A better environment starts with reflection

Walter Immerzeel
Studying the Himalayas

Using drifters to collect ocean plastic
Ten years ago, when I’d ask researchers why they didn’t speak out publicly about the climate crisis, they’d usually reply, “I don’t want to be seen as an activist.” They also told me it could be damaging to their scientific careers. I’d counter by asking, “Why would it be scary or activist to say you’re concerned on the basis of your scientific knowledge?” I must say there’s been a partial change in attitudes since then. Many leading scientists around the world are now speaking out about the danger of disruptive climate change, and some have even joined movements like Extinction Rebellion. I think everyone who understands the issues should speak out and raise major concerns. That also goes for the University as an institution. You can do that while you’re also working to develop solutions. We’ll have to push harder for change, because the political system and the government’s regulatory and legal machinery tend to be extremely slow and inert. It often takes a real disaster to force a breakthrough. For example, the Netherlands built the Delta Works after the 1953 flood disaster.

Last year, we built an LNG terminal for imported liquefied natural gas in Groningen in less than a year. It normally takes six to eight years just to get a permit. We also need that kind of urgency when it comes to climate change. We need to follow the science and get things done now, rather than just sitting around waiting for disasters to happen.

Marjan Minnesma
Director of the Urgenda Foundation
She received the first Alumnus of the Year Award in 2016 and is chair of the jury for this year’s award.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Reflection and/or action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>“Toaism — the path to wisdom. I always thought that was something worth striving for”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Things need to change ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>The search for hydrogen recipes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The big picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Hall of fame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Making it work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Dual interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>A message from ... the Himalayas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Life after graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Past and present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Tips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Tim’s perspective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Carolijn Terwindt
Human rights activist and artist

April 2023 — Illuster
The big picture

words O. Sulpis, P. Agrawal, M. Wolters et al., based on Aragonite dissolution protects calcite at the seafloor. Nat Commun 13, 1104 (2022)

image Alexander Semenov/Science Photo Library
Butterfly blennies, the unsung heroes of the climate crisis

The open ocean, far from the coast, is home to some very special creatures called butterfly blennies. These tiny creatures wear a shell that they produce from the mineral aragonite.

Utrecht University researchers Olivier Sulpis, Jack Middelburg and Mariette Wolthers and their colleagues from the Université de Liège, University of Lincoln and University of Leeds studied the decomposition process of aragonite and calcite. Calcite is another mineral used by organisms like mussels and oysters to build their shells. The researchers were surprised to find calcite all over the seabed but very little aragonite. This seemingly contradicts recent studies showing that butterfly blennies produce vast amounts of aragonite at the ocean surface. So how can we explain this apparent paradox?

The butterfly blenny’s shell is very sensitive to climate change. Oceans acidify as atmospheric CO2 levels increase. The butterfly blenny’s shell is the first to be affected. Acidification causes the aragonite from which the shell is made to dissolve more rapidly than calcite.

When aragonite dissolves, it partially offsets the process of ocean acidification. This phenomenon is referred to as a buffer effect: the mineral — and the butterfly blenny itself — plays a crucial role in regulating ocean acidity and thus CO2 uptake and the overall climate.

This is why butterfly blennies are typically seen as canaries in the proverbial coal mine: they serve as a warning sign of growing acidification, which causes their shells to become thinner and can impact population levels.
Utrecht University is proud of each and every one of its graduates, and alumni are an important part of Utrecht University’s academic community. But where do they all end up? In this section, Illuster presents some major appointments from the past six months.

Roeland van der Rijst
MA in Physics & Astronomy and Philosophy of Science (2003) has been appointed professor of Educational Sciences in Leiden.

Jolien Roos-Hesselink
MA in Medicine (1985) has been appointed managing director of the Dutch CardioVascular Alliance.

Piet Hein Buiting
MA in Medicine (1985); MA in History (1989) has been appointed chair of the Association of Medical Specialists effective 1 January 2023.

Mirjam Bikker
MA in Dutch Law (2008) has been appointed parliamentary party chair of the ChristenUnie party in the Dutch Lower House.

