# Pavilions, Partnerships, and the Power of Youth: EYEN at COP30

*A journal by Max Haizmann, Director of Partnership & Funding at EYEN*

I left Abu Dhabi at two in the morning, fully aware that the travel day would be brutal. After a blurry connection in Lisbon, where I immediately ran into friends from previous COPs, it already felt like the conference had begun. From Lisbon, my friend Kutalmis and I embarked on the long haul to Manaus, deep in the Amazon, and then onward to Belém. When we finally arrived at three in the morning, we met Wagner, a taxi driver who insisted on giving us a "tour" of Belém's nightlife before taking us to our Airbnb. By the time we reached our place, there was no running water and a cockroach in the kitchen, but we were too tired to care. We bought some water in a nightshop and collapsed in bed.

Jet lag woke us up absurdly early on 8 November. At a co-working space, we met two men who had sailed from Europe to Brazil just to attend COP, and later we met a German participant named Matthias. When we explored the city that afternoon, Belém struck me as a mix of a decaying colonial port and a patchwork of brutalist structures. It felt chaotic and beautiful at once.

That's when we stumbled upon the first pavilion of the trip: the Italian AquaPraça pavilion, unexpectedly tucked inside an old Portuguese administrative building. They had even transported a floating pavilion all the way from Venice. The idea that someone had shipped an entire structure across the world for COP was surreal.

## What are pavilions?

At COP, pavilions function as the beating cultural, diplomatic, and educational heart of the conference. They are built by countries, regions, organisations, or alliances to showcase climate solutions, host panel discussions, run exhibitions, and hold countless official and unofficial negotiations. Some are grand architectural statements; others are simple meeting rooms. But all of them act as spaces where ideas, partnerships, and policies take shape. Much of the “real” COP happens not in negotiation rooms, but in these pavilions. Here you meet the right person at the right moment.

This Italian pavilion was the first reminder of just how symbolic and creative these structures can be.

We ended the day drinking fresh coconut water on the riverside and buying avocados the size of my hand. Our staple diet for the rest of the trip.

On 9 November, we returned to work. We met new people, including a Moroccan delegate and a British journalist. Then headed to the COP venue to collect our badges. The site looked far from ready: fencing, dust, missing panels, and intense heat. Still, we managed to connect with the Turkish and German delegations before heading home to prepare for the first official day.

## 10 November – The chaotic opening

The organizers relaxed the dress code because of the heat. Outside, activists staged the first major protest. Inside, most pavilions were half-finished, cables and tools everywhere. The atmosphere was both comedic and determined.

My first panel with the Global Renewables Alliance (GRA) unfolded under torrential rain pounding the roof. Microphones malfunctioned, we had to share one mic between all speakers, and the AC added constant white noise. Right after, I spoke on a second panel with the European Commission. This time on a stage so unfinished that water leaked in and the platform wobbled.

Later that day, I attended a session in the German Pavilion called “Global Mutirão: Realising Just Transitions,” where I met Viktoria from a Hamburg biofuels plant. It was one of many valuable pavilion-based encounters.

## 11–12 November – Protests, panels, and Arctic events

On 11 November, I listened to national statements on just transition and met various Amazonian Indigenous groups whose presence was powerfully felt throughout COP. A sudden protest erupted inside the venue, with people pulling down parts of the security fencing until UN security evacuated parts of the area.

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The next day I explored the pavilions again before moderating EYEN's own session: "Youth Driving the Energy Transition." Held at the Italian Pavilion (in the blue zone), the event explored how younger generations are driving the just energy transition, with a focus on fostering their active engagement through public and private partnerships.

Minutes before it started, I was told the Director General of MASE (the Italian Ministry of Environment and Energy Security), Alessandro Guerri, might attend. After I finished reading the Italian Youth Council's message, he appeared right on time and delivered remarks, elevating the entire event. The turnout was amazing.

That evening, I joined an Arctic discussion at the Italian Pavilion, then went to the Global Renewables Alliance reception, reconnecting with delegates from around the world.

## 13–14 November – Singapore, Germany, and new connections

On 13 November, after helping Kutalmis prepare his session on carbon markets, I joined the UNFCCC ACE workshop. Later I attended a youth-finance-and-decarbonisation event at the Singapore Pavilion, which gave us valuable insights for EYEN.

The next day, after a morning of administrative work, I went to another event at the German Pavilion, this time on energy efficiency in the Global South. I met the deputy director of SE4ALL, who turned out to be incredibly inspiring. Walking the hallway afterward, I briefly chatted with Annalena Baerbock, now President of the UN General Assembly.

That evening, the Global Solar Council reception led to a joyful night of dancing with researchers, GIZ staff, and delegates from multiple countries. Leonardo, the COP Task Force Manager, arrived that night too.

## 15–17 November – Blocked roads, final meetings, and goodbyes

On 15 November, the entire city shut down due to a massive march, so we took a motorcycle taxi weaving through crowds just to reach the venue. Inside, I visited several regional pavilions. African and Australian among them, to explore partnership potential.

The 16th was a quiet workday, spent summarizing contacts, writing documents, and preparing follow-ups.

On my final day, I spoke at the *High-Level Dialogue between Youth and Global Energy Leaders* (organized by IRENA, YOUNGO and GRA). Afterward, I visited multiple delegations: Belgium, the UAE, and Oman, to discuss potential collaboration. The UAE, in particular, showed strong enthusiasm.

With one last giant avocado in my bag, I headed to the airport. Leaving COP30 with dozens of new connections, a long list of next steps, and the feeling that this experience had opened more doors than I ever expected.

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