

# TRANSFORMING SYSTEMS FOR PLANETARY HEALTH

20 - 24 July 2026  
Utrecht, the Netherlands

*Supported by UNESCO Chair Global Health & Education, and UU Planetary Health Education Hub*



## COURSE MAGAZINE



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## General information

This advanced course explores how deeply embedded global systems contribute to the planetary crisis and what pathways enable meaningful transformation. Participants engage with topics such as the exposome, decoloniality, power relations between public and private sectors, and the governance and economic structures that shape both health and ecological stability. In this course, participants will critically examine system-level drivers of the planetary crisis and develop perspectives on how to contribute to equitable and sustainable systems transformation.

**Learning Objectives:** By the end of this course, participants will be able to:

1. Integrate complex dimensions of the planetary crisis, including exposome science, decoloniality, and systemic inequities.
2. Assess the roles, responsibilities, and interactions of public, private, and civil society sectors in shaping planetary health outcomes.
3. Evaluate governance structures, policy mechanisms, and economic systems that influence environmental and health futures.
4. Integrate interdisciplinary evidence to propose strategies for systemic transformation toward planetary health.
5. Design context-appropriate, equity-centered approaches that address structural determinants and promote sustainable, health-supportive systems.

*This course is open to all with a basic understanding of planetary health before joining. Those new to the topic may consider taking the introductory course [Foundations of Planetary Health](#).*

**Course Coordinators:** Dr. George Downward, Dr. Joyce Browne, Prof. Ajay Bailey, Prof. Roel Vermeulen, drs. Camilla Alay Llamas, drs. Juliette Mattijsen, Mr. Goof Buijs

**Course Dates:** July 20 - 24 2026, 9.00 - 17.00 daily. See day to day course programme for details (to follow)

**Course Code:** M15

**ETCS Credits:** 1.5

**Location:** University College Utrecht

**Contact:** drs. Camilla Alay Llamas - c.a.llamas@uu.nl

drs. Juliette Mattijsen - j.c.mattijsen-3@umcutrecht.nl



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# Course Programme

## Day 1: Monday 20/07 - Systemic Crisis

### 9.30 - 11.00 Session 1: Planetary destabilization and polycrisis

*George Downward*

- To critically analyse the planetary boundaries framework, the determinants of planetary health, and the bidirectional relationships between ecological change and health outcomes across social, political, and commercial dimensions.
- To evaluate transformative economic frameworks such as circularity and donut economics alongside the fundamental science of climate change and environmental exposure, assessing their implications for achieving sustainable and equitable health outcomes.

### 11.15 - 12.45 Session 2: Exposome science and life-course exposure frameworks

*Danielle Vienneau*

- To examine the exposome framework by evaluating how multiple environmental exposures shape population health outcomes, and to assess how geographic information science (GISc) and spatial epidemiological approaches advance our understanding of these complex relationships.

### 13.45 - 15.15 Session 3: Historical roots of global inequities

(TBA)

### 15.30 - 17.00 Session 4: Entomology and climate change

- To assess the bidirectional relationships between entomology and climate change, examining how shifting climatic conditions affect insect populations, biodiversity, and ecosystem services, and the cascading implications for human health, food systems, and ecological resilience.

## Day 2: Tuesday 21/07 - Decoloniality and Structural Inequities

### 9.30 - 11.00 Session 1: Indigenous knowledge systems and wisdom

- To critically examine the underrepresentation of indigenous knowledge systems within dominant research and policy frameworks, and to advocate for epistemic justice by recognising and integrating indigenous wisdoms as equal and legitimate ways of knowing in addressing sustainability and health challenges.

### 11.15 - 12.45 Session 2: Decolonisation as a political praxis

- To guide participants in discussing decoloniality, emphasizing the role of historical exploitation in climate change, and how to incorporate decolonial perspectives in current climate policies.

### 13.45 - 15.15 Session 3: Power of community mobilisation

- To explore the power of community mobilisation as a driver of climate accountability, analysing how grassroots movements and collective action have shaped legal and political cases against states and institutions failing to meet their climate obligations.

### 15.30 - 17.00 Group reflections

- To engage in both individual and group reflection to critically examine personal perspectives and collectively deepen understanding of planetary health themes.