Maarten van Aalst
MA in Astronomy (1998) and PhD in Nature and Astronomy (2005) has been appointed as the new managing director at the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI).

Arian Steenbruggen
MA in Geochemistry (1994); PhD in Earth Sciences (1999) has been appointed member of the Fontys University of Applied Sciences Executive Board, charged with Education and Research.

Naomi Mestrum
Arabic, New Persian and Turkish languages and culture has been appointed director of CIDI, the Centre for Information and Documentation on Israel, effective 1 January 2023.

Aris Prins
MA in Pharmacy (2003) has been reappointed chair of the Royal Dutch Society for the Advancement of Pharmacy (KNMP).

Lonneke Ijsseleijjk
MA in Environmental Biology (2017), PhD in Environmental Biology (2021) is one of several researchers to win the Stairway to Impact Award.

Wilma ten Wolde
MA in Musicology has been awarded the Concertgebouw “Young Talent Award” in recognition of her National Women’s Youth Choir.

Ruud Sondag
MA in Law (1986) has been appointed acting CEO of the Schiphol Group.

Arne van Hout
MA in Dutch Law (1998) and MA in Environmental Science (1999) has been appointed Director-General of Public Administration and Democratic Rule of Law at the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.

Niko Wanders
PhD in Physical Geography (2015) was one of five Utrecht University staff members to receive a €1.5 million European Research Council Starting Grant for research.

Hydrologist
Niko Wanders’ “MultiDry project”

Multi-year droughts have become increasingly common in recent decades. The phenomenon is occurring all over the world, in places like Chile, South Africa, California as well as the Netherlands. Droughts have a negative impact in many areas, such as agriculture, drinking water, energy supply and ecosystems. In the case of multi-year droughts, these effects take decades to reverse. However, they are becoming more frequent and prolonged.

Prolonged droughts are fundamentally different from “normal” droughts. Assistant Professor Wanders’ ERC grant-winning research project aims to explore the complexities of multi-year droughts and identify their causes and impacts on vegetation, groundwater systems and human water consumption. The results will be presented to policymakers and water managers around the world to help them prepare for and minimise the effects of future droughts.

Roeland van der Rijst
MA in Physics & Astronomy and Philosophy of Science (2003) has been appointed professor of Educational Sciences in Leiden.

Niko Wanders
PhD in Physical Geography (2015) was one of five Utrecht University staff members to receive a €1.5 million European Research Council Starting Grant for research.

Hydrologist
Niko Wanders’ “MultiDry project”

Multi-year droughts have become increasingly common in recent decades. The phenomenon is occurring all over the world, in places like Chile, South Africa, California as well as the Netherlands. Droughts have a negative impact in many areas, such as agriculture, drinking water, energy supply and ecosystems. In the case of multi-year droughts, these effects take decades to reverse. However, they are becoming more frequent and prolonged.

Prolonged droughts are fundamentally different from “normal” droughts. Assistant Professor Wanders’ ERC grant-winning research project aims to explore the complexities of multi-year droughts and identify their causes and impacts on vegetation, groundwater systems and human water consumption. The results will be presented to policymakers and water managers around the world to help them prepare for and minimise the effects of future droughts.

Want to be “named”? Email us your new position at alumni@uu.nl. Who knows? You could see yourself in the next edition of Illuster.
Honorary doctorates

Prof. Corinne Le Quéré (University of East Anglia, UK) — on the right in the picture — and Prof. Sonia Seneviratne (ETHZ Zurich, Switzerland) received honorary doctorates during the University’s anniversary celebrations (the Anniversary Day, on 26 March). Both have been nominated by the Pathways to Sustainability strategic research theme. Le Quéré specialises in atmospheric and oceanographic research and has made important contributions to the IPCC. Seneviratne is a climate scientist and mainly focuses on human involvement in climate impacts such as heat and droughts. She is also active in the IPCC.

