

Close-up

Public engagement
at Utrecht University

Erik van Sebille

How does science work?

Marij Swinkels

Teaching impact

**A word about
tomorrow**

Discussions with
Utrecht residents



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Femke den Boer



More than anything else, engaging a broad audience in science involves organising encounters. Precisely this has been a challenge in the past two pandemic years. Some programmes involving partners at the university and elsewhere had to be postponed until better days. On the other hand, we discovered just how flexible we could be. An alternative format was formulated for Science Weekend (*Weekend van de Wetenschap*), while school programmes, public programmes and workshops were transformed into online and hybrid events. At the Centre for Science and Culture (CWC) we continually looked for new challenges, new formats and, above all, new audiences.

In order to reach and engage new target groups, we work with organisations that already know them. We partnered with the district libraries in the city of Utrecht for the benefit of the Utrecht Research Agenda, a project on the occasion of the lustrum of Utrecht University and University Medical Centre Utrecht. With the libraries we developed *A word about tomorrow (Even over Morgen)*, a programme in which researchers and library visitors together inventoried questions for science. This resulted in new insights not just for the visitors, but for the researchers as well. Read more on pages 16–17.

The university sees ever more opportunities for inspiring encounters between science and society, made possible by cooperation. Ambitions in this field are becoming increasingly apparent across university. Our partnerships seek to turn those ambitions into achievable plans and successful public activities. So by all means, get in touch with us! Of course, this invitation extends to people and organisations outside of the university who are keen to be in dialogue with science. Let the examples in this magazine inspire you, develop your own ideas and look for the right partners to put them into practice. The Centre for Science and Culture is eager to hear from you!

Femke den Boer
Director, Centre for Science and Culture, Utrecht University

Science Weekend



Science Weekend (*Weekend van de Wetenschap*) is a national event in the first weekend of October, in which knowledge institutions offer a peek behind the scenes in the world of science and technology. The activities are free and aimed mainly at families with children.

“Each year we look for activities that allow visitors to experience science, for instance by taking part in an experiment, through an interactive lecture, or by doing their own research.

We had to come up with an alternative format for the past two editions due to COVID-19 measures. So in 2020 we developed Operatie Breinbreker, an interactive science show at the TivoliVredenburg venue. This worked so well that we have continued to organise the show separately from Science Weekend. In 2021 we had a format where visitors took part in a surprise programme involving three activities.

This proved too chaotic in practice, although it had some benefits. We created a route for visitors, allowing them to discover a range of scientific disciplines. There also was more time and space for dialogue between visitors and researchers. We’re currently looking at ways to repeat this kind of elements in the next edition.”

Gary Sheikkariem is the project leader of Science Weekend and a programme maker at the Centre for Science and Culture

📷 **Photography:** Lize Kraan

“My role in the organisation of Science Weekend takes place behind the scenes. I’m proud of being a small part of the whole in this way. Arranging for speakers, joining in brainstorming about the programme and publicity for it, a thousand and one preparations on the day itself, the implementation, clearing things afterwards, sorting things out. It’s always very gratifying to see the many inquisitive visitors, young and old, the fun they’re having, and your colleagues bringing off a successful day with the activities they’ve contributed.”

Stephan van Meulebrouck is a communications consultant at the Faculty of Geosciences

“I think it’s important to explain the core of our research in non-academic language, so a broad public knows about all of the things it is possible to research. For example, many people are surprised to learn that you can study language in babies. I really enjoyed involving the public in a language experiment and being able to show the results right away (and comparing these with the results of a ‘real’ experiment). The diagram didn’t look quite as ‘pretty’, but this was an opportunity to point out the importance of involving enough test subjects in your study.”

Dr Desiree Capel is the manager of Babylab, Utrecht Institute of Linguistics OTS, Faculty of Humanities





Science with and for society



Being appointed Professor of Oceanography and Public Engagement at the end of 2021 was a dream come true for Erik van Sebille. Not only can he now study the workings of science communication, he was finally able to participate in Meet the Professor. How important is it to have a Professor of Public Engagement, and what will he be working on this year? We picked Erik's academic brain.

Prof. Erik van Sebille holds the chair in Oceanography and Public Engagement at the Faculty of Natural Sciences

Photography: Lize Kraan
Authors: Lisanne Steenbeek and Stephanie Helfferich

First: Meet the Professor. How was it for you?

“I was delighted to take the stage literally and figuratively during the opening. It was really a short inaugural lecture on public engagement. Colleagues who didn't know it yet learned that there is a Professor of Public Engagement. I took plastic that had floated in the ocean for years along to a primary school in Kanaleneiland, to show to the children of group 6. They were really interested and even smelled the plastic. So they spontaneously did some enquiry-based learning!”

How do you combine the two roles: Professor of Oceanography and Professor of Public Engagement?

“I work in oceanography four days a week, and one day a week I'm the new group leader of Public Engagement and Science Education. The trick is to achieve a balance to make sure that what I do in the Physics department also works for public engagement and the other way around. My remit is to map the research around public engagement.”

As Professor of Public Engagement, are there things you are able to do that were not possible before?

“I've now had this appointment for five months, and I've allowed myself the period up to my inaugural lecture, on 16 May 2023, to achieve clarity around the research assignment. I want to look at the role of researchers in the public debate on climate. What mantle should they take on? What is the added value of researchers? How do we retain the confidence of society?”

I also very much enjoy setting up a new group. A PhD candidate, Aike Vonk, and a post-doctoral researcher, Frances Wijnen, are studying the measurement of the impact and the efficacy of public engagement, among other ways by analysing press releases. They examine narratives: how do researchers frame their press releases about oceanic climate change versus the plastic soup? Do they learn from each other? My appointment lets me ask the question of how science works.”

You also involved an employee of the faculty section of Communications in your research centre. What is the added value of this?

“Nieske Vergunst has experience. She switches quickly between tasks and has a huge network. We want to experiment: how much effort is it to let a specific message sink in with a specific target group? I mostly try to discover what makes things effective. How do you achieve maximum impact? Some people believe that public engagement with sustainability should aim for behavioural change. I for one am happy just to foster scientific literacy.

As the COVID-19 crisis has shown, science communication is not about conveying the facts but about an understanding of how science works. How do you ensure that scientific literacy ends up having an effect? This is what Nieske will be working on. I'm a firm believer in a less absolute separation between support staff and academic staff. We can, in fact, learn from each other. A year from now, we'll be going around to demonstrate this collaborative model. We hope that a good example will inspire the other faculties.”



“Science communication is not about conveying the facts, but about an understanding of how science works.”

You’ve written a paper together with a group of fellows; colleagues who are working on public engagement as an aspect of open science. What is your message?

“One important message is that we can’t work on behalf of public engagement if these tasks are not recognised and rewarded as part of our academic work. As long as it’s an unpaid activity you do out of private conviction, it can’t be professionalised and its effectiveness can’t be determined. Science is done together with society and for the benefit of society. This means we have to do it as effectively as possible. I believe the graduate schools also have a role to play here. All PhD candidates have an educational remit; why wouldn’t public engagement be a part of that? We try, for example, to show as much appreciation for the public engagement activities of Climate Helpdesk volunteers, many of whom are PhD candidates, as for their teaching tasks.”

You strongly advocate training young researchers in how to present what they do to the public. What led you to advocate this?

“I received my own very first media training while working as a climate researcher in Australia. A concerted effort was made at the time to give twenty young researchers intensive media training to get a diverse group of people to convey

the same message in the same way and using the same terminology. This makes the message much stronger and, as a result, more effective. We do this in Utrecht as well, for example with the programme Breaking Science. I’m often on the jury during qualifying rounds, which in fact are even more fun than the finals: you can cheer them on and watch them grow. This summer we’ll have a similar programme in the Botanic Gardens, which involves literally putting young researchers onto a soapbox.

“At Breaking Science the qualifying rounds are even more fun than the finals: you can watch the participants grow.”

I think it’s right to say that in the Netherlands we really are pioneers. Not just in Utrecht, but at other universities, too, people reflect at an academic level on just what role science has in society. How can it be made efficient, effective and fair? In Open Science and Recognition & Rewards we also lead the way. It’s something we should take pride in.”