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### Day 3: Wednesday 22/07 - Governance, Institutions and Sectoral Roles

#### 9.30 - 11.00 Session 1: Global health governance

- To think critically about the political and ideological drivers of action and inaction in global health
- To imagine alternative visions of international and global collective action to prevent and respond to the public health challenges of the present and future

#### 11.15 - 12.45 Session 2: From Alma Ata to Austerity: How Debt and Corporate Power Derail Health Equity

- Illustrate the harmful tactics used by industries such as fossil fuels and tobacco, showing how these industries prioritize profit over public health and environmental well-being.
- Examine historical patterns of influence, including lobbying, regulatory capture, greenwashing, and knowledge suppression.
- Explore how corporate interests intersect with structural inequalities, global trade, and governance systems.

#### 13.45 - 15.15 Session 3: Planetary health leadership

- To develop a critical understanding of transformative leadership approaches and capacities needed to drive systemic change for planetary health, drawing selectively on diverse knowledge systems - including indigenous wisdoms - to broaden and enrich leadership practice.

#### 15.30 - 17.00 Session 4: Consultation hour with non-profit organisation and civil society groups

- A structured consultation session in which participants engage directly with a non-profit organisation working at the intersection of planetary health and sustainability, applying course concepts to real-world challenges and gaining practical insight into how civil society actors drive change from the ground up.

### Day 4: Thursday 23/07 - Collective values for change

#### 9.30 - 11.00 Session 1: Pathways to Climate Justice: a systemic approach

- Discuss the concept of climate justice and planetary health
- Identify ethical considerations related to planetary health
- Explore how commitments to climate justice can translate in (epidemiologic) research practice

#### 11.15 - 12.45 Session 2: Contemplative dialogues (group work)

- A reflective session in which students engage in guided contemplative dialogues, creating space for deep listening, inner inquiry, and collective sense-making around the values and responsibilities that underpin transformative action for planetary health.

#### 13.45 - 17.00 Session 3: Ethics of Health Activism and Advocacy

*Juliette Mattijsen*

- To examine the ethical tensions inherent in health activism and advocacy, navigating the boundaries between professional responsibility, moral conviction, and systemic change in the pursuit of planetary health justice.



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### Day 5: Friday 24/07 - Building more equitable and sustainable societies

#### 9.30 - 11.00 Session 1: Climate resilient and sustainable health systems

- To analyse the principles and strategies underlying climate-resilient and sustainable health systems, evaluating how health infrastructure, policy, and practice can be transformed to withstand climate impacts while reducing their own environmental footprint.

#### 11.15 - 12.45 Session 2: Postgrowth economies and transformation

- To evaluate post-growth economic frameworks and the limits to growth paradigm - incorporating post-capitalist perspectives - examining their transformative potential for reshaping health systems governance, resource use, and social wellbeing within the bounds of climate justice and ecological sustainability.

#### 13.45 - 17.00 Session 3: Group work, reflections and closing programme

### Workshops

A field visit to Amelisweerd reveals how valuable urban-adjacent nature areas can be. The estate consists of a diverse landscape of old forests growing on fertile river clay, open hay meadows, and the banks of the Kromme Rijn, Utrecht. This mosaic of habitats supports a high level of biodiversity. The ancient trees provide shelter for several bat species and birds such as tawny owls and woodpeckers, while the flower-rich grasslands attract butterflies including the orange tip and common blue. Mammals such as badgers, roe deer, and foxes also inhabit the area, and the river hosts fish, dragonflies, and occasionally kingfishers. At the same time, Amelisweerd is not only a place of ecological importance but also of social and political significance. For decades, local residents, activists, and environmental organizations have mobilized to protect the forest from infrastructure developments, most notably the planned widening of the A27 motorway. These movements have turned Amelisweerd into a symbol of civic engagement and urban nature conservation, where biodiversity, recreation, and environmental activism intersect.



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## Course Coordinators



### GEORGE DOWNWARD

**COURSE COORDINATOR**  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR,  
EXPOSOME & PLANETARY HEALTH,  
JULIUS CENTER UMC UTRECHT

Dr. Downward is an Associate Professor at UMC Utrecht and an affiliated researcher at the Institute of Risk Assessment Sciences (IRAS), Utrecht University, where his research focus examines how environmental and planetary disruptions, in combination with personal risk factors, contribute to communicable and non-communicable disease. He has a special interest in planetary health, vulnerable groups, and low-middle income countries.

George's publications examine the relationship between our changing world and human health in a variety of ways as exemplified by recent publications on air pollution on health, the role of scenario analysis in achieving the SDGs, and the importance of sex and gender disaggregated data.



