco, December 2018. Credit: Gorm Ashurst

Results:

The research will describe how contemporary art practices engage policy issues related to human displacement related to the impacts of climate change, and what impacts these practices may have on international norm development. In particular, analysis of the case studies will explore the idea that art can: i) make issues visible; ii) provoke and foster conversations; iii) interpret evidence; iv) generate knowledge and v) problem solve as part of policy discussions by drawing on emotion and affect to prompt critical thinking.

Conclusion:

The inclusion of contemporary art practices in intergovernmental debates is not a given. While the research is still ongoing, analysis of the case studies will seek to better understand why some art organizations are able to gain access when others are not, and what are the implications of this distinction. It will also provide initial reflections on what the impact of such work may be. Based on this, my research will develop plausible, but not proven, strategies about how artists can impact international norm development processes within intergovernmental fora related to disaster displacement.

Selected references:

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The Arts in Society