Reading tip: [Preprint Public Engagement paper](#) by the Public Engagement fellows

Viewing tip: [PCNI inspiration session on YouTube](#), from 8:08 to 13:15

During Meet the Professor, Utrecht University professors cycle to primary schools to meet pupils and answer all of their questions. The pupils receive hints and teaching material in advance in order to prepare thoroughly for the visits.



“This citizen science programme enables students to actively help researchers design and implement research. We hope this will inspire them to take on the role of researcher.”

Charlotte Gentenaar is an educator at Utrecht University Museum



“The information from the pigeon counts helps us answer biological questions, such as how pigeons survive in cities. Just like people, they are exposed to environmental pollution. The extent of the pollution can be measured from their feathers and eggs. In this way we can study the effects of pollution on pigeons and their offspring.”

Dr Vivian Goerlich is a researcher at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine



Counting pigeons for science

V MBO, HAVO and VWO students can use the digital curriculum Focus on Human-Animal Relations (*Relatie mens & dier in het vizier*) by Utrecht University Museum (UMU) to contribute to real scientific research.

In this programme, students meet Dr Vivian Goerlich and Dr Franck Meijboom, researchers at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. Vivian studies feral pigeons. The students formulate their own research question and attempt to answer it by counting pigeons. The outcomes of the pigeon counts help Vivian gain insight into the distribution and numbers of feral pigeons. Franck studies how people can interact with animals in responsible ways. Students use photos to express their ideas and emotions about animals. Franck collects the results of the students’ research for use in his own research.

The curriculum was developed by Charlotte Gentenaar at Utrecht University Museum in collaboration with Dr Franck Meijboom, Dr Vivan Goerlich and a teacher at Utrecht secondary school Academie Tien.

“In my eyes, this programme has the advantage that you don’t need to have been to university to do research.”

Teacher who took the curriculum with his students

If you’d like to find out more, have a look at the curriculum at uu.nl/publicengagement



Charlotte’s viewing tip: De Wilde Stad The commuting chips gull and the Vinex-location fox are just as wild and special as the seagull and the panda. The film De Wilde Stad (*The Wild City*) is an exploration of the deep and often humorous relationship between humans and animals.

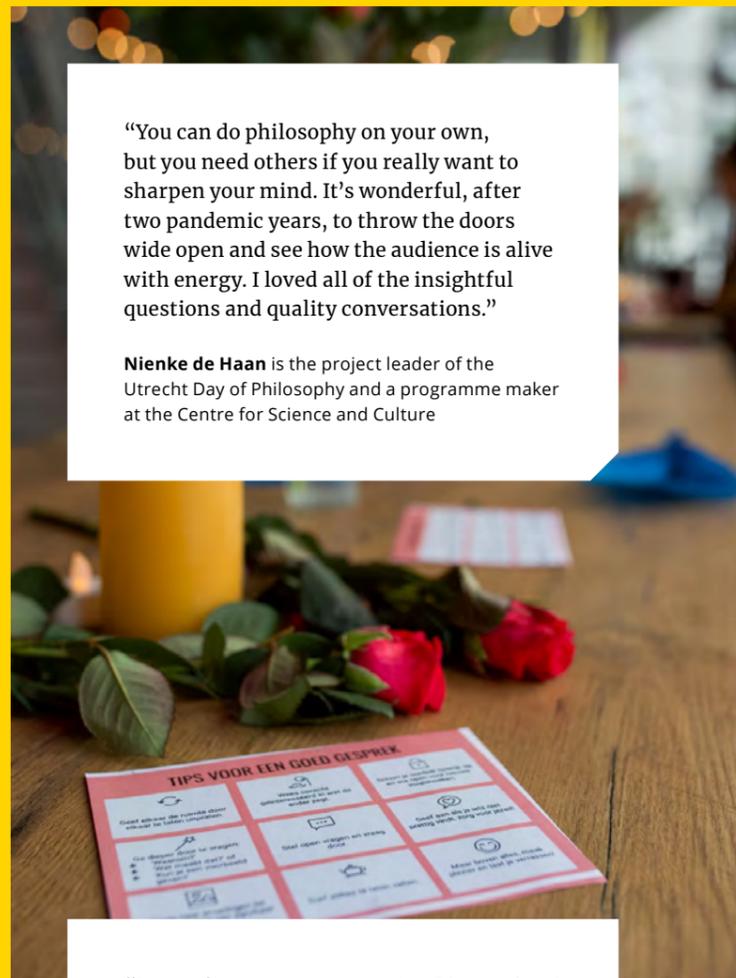
Utrecht Day of Philosophy



Is it a bad thing that we are governed by irrational thoughts? Are you responsible for your own prejudices? And how do we experience beauty? On the Utrecht Day of Philosophy, the public and philosophers studied the world around us. Visitors listened to talks by prominent philosophers, explored their own moral boundaries and participated in philosophical speed dating.

The Utrecht Day of Philosophy is an annual event organised by the Centre for Science and Culture as part of the General Studies programme, in cooperation with the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the Faculty of Humanities, and with contributions from the Descartes Centre, the Faculty Association of Utrecht Philosophy Students (*Faculteitsvereniging Utrechtse Filosofiestudenten*) and the University of Humanistic Studies.

Photography: Naomi van Steenberg

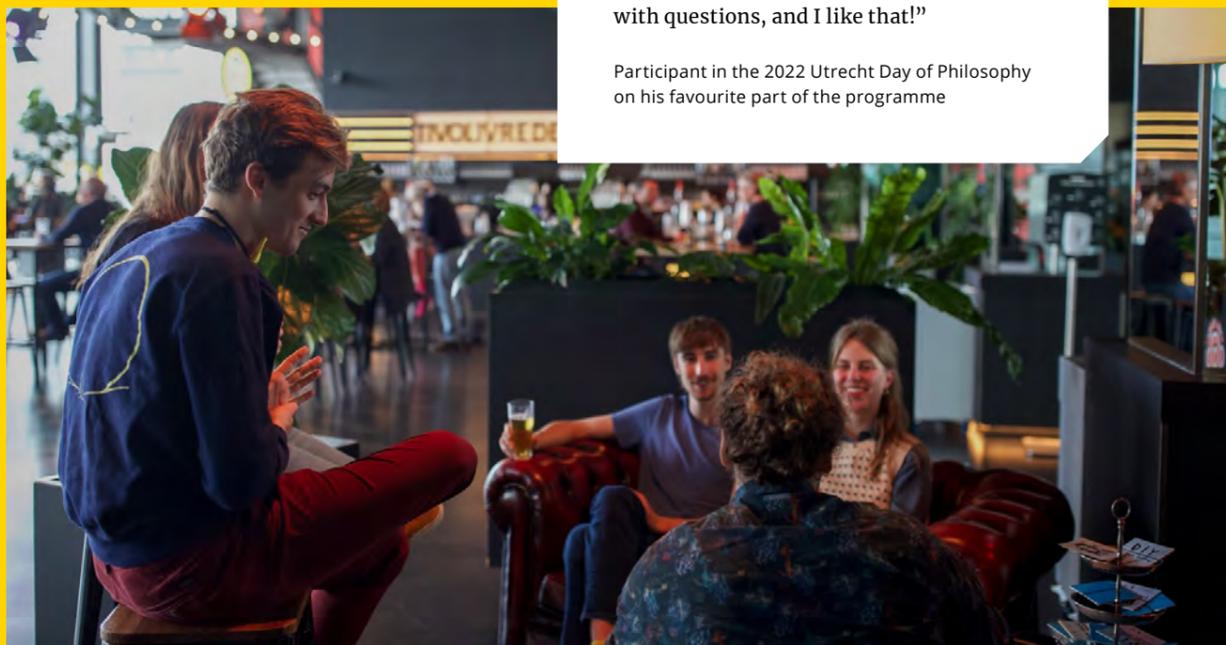


“You can do philosophy on your own, but you need others if you really want to sharpen your mind. It’s wonderful, after two pandemic years, to throw the doors wide open and see how the audience is alive with energy. I loved all of the insightful questions and quality conversations.”

Nienke de Haan is the project leader of the Utrecht Day of Philosophy and a programme maker at the Centre for Science and Culture

“I went from story to story, but I have a hard time choosing between them. Each got me thinking in a different way or saddled me with questions, and I like that!”