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### AJAY BAILEY

#### COURSE COORDINATOR

PROFESSOR, CHAIR IN GEOGRAPHIES OF HEALTH, INCLUSION, & DEVELOPMENT, INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES, DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY AND SPATIAL PLANNING, UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

Professor Bailey is passionate about creating sustainable and inclusive futures. He specialises in the intersection of (planetary) health, ageing, and inclusive cities. With a strong foundation in anthropology and demography, Ajay brings a unique perspective to the challenges faced by rapidly urbanising communities in India, Bangladesh, Curaçao, and the Netherlands, where he focuses on integrating human-centred approaches to health, urban infrastructures, and social equity.

Ajay has an extensive experience managing research teams across countries, leveraging my excellent leadership skills to drive collaborative, cross-cultural initiatives, and is very interested in qualitative research, teaching, and capacity building of young researchers. His work ensures that cities grow in ways that are sustainable, inclusive, and resilient for all ages, and is committed to driving innovative solutions that bridge the gap between demographic realities and environmental imperatives, contributing to a healthier planet and more just societies. Ajay is passionate about qualitative research, teaching, and capacity building of young researchers. His work significantly contributes to expanding the field of transnational mobilities, ageing, inter-generational relations, health systems research, health services, reducing barriers to care, while establishing meaningful North-South and South-South collaborations.



## Course Coordinators



# CAMILLA ALAY LLAMAS

## COURSE COORDINATOR

PROJECT MANAGER & JUNIOR RESEARCHER, PLANETARY HEALTH, JULIUS CENTER UMC UTRECHT / HUB MANAGER, PLANETARY HEALTH EDUCATION HUB, UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

Dr. Llamas is a general physician from the Philippines, where she gained hands-on experience providing medical and surgical assistance to underserved and remote communities - grounding her early career in community-based care and health equity.

Alay is currently a project manager at UMC Utrecht, and serves as Hub Manager of the Planetary Health Education Hub at Utrecht University. Her work centres on capacity building, equitable partnerships, and education, with a particular focus on transforming how knowledge is developed and applied through a planetary health lens. This includes reimagining planetary health curricula in higher education institutions in Asia to foster transformative, justice-oriented learning in low- and middle-income settings, while championing community engagement as a cornerstone of meaningful and sustainable health development.

Her expertise spans clinical medicine, community health, global health, capacity building, curriculum design, and planetary health education.



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### JOYCE BROWNE

#### **COURSE COORDINATOR**

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR GLOBAL HEALTH / EPIDEMIOLOGY, WITH A FOCUS ON MATERNAL HEALTH, JULIUS CENTER UMC UTRECHT & FACULTY OF LAW, ECONOMICS AND GOVERNANCE (UU)

Dr. Browne is a medical doctor and epidemiologist. The continuing global inequities in reproductive, maternal and perinatal health are the driving force behind her research and professional interests.

Her work focuses on global maternal health research, health equity and equitable partnerships in global health, research capacity building in low- and middle-income countries, and global health education.

She currently is Associate Professor of Global Health at the Julius Center for Health Sciences and Primary Care, UMC Utrecht in the Netherlands. In addition, she is the chair of the Dutch Knowledge Center on Global Health board.



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# ROEL VERMEULEN

### COURSE COORDINATOR

PROFESSOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL  
EPIDEMIOLOGY & EXPOSOME SCIENCE,  
INSTITUTE FOR RISK ASSESSMENT  
SCIENCES, UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

Professor Vermeulen is Professor of Environmental Epidemiology and Exposome Science at the Institute for Risk Assessment Sciences at Utrecht University. He holds an adjunct professor position at the Julius Center, Department Public Health Healthcare Innovation and Medical Humanities (UMC Utrecht) and a Visiting Professorship at Imperial College London, UK. He has been appointed Distinguished University Professor at Utrecht University as of 15 July 2024.

Since 2024, Roel is Scientific Director of the Institute for Preventive Health (i4PH) of the EWUU alliance of the universities of Eindhoven Wageningen (WUR) , Utrecht and UMC Utrecht. He chairs the planetary health community of Utrecht Life Sciences.

Roel coordinates the Dutch research program on the exposome (Exposome-NL), leads an EU project (EXPANSE) as part of the European Human Exposome Network, coordinates the Dutch Hub of the European infrastructure on Exposome research (EIRENE-NL), co-coordinates the International Human Exposome Network (IHEN) and coordinates an EU project on micro- and nanoplastics (AURORA). Additionally, he has served on many international committees including the World Health Organization and the National Toxicology Program in the USA. He was a member of the Dutch Health Council for over 12 years and has authored/co-authored over 800 academic publications.



## Course Coordinators

# JULIETTE MATTIJSEN

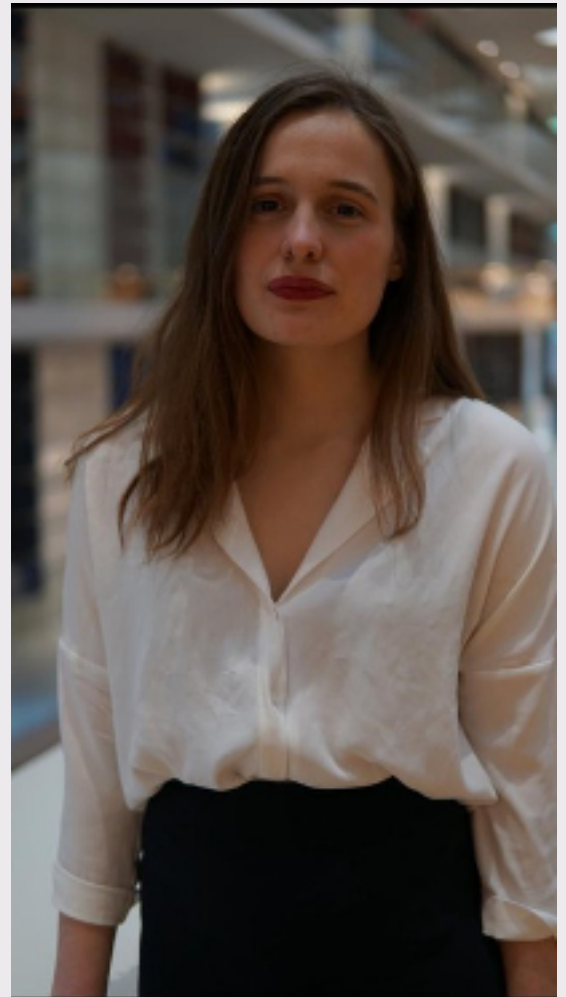
### COURSE COORDINATOR

MEDICAL DOCTOR, PROJECT MANAGER  
AND JUNIOR RESEARCHER, GLOBAL  
HEALTH / PLANETARY HEALTH, JULIUS  
CENTER, UMC UTRECHT, THE  
NETHERLANDS

Juliette Mattijsen is a medical doctor, activist, and researcher dedicated to advancing health justice, decolonizing medicine and addressing ecological and social determinants of health. Determined to achieve health for all, she has participated in over 12 high-level United Nations political meetings, advocating for the integration of health in all policies.

Juliette is affiliated with UMC Utrecht, where she works as a project manager and junior researcher, focusing on climate justice and planetary health education. As an activist, she founded the People's Health Movement - the Netherlands and engages in a wide range of grassroots initiatives - from supporting Doctors for Gaza to organising local efforts in Rotterdam aimed at tackling housing inequality and promoting universal health coverage.

Driven by a commitment to social transformation, Juliette works at the intersection of healthcare, climate advocacy, and community action, striving to build a more just and equitable world for all.



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### GOOF BUIJS

**COURSE COORDINATOR**  
MANAGER, UNESCO CHAIR/WHO  
COLLABORATING CENTRE GLOBAL  
HEALTH & EDUCATION

After finishing his Master study in Human Nutrition his first job was teaching health science at the Amsterdam teacher trainer institute. Next, he moved into the field of health promotion, as health promotion officer in Amsterdam. At the Netherlands Institute for Health Promotion NIGZ he specialized in school health promotion, first on the Dutch level to introduce the national health promoting school programme and leading several European projects. In 2007 he became the manager of the Schools for Health in Europe (SHE) network until 2017.

In 2018, with Professor Didier Jourdan, he set up the UNESCO Chair Global Health & Education, which is also a WHO Collaborating Centre. His specialisation is bringing health and education sectors together. He is an experienced networker, expert in co-creation, trainer, and organizer of local and global events. He supports cooperation among people, focusing on everyone's talents and uniqueness. He is an environmental activist for most of his life.



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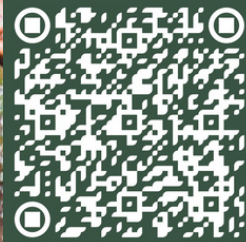


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