Participant in the 2022 Utrecht Day of Philosophy on his favourite part of the programme



Public engagement with education:

You can never start too early



Dr Marij Swinkels is a researcher and lecturer at the Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance

Photography: De Balie Studio

Together with a group of enthusiastic colleagues, the Public Engagement Fellows of the Open Science Programme, I reflect on public engagement with research and education. We interviewed each other last year to explore what this concept means to us. One of our lessons was that you can never start too early when it comes to training and educating socially engaged researchers. I immediately took this lesson to heart.

In talks with students I drafted a module on public engagement. The goal: to increase knowledge about the added value of public engagement with research and education, and to develop the skills needed to be successful at it yourself. Together with the Centre for Science and Culture, the press office and other Public Engagement Fellows, the students will experiment over the course of a few months with translating academic research for various target groups. They will also discuss research with non-academics, learn how to set up impact measurements and develop their own product or activity on the basis of their own (thesis) research.

My first experience has been that I’m learning just as much as the students themselves how to work on public engagement effectively. Had I myself ever really reflected on how I could evaluate the impact of a blog or a guest lecture? Am I myself clear enough on how I want to profile myself in the public debate as a researcher, and on where my boundaries are? And have I ever really engaged my audience in conversation, or has it been more of a monologue about my research so far?

The module holds up a mirror to me, gives me new pointers and makes us all more focused on and skilled in that which we all work for: creating impact. It’s great to really reflect and work on this together with students.

I can now say it’s true: when it comes to public engagement, you can never start too early! I recommend that others take this lesson to heart and that they experiment and explore, with students and PhD candidates, how attention can be freed up to strengthen public engagement skills. For example, students can contribute their thoughts and cooperate on public engagement in your research. And if you yourself didn’t start early enough: don’t worry. Be open and learn along.

Reading tips: the new piece by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences on [ten lessons to create impact](#), and – of course – the preprint of the [Public Engagement paper](#) by the Open Science Public Engagement Fellows.

Listening tips: Both in terms of their content and from a science-communication perspective, I enjoy the podcasts *Onbehaarde Apen*, *Focus Wetenschap* and *Betrouwbare Bronnen*.

Viewing tips: [University of the Netherlands](#), the online programmes of General Studies.

Learning tip: the [So We Think UU Can Blog](#) page.

This is a fun citizen science app: [Obsidentify](#).

Making time for public activities



It can be a challenge to find the time to engage in public activities in addition to one's research and teaching tasks. We asked three Utrecht University staff with practical experience for their perspectives.



Dr Arthur Lutz is a physical geographer at Utrecht University. He received the Public Engagement Seed Fund for a public project in which he and a music producer take the public on a journey through the Earth's water cycle (see page 26).



Prof. Elma Blom holds the chair in Language Development and Multilingualism in Family and Educational Contexts at Utrecht University. On behalf of the Dutch Research Agenda, she heads a research project on the various contexts in which children learn.

Time is an issue

Arthur Lutz: "Time is an issue. Preparing my public project took me more time than expected. I believe it was time well spent, but it did leave less time for other work. How do you ensure that you make good use of your time so as to pay enough attention to the activity as well as to education and research?"

Immediate practical use

Elma Blom: "Our project uses a method that involves cooperation from the start with social partners. The PhD candidates work with families, with teachers, with the educational staff of museums. They share their research for immediate practical use. This adaptation for use in society, and the immediate involvement of people beyond the university, is a very natural process thanks to the method we use.

There will definitely continue to be research where this is not self-evident, which we must also safeguard. However, it's important for us as researchers to reflect before starting any research project: are there methods we can use to integrate recognition and rewards for such activities throughout the project? This makes it possible to reward the PhD candidate and to ensure a good supervision structure.

I also receive frequent requests to deliver a lecture or teach a workshop, for which I often don't have time. Ideally, I'll have a group of researchers around me to work together and distribute my time a bit. What I also do is ask a market price. With the money earned I can free up some time, for instance by hiring assistance."

"We, the researchers, can solve a lot of things ourselves, and we're creative when it comes to this. However, you don't just want university solutions at the level of the individual researcher. You want solutions at a higher level as well."



Dr Stans de Haas and Dr Paul Boselie are leaders on the theme of Recognition & Rewards, part of Utrecht University's Open Science programme

"So these, I think, are the three main ways for individual researchers to approach this. Another issue I've encountered involves the job profiles we have to work with, which don't match what we want. Sometimes I want to hire someone who is great at communication with external parties and with the outside world, but it will be hard to find a job profile that is sufficiently rewarded. I then have to bend over backwards to find a solution.

We, the researchers, can solve a lot of things ourselves, and we're very creative when it comes to this. However, you don't just want university solutions at the level of the individual researcher. You want solutions at a higher level as well, in order to have better arrangements in place for this sort of thing."

Greater team spirit

Stans de Haas: "Recognition and rewards is a transformation happening at the individual level, the team level and the level of the organisation and the system. I would want to advocate greater team spirit in academic work. To me, this means the team reflecting on the impact you want to achieve collectively, in science and in society, and then looking at what is needed for this.

"The core of the transition to the new system of recognition and rewards is that all of those contributions to the total impact should be recognised and rewarded."

When that is the case, public engagement forms part of a shared plan that involves determining which competences and skills are needed. These can be developed in the team, so the whole team comes out stronger and everyone helps each other to develop in this area. It can also involve recruiting a new colleague when the means are available. I would think not so much in terms of job profiles as in terms of a personal profile, with a built-in opportunity for development and fitting in with the team. Of course, time and money are factors in any plan. In case of a conference with commercial admission fees, it's entirely justified for academics to request a fee for their contribution. This money can be used for the joint research or teaching that has produced the contribution to the conference. However, such direct funding isn't always possible. Other resources may be needed, such as the Public Engagement Seed Fund.

Public engagement can also be made a part of one's research project. I deliberately say 'a part' instead of, for instance, 'an additional result'. In order to have an impact, public engagement has to be on a par with other project results, such as an academic article in a peer-reviewed journal. Different types of output serve a variety of purposes, with their own audiences and effect. Together, they contribute to the project's total impact. The core of the transition to the new system of recognition and rewards is that all of those contributions to the total impact should be recognised and rewarded. The organisation can contribute to this, for example by investing in leadership and by assisting with team-spirit-driven work."

Keeping quiet is not an option



Prof. Marc Bonten holds the chair in Molecular Epidemiology of Infectious Diseases at the Julius Centre, part of University Medical Centre Utrecht

Photography: Seth Carnill, Utrecht Science Week
Author: Erik van Zwol

Marc Bonten enjoys discussing science. During the pandemic, he dealt selectively with the many media requests he received. He takes his academic responsibility to provide guidance seriously: “If I don’t do it, there will soon be someone else and I’m not so sure they’re doing a great job.”

Two speeds

Already before the pandemic, he was actively communicating off the beaten track of science. Bonten: “I wrote blogs about scientific articles, and in 2016 I started using Twitter to increase their exposure.” As a scientist who is keen to engage in dialogue, he identifies a chasm between the speeds at which two worlds move. “There is hardly any discussion along the beaten tracks of science. You submit a piece, it’s reviewed over the course of months, and in many cases a year will have passed before it’s published.”



To respond, you’ll need to send in a letter and wait three to four weeks before you hear anything back. That’s really not much of a discussion, so this – blogging, Twitter – is much more fun.”

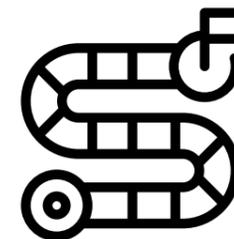
Stick to your trade

The pandemic has opened a middle course between fast, ungoverned social media and the slow, tightly governed scientific forum. “A world of preprints, webinars, forums and so on has opened up.” Bonten felt at home in this world. As a researcher he sticks to his trade [*infection prevention and antibiotic resistance, ed.*], but the online discussions are about anything and everything. “When patients reach out to me personally, I tell them I’m no longer a practicing physician and I’m not likely to blurt out something on a subject I don’t know enough about.” In Bonten’s opinion, public engagement is a responsibility researchers should assume in more cases: “It’s often enjoyable, it keeps you on your toes and you meet people who know more about a specific subject. This helps you ahead in your own research.”

“It’s often enjoyable, it keeps you on your toes and you meet people who know more about a specific subject. This helps you ahead in your own research.”

Young researchers

As a member of the Outbreak Management Team, Bonten was thrust into the limelight during the COVID pandemic. “From one moment to the next you’re under intense scrutiny.” As a public figure, Bonten pays even closer attention to his communication. He has this advice for young researchers: “Never speak out about things you don’t know about, and keep your gut feeling out of the discussion. The responsibility of science to provide guidance has only increased, especially in a time when everybody speaks their mind. If a scientific conclusion points in a different direction, you have to be able to explain this. As a scientist, you must always be free to say: last week I was saying turn left, but now I have a responsibility to turn right.”



The route to impact measurement

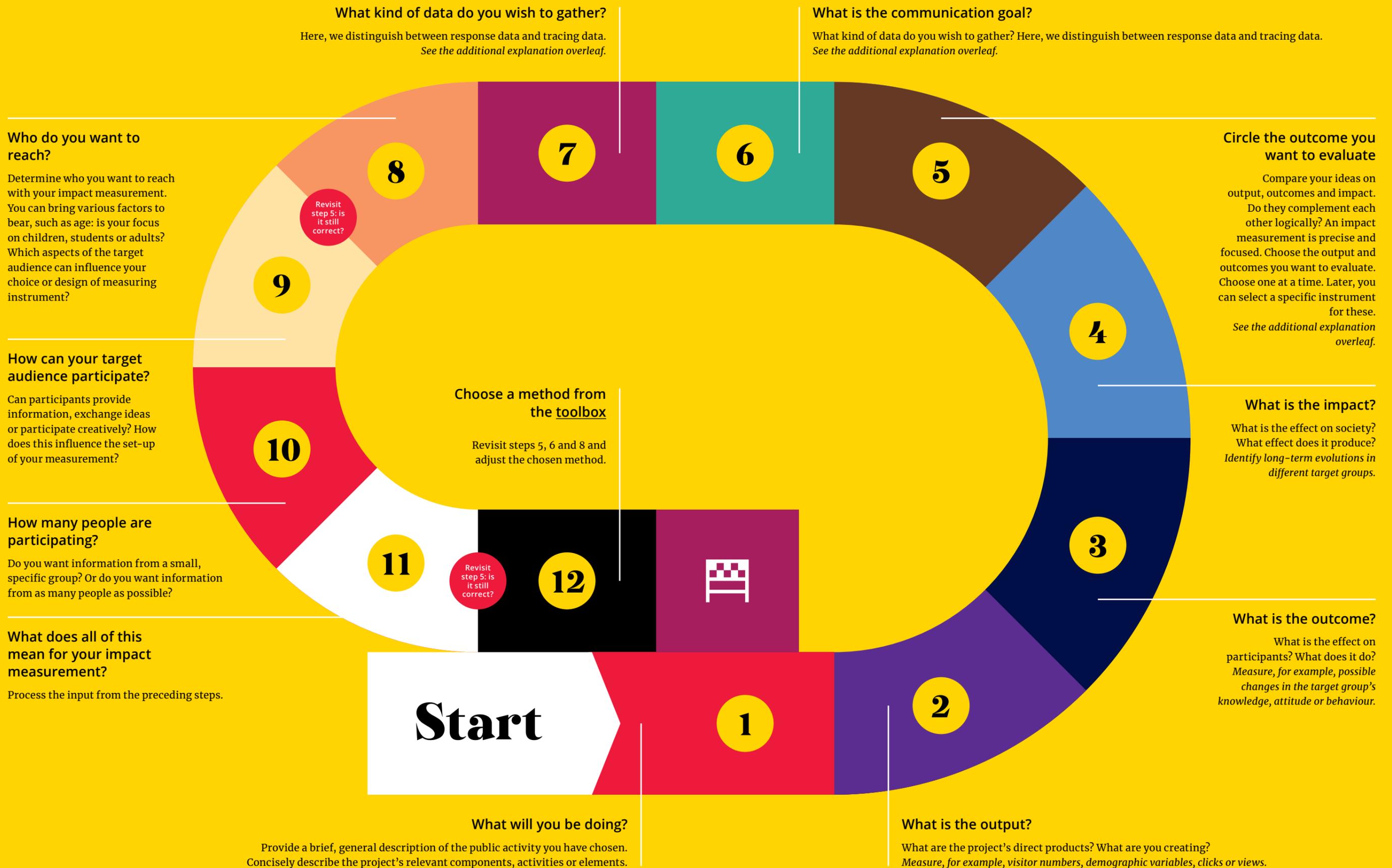


To measure the impact of your public engagement activities, it is useful to consider a few basic principles of science communication. This will allow you to make the right decisions while developing and implementing your activities.

Answer the questions along the route step by step. The answers will help you design a good impact measurement. You can use your answers to do a targeted search in the toolbox for instruments that are suitable for your impact measurement.

This route is based on the instruments of IMPACTLAB that can be found at impactlab.sites.uu.nl. Here you will also find a decision tree and the toolbox.

IMPACTLAB is a collaboration between Utrecht University, Leiden University and the Dutch Research Agenda, and is composed of Dr Madelijn Strick, Dr Ward Peeters and Dr Anne Land.



What kind of data do you wish to gather?

Here, we distinguish between response data and tracing data.
See the additional explanation overleaf.

What is the communication goal?

What kind of data do you wish to gather? Here, we distinguish between response data and tracing data.
See the additional explanation overleaf.

Who do you want to reach?

Determine who you want to reach with your impact measurement. You can bring various factors to bear, such as age: is your focus on children, students or adults? Which aspects of the target audience can influence your choice or design of measuring instrument?

Circle the outcome you want to evaluate

Compare your ideas on output, outcomes and impact. Do they complement each other logically? An impact measurement is precise and focused. Choose the output and outcomes you want to evaluate. Choose one at a time. Later, you can select a specific instrument for these.
See the additional explanation overleaf.

How can your target audience participate?

Can participants provide information, exchange ideas or participate creatively? How does this influence the set-up of your measurement?

What is the impact?

What is the effect on society? What effect does it produce? Identify long-term evolutions in different target groups.

How many people are participating?

Do you want information from a small, specific group? Or do you want information from as many people as possible?

What does all of this mean for your impact measurement?

Process the input from the preceding steps.

What is the outcome?

What is the effect on participants? What does it do? Measure, for example, possible changes in the target group's knowledge, attitude or behaviour.

Choose a method from the toolbox

Revisit steps 5, 6 and 8 and adjust the chosen method.

Revisit step 5: is it still correct?

Revisit step 5: is it still correct?

Start

What will you be doing?

Provide a brief, general description of the public activity you have chosen. Concisely describe the project's relevant components, activities or elements.

What is the output?

What are the project's direct products? What are you creating? Measure, for example, visitor numbers, demographic variables, clicks or views.

Working together by going down unexpected paths



The Centre for Unusual Collaborations (CUCo) enables young researchers to do interdisciplinary research that can make a positive contribution to social issues. At the 2021 Betweter Festival, the research on chronic pain by Hanneke Willemen et al, organised by the Centre for Science and Culture, took centre stage. They drew the public's attention to the issue by way of experiments and conversations.



“Chronic pain is an underestimated problem: one out of every five persons worldwide suffers from it. Our main goal was to inform people about chronic pain and to invite them to share any personal experience of it. What was the festivalgoer's definition of chronic pain? This led to interesting exchanges and refreshing perspectives. We also drew people's attention to the vital importance of interdisciplinary research to understand chronic pain better. This will help the development of efficient and safe treatment methods. We carried out experiments to measure sensitivity to pain. Pain was triggered by a device that can put pressure on the calf muscle, and by creams that produce hot and cold stimuli. It's interesting to see that people respond to pain stimuli in very different ways.”

Dr Hanneke Willemen is a researcher at the Centre for Translational Immunology of University Medical Centre Utrecht

“CUCo wants to increase the joy and creativity in research by going down unexpected paths. Cooperation in research continually requires translating perspectives: between scientific disciplines and with social groups. The Betweter Festival is an ideal setting for young CUCo researchers to translate perspectives for the benefit of a young and enthusiastic audience. This also involves reflecting on the research itself. The collected results are immensely useful for the project. The team had a lot of fun designing and preparing the experiment. This has whetted CUCo's appetite: the next Betweter Festival will again involve projects, and we'll share a contribution about the (difficult!) process of cooperation.”

Corinne Lamain is the director of the Centre for Unusual Collaborations (CUCo), one of the core groups within the Strategic Alliance between Eindhoven University of Technology, Wageningen University & Research, Utrecht University and University Medical Centre Utrecht

If you'd like to find out more, listen to the episode on chronic pain on the Universiteit van Nederland podcast



Photography: Anna van Kooij and Jelmer de Haas

EXPLANATION OF STEP 5

The three elements build on each other. Results from the output and from outcomes provide an increasingly complete impact picture. In this way you will improve your understanding of the impact of your activity.

EXPLANATION OF STEP 6

Which of these communication goals is the best fit and is a good summary of everything?

Creating knowledge and understanding	Promoting behaviour and skills	Enriching awareness and attitude
Informing, teaching, training, coaching	Inspiring, motivating, convincing, inspiring creativity, acquiring or improving skills	Creating new experiences, stimulating critical thinking, generating awareness, generating perspectives, improving attitudes towards the issue or towards science

EXPLANATION OF STEP 7

Response data is any form of data provided consciously by participants, such as an answer to a quiz question or a completed survey. This type of data can be generated both online and offline. Tracing data is information you can collect by observing people and their behaviour. An example is to look at the number of clicks or views to trace the online reach of an item.

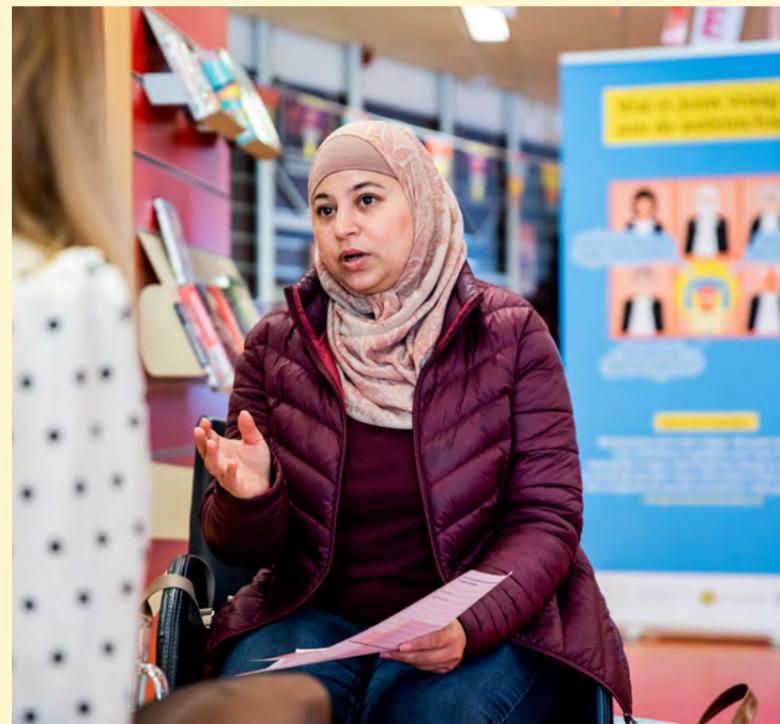


A word about tomorrow



Scientific research starts with questions. With this in mind, in October 2021 the Centre for Science and Culture organised *A word about tomorrow (Even over Morgen)*, a low-threshold programme in seven district libraries in Utrecht. The programme involves dialogues on equal terms between visitors to the library and researchers of Utrecht University and University Medical Centre Utrecht. The researchers went looking for questions and insights that could lead to new research or trigger surprising developments in existing research. These questions stand a chance of getting onto the Utrecht Research Agenda, which will be drawn up in 2022.

📷 **Photography:** Lize Kraan



“For the Utrecht Research Agenda we wanted to have conversations with residents of Utrecht who are not normally in touch with science or within the orbit of Utrecht University. This was a challenge for us, so we partnered closely with Utrecht Library. Giving a programme maker of the library an active role in our project team allowed us to tap their knowledge and experience of a target group that we are not very familiar with. This led to *A word about tomorrow*, a fine programme in which we collected over 500 questions about what Utrecht residents find important for the future.”

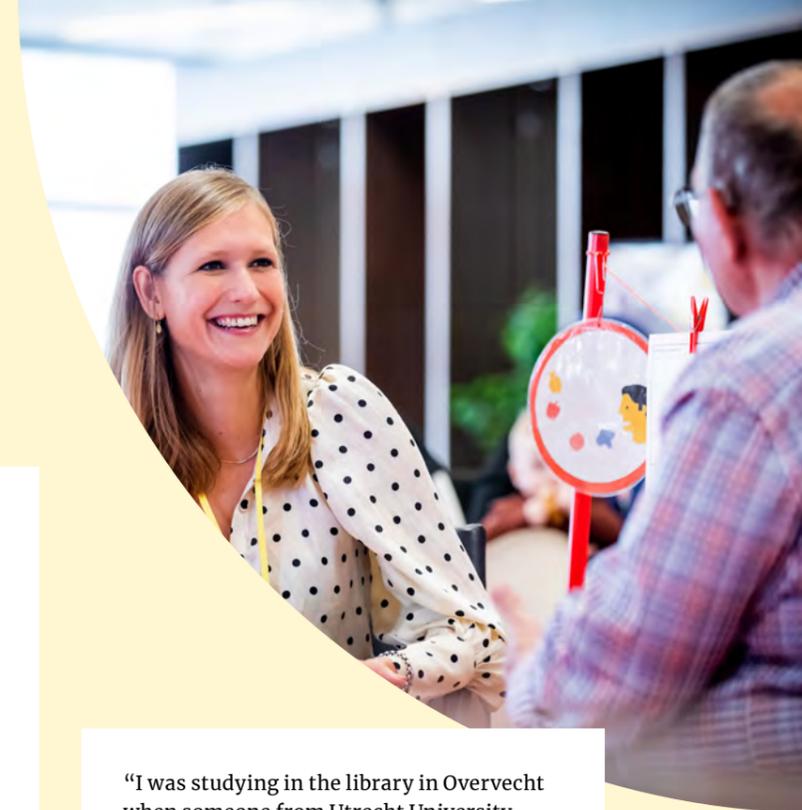
Miranda Thoen is the project leader of *A word about tomorrow* and is a programme manager at the Centre for Science and Culture

“When Utrecht University approached Utrecht Library with the aim of having conversations with ‘the Utrecht citizen’, I had to chuckle about that term. All Utrecht residents are welcome in the library: to read, to learn, to get informed, but also just to seek shelter from the rain or to sit for a bit. And, during this project, also to have conversations with researchers! The project proved immensely educational for visitors, the university and the library alike. I’m glad we’re also working together to explore an expanded offer for Utrecht residents. All three parties have a lot more to learn. This was definitely a project with excellent cooperation!”

Nelleke van Erven is a social domain programme maker at Utrecht Library

“What I remember most from participating in *A word about tomorrow* is how the sincere, interesting and original questions of residents from across Utrecht’s districts and of all ages get you to reflect on your own specialisation and research. Whether they concerned the COVID pandemic or (the lack of) freedom in other parts of the world, the questions always led to interesting conversations that now inform my work as a researcher. It showed me, moreover, that research done at Utrecht University really is relevant to people; it affects them and it matters.”

Max Vetzo is a PhD candidate in constitutional law at the Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance



“I was studying in the library in Overvecht when someone from Utrecht University asked me if I wanted to have a dialogue with a researcher. I was a bit nervous at first, but Max [Vetzo, ed.] said: ‘You can tell and ask anything that’s important to you.’ I really appreciated him putting me at ease and listening so carefully. We talked at length about fear, and how it is that people can feel imprisoned while they’re free. Together we came up with a question for science: ‘How can we make people who seek refuge in the Netherlands feel at home?’”

Wafa Ali sat down for a conversation with Max Vetzo





Debut



Programme maker Lieke Dekker works with media creators Tobias Mathijssen and Roshni Dokkum to create short videos in which researchers describe the personal paths that led them to science. They do so for the programme Debut, a collaboration with the online platform UGO, which is aimed at children who benefit from additional help with language skills. They offer a sneak peek here.

“Debut is a good example of how we at the Centre for Science and Culture create ever more programmes for target groups that the university finds it hard to reach. It’s also an example of how we like to collaborate with people at Utrecht University as well as elsewhere. Colleagues in communications at the faculties make suggestions for researchers to approach. Researchers provide the content, the video creators of Mediaproducties make it into a quality video, and our partner UGO provides access to the target group. At the Centre for Science and Culture we take the initiative, lead the project and monitor the content. It’s great to create something beautiful in this way!”

Lieke Dekker is the project leader of Debut and a programme maker at the Centre for Science and Culture

“I think it’s important to give students the opportunity to look over a researcher’s shoulder. ‘Doing science’ is an abstract idea, but in fact it’s very practical. My research is about improving the health of pregnant women worldwide. I often work with researchers and doctors from all over the world, and on top of that I teach the subject.”

Dr Joyce Browne is a lecturer and researcher at University Medical Centre Utrecht and University College Utrecht

“The main thing is to explain the research and its relevance clearly and simply. Sometimes, researchers are so immersed in their own specialisation that they need help presenting their work to the outside world. The best stories are the ones that are told with conviction and passion. When making videos, you want to be clear on what you want to say and who you want to say it to. At Mediaproducties we like to help with this from the start of the process. We provide guidance and advice on the video’s content and format so as to present the researcher’s stories with maximum effect.”

Tobias Mathijssen and Roshni Dokkum are creators at Mediaproducties, Utrecht University

Climate Helpdesk



Are biodegradable coffee pods really better for the environment? Is an electric motorbike more environmentally friendly than a petrol-powered motorbike? We all have a climate question from time to time. It’s not easy, however, to find reliable information these days. To address this, the Climate Helpdesk was set up two years ago: the go-to place for anyone looking for a science-based answer to climate questions.

Joseline Houwman, one of the founders of the Climate Helpdesk, explains how it works: “It’s really simple, in fact. Anyone can submit a question through our website. The editors-in-chief check if the question has been asked before, as well as suggesting ways to make it more effective. Once we have a good question that hasn’t been answered yet, we search our database of 250 experts from different fields for the best-placed person to answer it. Their answer is checked by a reviewer, a sort of peer review as we know it from science. This results in an insightful, readable answer.” Two years on, the Climate Helpdesk website is a treasure trove of reliable and accessible information.

Readable, yet science-based

“It’s great fun being an expert at the Climate Helpdesk”, says Karlijn van den Broek. “As a researcher, you really need to zoom out to get the questioner’s helicopter view. It’s a fun challenge, making you realise how your research fits into the picture. You want the answer to hug the science, you want it to be readable and refined at once. The challenge is to strike the right balance, and fortunately I have the Climate Helpdesk editors to help me.”

The Climate Helpdesk has put in a few live appearances at TivoliVredenburg, with a different theme each time: sea level rise, eating sustainably, and so on. The audience asks the questions, and a number of experts on stage answer them live.

Dr Joseline Houwman is a project leader at the Faculty of Science

Dr Karlijn van den Broek is a lecturer at the Copernicus Institute, part of the Faculty of Geosciences

Questioner Riny Blokhuis, a group leader at the Salvation Army, shares his reason for turning to the Climate Helpdesk: “The climate is changing so fast that it’s a popular conversation topic around the water cooler. Talks with friends and acquaintances often leave you with more questions than answers. I went looking for answers myself, and found the Climate Helpdesk. I submitted my question to them and received a wonderful answer. It came with detailed arguments; you could tell they’d taken the time for it!”

“I submitted my question and received a wonderful answer. It came with detailed arguments; you could tell they’d taken the time for it!”

Joseline emphasises the team effort needed for these results: “Together with 30 volunteers and a few paid employees, we have worked very hard to realise the Climate Helpdesk. I am incredibly proud of the result we have achieved together.”

Would you like to read more?
A longer version of this story can be found at uu.nl/publicengagement



Photography: KlimaatHelpdesk
Author: Sigrid Dekker



Competing interests, successful cooperation

Animal Rights and Utrecht University demonstrate it's possible



Utrecht University conducts research using laboratory animals, which the organisation Animal Rights opposes on principle. Even so, they've cooperated successfully for years. Monique Janssens (Utrecht University) and Jen Hochmuth (Animal Rights) talk about the cooperation, in which mutual trust is key.



Dr Monique Janssens is a communications consultant with the Animal Welfare Body Utrecht, which is part of Utrecht University and University Medical Centre Utrecht



Dr Jen Hochmuth is a programme manager at Animal Rights



It started in 2014 with half-yearly consultations between the two organisations. “Animal Rights saw our blind spots and asked critical questions”, Janssens explains. “This helped us take a critical look at our work. We, in turn, had an opportunity to explain what we do on behalf of animal welfare.” Mutual respect grew, with a concrete collaborative structure set up in 2020.

Adopting lab animals

Monique Janssens: “Both of us were surprised that small-sized former lab animals, such as mice and rats, are put to death while large former lab animals, such as horses and dogs, are rehomed. Animal Rights immediately offered to assist if the university were willing to put former lab animals up for adoption. So that’s what we did. To convince policymakers, we began a small pilot without any long-term promises. This pilot, involving ten rats and fifteen mice, really caught on. Utrecht University no longer puts any redundant lab animals to death.”

Jen Hochmuth: “It’s great to see that so many people are willing to adopt a former lab animal. Each year, half a million lab animals die unnecessarily in the Netherlands: because they’ve been bred but aren’t used, for example, or because the test has ended and they’ve become redundant. It’s shocking.”

Setting an example

To date, over 1,670 former lab animals from Utrecht University have been adopted. The adopted animals are mice, rats, chickens, goats, hamsters, zebra finches, a python and an iguana. In Hochmuth’s opinion, ‘Utrecht University is setting an example.’ “We’re now also in touch with other universities to set up an adoption project for

small former lab animals. If there are any doubts about its feasibility, we point to Utrecht University to show that it works.”

Solutions out of reach

“We can accomplish more by working with the university”, says Hochmuth. “At Animal Rights we want to prevent the suffering of animals, but solutions are often out of reach. Together with the university, we can actually make a difference.”

“At first, researchers shy away from conversations with animals rights organisations.”

The cooperation also has added value for the university. “Without Animals Rights we could never have rehomed former lab animals”, Janssens explains. “Their network is crucial. They recruit adopters from among their supporters, a large group of animal lovers. They also arranged for temporary shelter in rodent rescue Het Knagertje. The Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals also provides help. They place animal ads on the national website for shelter and adoption animals, ikzoekbaas.nl.”

Enriching each other’s knowledge

Sometimes they disagree, but they always look for the dialogue, even on sensitive issues. Janssens: “Some time ago, Animal Rights had a campaign against animal testing for research into cardiovascular disease. Utrecht

researchers carry out this kind of testing and were alarmed at the campaign. I initiated a conversation between the researchers and the Animal Rights people in order to reduce the tension. At first, researchers often shy away from conversations with animals rights organisations. I explain that such conversations help each party understand the other better. What both organisations have in common is their passion for doing what’s right for people and animals. Following the conversation, Animal Rights corrected inaccurate information on its website, while the researchers reflected critically on the aspects Animal Rights found disturbing. They enriched each other’s knowledge and got closer to each other’s positions.”

Hochmuth: “Respectful exchange makes it clear that we often want to achieve the same things, even if our priorities aren’t always aligned.”

“A mediator trusted by both parties is indispensable.”

Mediation works

What is the top tip for a fruitful conversation? “A mediator trusted by both parties is indispensable”, Hochmuth believes. “I’d like to pay a compliment to Monique here. We often have conversations with researchers, but many of those conversations aren’t constructive. At Utrecht University, Monique is the mediator, which helps immensely. So: thank you, Monique!” Janssens laughs. “Most people are very reasonable, we always find. I pay attention to equality and let each party respond to the other at the right time. I identify and clear up misunderstandings, which I’m able to do because I’m familiar with the facts and aware of each side’s concerns.”

Mutual trust

Do Janssens and Hochmuth have any tips? “Go for the dialogue”, Janssens stresses. “In person, of course, not via video call. You have to get a feel for each other’s position and take the time needed.” Hochmuth adds: “And follow up on the conversations. Don’t let good plans and ideas go to waste.”

Janssens has something else to add from her perspective as a communications consultant: “Don’t violate each other’s trust, and communicate jointly about joint projects. Discuss how you want to word things. Wrong wording can be hurtful and get in the way of cooperation. Mutual trust is essential.”

Photography: Animal Rights
Author: Rosan Reusken



Botanic Gardens



Everyone who is interested in plants and nature is welcome to visit Utrecht University's Botanic Gardens. They're also a location for teaching and research, such as biodiversity research on a large scale. The Gardens will open their own research centre in 2022 to reinforce and broaden the scientific foundation of the Botanic Gardens. In the coming years, the Gardens will open more frequently for exploration, education and science in order to share knowledge about the plant world with a broad public. Programmes are currently being developed for this, such as a festival on 30 June 2022 at which young researchers will share their research, and tours of research locations in the Gardens in the autumn of 2022. The interaction between researchers and visitors will be at the core of these events.

📷 **Photography:** Akkie Jooisse and Lize Kraan



Vechtclub and science: a good match!



Vechtclub is a creative incubator that has started a collaboration with the Centre for Science and Culture. The series of programmes *Creativiteit Ontleed* addresses the questions of what creativity is, what its value is and how it can be used. Why has Vechtclub joined forces with the university? We asked Daan Lustenhouwer of Vechtclub.

How did the partnership come about?

“Vechtclub is a creative incubator in Utrecht consisting of 170 creative entrepreneurs of all sorts. We have a venue and a stage to present programmes. At *Creativiteit Ontleed* we address the creative (thinking) process, the role of creativity in education and the value of art in protest movements. Every evening we look for a range of complementary perspectives, including scientific expertise. With this quest in mind we got in touch with the university to see if a partnership was possible.”

“The speakers are often an interesting voice in our post-event discussions with the audience.”

📷 **Photography:** Daan Lustenhouwer

Why did you choose our university?

“Utrecht University in particular suits us well. Not just because we're in the same city, but even more so because the Studium Generale programmes, such as Science Café Utrecht, match what we had in mind for the *Creativiteit Ontleed* series. Aside from that, the contact with the programme makers of the Centre for Science and Culture went smoothly right from the start. They had a good feel for the intention of this series of programmes, and contributed suggestions for the content. On every occasion there was an excellent match between the evening's event and the speaker.”

Why does the Vechtclub audience want a scientific perspective?

“The audience that visits these programmes is an inquisitive one. The theme of a given evening is often related to their jobs, but we also have visitors who attend every evening and who appreciate the in-depth exploration. We want to challenge this audience with a substantive offer and by approaching the theme from various angles. In addition to practice, we think a scientific angle is indispensable. We often start with the science speaker, so as to lay a (theoretical) foundation that the rest of the evening can build on. In addition, these speakers are often an interesting voice in our post-event discussions with the audience. In short: for us, this scientific perspective is an essential link.”

Daan Lustenhouwer is programme manager at Vechtclub

Utrecht University Museum's Fossil Hunt



Utrecht University Museum is currently being renovated and innovated. In the meantime, it is organising a variety of (online) activities, including for residents of the city of Utrecht. Working with Prof. Jelle Reumer, Lore Smit and her colleagues devised a family-oriented audio tour of fossils in the city centre. To date, about 400 families have participated in the Fossil Hunt.

“The Fossil Hunt is a real family activity and a quest of discovery that takes you to special, often hidden places and forgotten fossils. Some of them will be on display in the new museum. It’s an enjoyable way of connecting the city and the museum. Families get a sampling of how you can learn together through playful exploration. Utrecht University Museum will open in the summer of 2023 as the premier research museum of the Netherlands.”

Lore Smit is a marketing and communications staff member at the museum



“Although we’re pretty familiar with Utrecht, we were still surprised by the fossils we encountered. Thanks to the app’s clear hints, they weren’t too hard to find. The quiz questions linked to the fossils were also quite doable, at least if you paid attention to the explanations. So do take the time to really listen or read via the app. Fossils don’t just have a long history; they’ve also travelled impressive distances. And all of this is right under our noses, visible in the street and in the facades of buildings. The tour changed the way we see the world quite a bit. We’ve since been finding fossils in more and more parts of other cities, too.”

Mark Pen and his family went in search of fossils in the city of Utrecht

Has this piqued your curiosity? The Fossil Hunt starts and ends at Utrecht University Museum. It’s suitable for young (ages 8-14) and old. umu.nl/fossielenjacht

Photography: Lize Kraan



Photography: Laurens Zautsen



Being open involves being vulnerable



“So, how are you doing?” my colleague asked me one Friday afternoon in the university library. Two weeks earlier, I’d delivered a lecture on ‘Life in the here and now?’ at Studium Generale in the auditorium of the University Hall, and before that I’d appeared on the radio programme ‘De Nacht van NPO Radio1’. My research is about the experience of time. I convert some of my findings into compositions, and I use this music to have conversations about psychological suffering. It was during these public appearances that I first tested, on a large scale, a new treatment ritual involving the audience. It was very successful, but in the office, I burst out in tears.

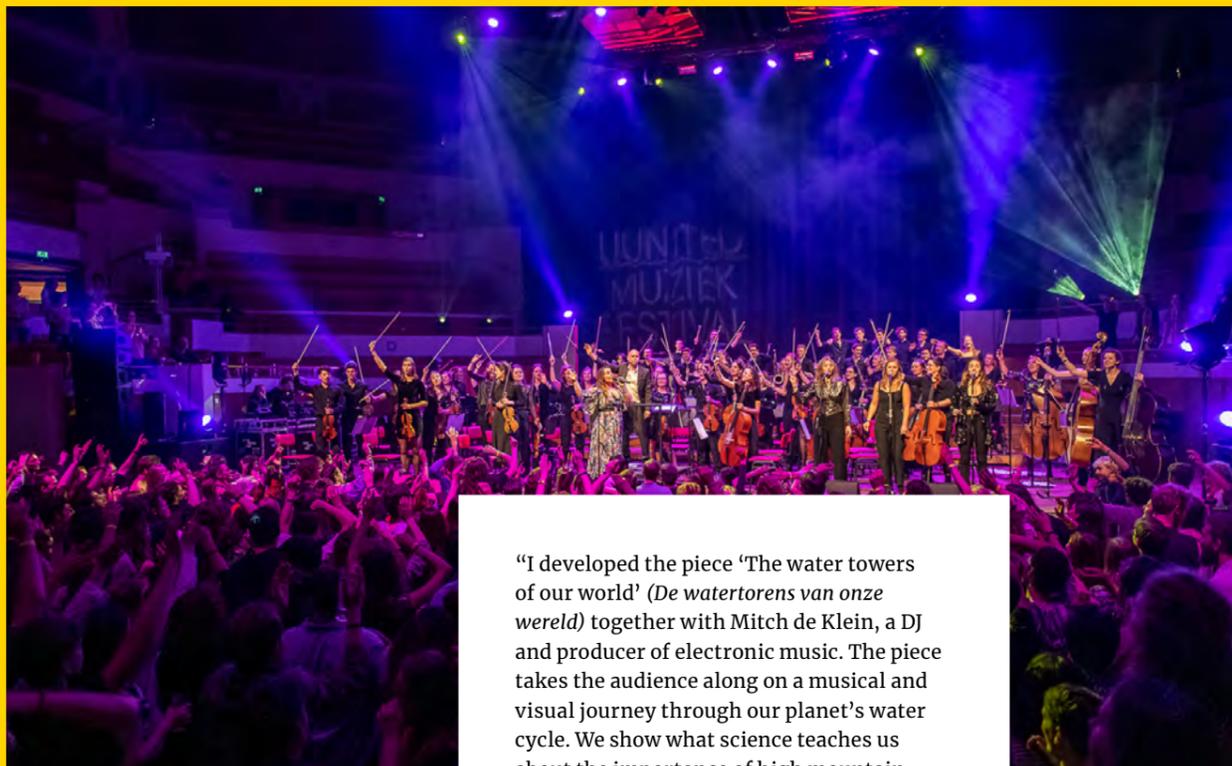
Over drinks with colleagues on Friday afternoon, my crying came up in the conversation. So what had caused those tears? Had I been through a hectic period and had it all got a bit much? Was this the storied breaking point on the way to a doctoral thesis? Had I finally broken down under the pressure of

money worries? It was only in the evening, at home, that it dawned on me what had happened to me in the past month. After my public appearances, my app and my email inbox had been inundated with messages and I was regularly approached at unexpected moments. For example, in the supermarket I would end up having conversations in the milk aisle about therapy, complete with tears from the conversation partner.

The abstract suffering I study has only had two or three concrete expressions at the most in my own life. Now it suddenly acquired hundreds: personal stories full of despair. This confrontation with concrete suffering is something every physician experiences. Many social researchers do as well, but to me, a humanities scholar and composer, it was new. I realised: aside from online haters and negative – sometimes aggressive – reactions, this is another, unforeseen side of public activities.

If as an academic you study relevant and urgent problems, and you work towards solutions together with people who are going through those problems (poverty, inequality, war and so on), you get confronted with the sorrow of real people. This, too, forms part of open science: paying attention to people and their stories. If your research is about problems in society, sometimes you’ll come in for some flak yourself. At a socially committed university, crying at work is a form of academic integrity, too. May many tears follow.

Susanna Bloem is a science historian, philosopher and composer. She is working towards her doctoral degree at the Descartes Institute of the Faculty of Humanities.



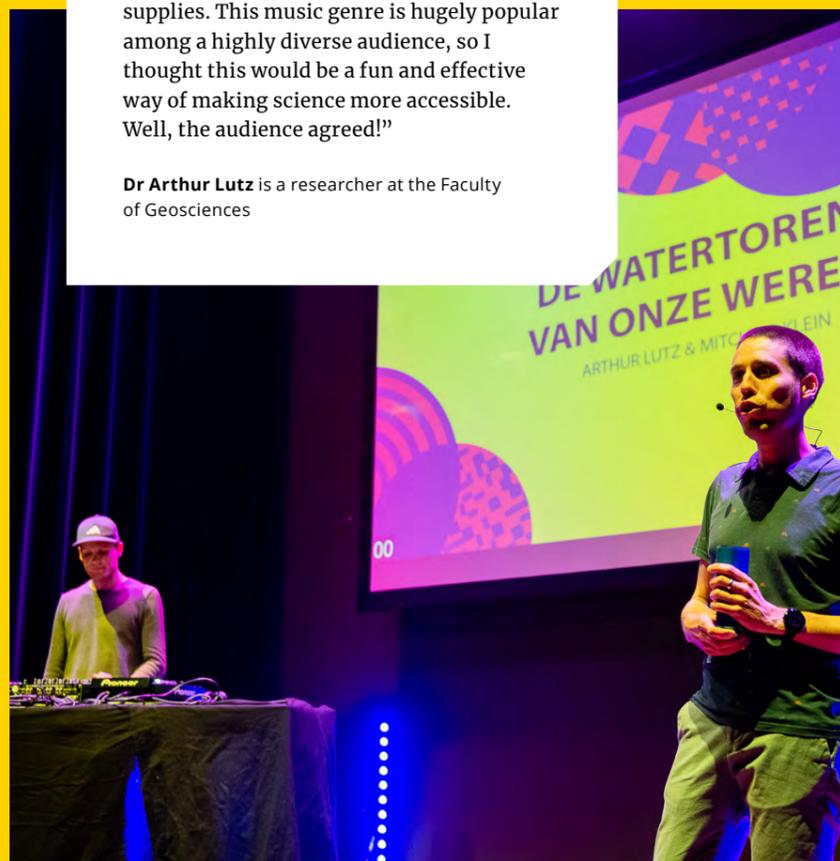
“I developed the piece ‘The water towers of our world’ (*De watertorens van onze wereld*) together with Mitch de Klein, a DJ and producer of electronic music. The piece takes the audience along on a musical and visual journey through our planet’s water cycle. We show what science teaches us about the importance of high mountain ranges for worldwide water supplies, and what challenges we face to maintain these supplies. This music genre is hugely popular among a highly diverse audience, so I thought this would be a fun and effective way of making science more accessible. Well, the audience agreed!”

Dr Arthur Lutz is a researcher at the Faculty of Geosciences

UUnited Music festival

The UUnited Music festival held on 24 March 2022 was an explosion of creative energy. The Utrecht student choirs and orchestras, composed of 450 students of Utrecht University, gave a performance at TivoliVredenburg together with well-known artists such as Brigitte Kaandorp and Trijntje Oosterhuis. Especially for UUnited, researcher Arthur Lutz set his doctoral thesis to music together with DJ Mitch de Klein. The event was organised by Parnassos, Utrecht University’s cultural centre.

📷 **Photography:** Maarten Mooijman, NomoviesFotografie



Green Challenge



In the autumn of 2021, Studium Generale organised the Green Challenge (*Groene Challenge*). Throughout November, participants opened a little online door every day, revealing a sustainability challenge on themes such as water, food, mobility and biodiversity. In-depth information was included, such as links to Utrecht University lectures or studies and reading and viewing tips from the international media. Social researchers Michèlle Bal and Marijn Stok conducted research during the Green Challenge. By filling in short surveys, participants were invited to help science along by providing insight into sustainable and unsustainable behaviours.

“I expected to reach people who are probably already ‘green’, but I hoped that unexpected angles and a positive approach would offer new insights to participants and inspire them. The research linked to the challenge was intended to provide additional depth, as well, of course, as providing the researchers with a research group. Much of the content behind the little doors came from the archive of General Studies or referred to research done at Utrecht University. We wrote all of the texts ourselves: no small job, but worth it. Participants could leave feedback every day, and I got loads of enthusiastic replies!”

Laura Mol is the project leader of Green Challenge and a programme maker at the Centre for Science and Culture

If you’d like to find out more, have a look at the Green Challenge at sg.uu.nl/challenge

📷 **Illustrations:** Frank-Jan van Lunteren

“I really enjoyed the online Advent calendar of the Green Challenge. It provides a little online tic to return to the theme every day and find out which initiatives you yourself can take. If I remember right, the messages were positive almost every day. I for one am always conscious of the need for sustainability, so I already knew quite a bit. I especially enjoy using the challenge and then sharing my actions and thoughts, in the hope that this will inspire actions and thoughts in turn.”

Priscilla Haring took part in the Green Challenge

“To us, this was an interesting opportunity to do research ‘in real life’. We found it innovative and challenging to come up with a format that would work over the long term, in this case at least throughout the month. That was the tricky part; not all participants joined in all month long. As a result, participant numbers fluctuated between the different data sets in our study. But we had a great time devising a study that would work in practice and would really be able to encourage people to make (more) sustainable decisions.”

Dr Michèlle Bal and Dr Marijn Stok are lecturers and researchers at the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences



Facts and figures



1.200



In 2021, **1,200** questions were collected for the Utrecht Research Agenda over the course of various lustrum activities.

553



A selection of **553** questions were asked in the programme A word about tomorrow, held in 7 district libraries in the city of Utrecht.

58



Since 2017, **58** researchers received a donation from the Public Engagement Seed Fund to develop a public activity; in 2021, this involved 11 researchers.

2.000



The youngest visitor to the 2021 Betweter Festival was **17**; the oldest visitor was **73**. The festival was completely sold out, drawing **2,000** visitors.

1.670



Over **1,670** former lab animals have already been adopted rather than euthanised, thanks in part to cooperation between Animal Rights, the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals and Utrecht University. They include **419** mice, **958** rats, **277** chickens, **5** goats, **6** hamsters, **10** zebra finches, **1** python and **1** iguana.

183



To attract a more diverse audience, **183** tickets were gifted this year during Operatie Breinbreker via partners such as Taal Doet Meer, Het Vergeten Kind, Welkom in Utrecht and Jeugdfonds Sport en Cultuur.

542



In 2021, the Centre for Science and Culture cooperated with **542** researchers.

307



307 persons have already subscribed to the public engagement newsletter full of inspiring stories, special projects and professionalisation content. *

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