Researching the history of slavery

The Executive Board has established a steering committee to shed light on the University’s historical involvement in slavery. Several faculties are already conducting research in this area; the steering committee will be coordinating these activities and has been awarded a budget of 75,000 euros for the year.

TerInfo project wins Brouwer Award

At the start of this year, the Royal Holland Society of Humanities and Sciences (KHMW) named Utrecht University History Professor Beatrice de Graaf’s TerInfo project winner of the Brouwer Award, to the amount of €100,000. The Brouwer Award is given to civil society initiatives that reinforce the sense of mutual trust in Dutch society. The TerInfo project aims to help schools address the issues of terrorism and political violence and contribute to students’ resilience. TerInfo teaching materials are available free of charge to all teachers in primary, secondary and vocational education. The jury was impressed by the quality of the teaching materials and their relevance to current events.

AnnamAKe

Can we* do it again?

* 1953: Colijnsplaat is spared as villagers join forces to hold up the flood defences. The schoolmaster can be seen warning for approaching waves from the dike.
If we want to tackle the plastic problem as efficiently as possible, we’ll need to remove plastic waste from the ocean as quickly as possible. It would obviously be even better to prevent it from ending up there in the first place, but that just isn’t realistic, unfortunately,” Erik van Sebille says about the main takeaway from five years of research on ocean plastics. Van Sebille has been studying how “things” — plankton, fish, but especially plastics — are carried along by ocean currents. To this end, he and his team have developed a computer model that can simulate the trajectory of virtual plastic particles in order to pinpoint the origin and ultimate destination of ocean plastic waste.

North Sea and Wadden Sea
We can then use that knowledge to tackle the plastic problem. “Beaches are the most effective place to clean up plastic. The plastic waste on beaches is easy to reach and hasn’t been broken down into tiny particles yet.” Once it has been out in the ocean for a while, it will gradually fragment from large macroplastic fragments into smaller and smaller particles that are harder to remove. Most of the fragmentation process takes place on beaches. Plastic waste can eventually fragment into so-called nanoplastics that are not even visible to the naked eye and are almost impossible to clean up.

That means cleaning up beaches is a good way to tackle the problem of ocean plastics. So what is the most effective approach? “You could just go to the beach on a nice day and get started. If you want to be effective and clean up on a large scale, though, you’ll need to figure out where and when the most plastic washes ashore. You can then clean everything up on the spot.”

Van Sebille has been working with Stefanie Ypma and the Galapagos Conservation Trust over the past few years to develop a
Bequests for a better future

The education and research we conduct at Utrecht University helps to advance humanity. A bequest to science will ensure that new generations of students and researchers can flourish and make their own valuable contributions to society.

You can also contribute to a better future after your own lifetime. Alumni donations are crucial to the University and help us to promote student development and facilitate groundbreaking research. A bequest to science will help us resolve societal problems and create a better world for everyone. Every donation helps — no matter how large or small — leaving a sustainable legacy for future generations.

A bequest or legacy in support of the University can be put to various uses, such as the advancement of scientific research and student scholarships. However, your bequest could also make a huge difference to the University Museum or the Botanical Gardens.

Please contact Robbert Jan Feunekes for more information about the various options (r.j.feunekes@uu.nl, 06–44225014).

Help out!

You can also contribute to the ongoing research on a plastic-free North Sea and Wadden Sea. Erik van Sebille’s project is among the recipients of the Utrecht University Fund’s annual Pay it Forward campaign. Visit Pay It Forward – Donate – Utrecht University (uu.nl) or donate directly by using the QR code:

You can adopt your own drifter from €500. For more information, please contact c.a.vandebeek@uu.nl

Predictive tool for the Galapagos Islands, a unique and fragile ecosystem that is currently under huge threat from plastic waste. He now aims to do the same closer to home, in the North Sea and the Wadden Sea. Siren Rühs, a postdoc working in Van Sebille’s research group, will conduct this research building on the experience gained in the Galapagos. Rühs: “The Galapagos tool is a proof of concept for our approach to identifying the most effective clean-up sites. In the case of the Wadden Sea and the North Sea, we’ll be factoring in more information on regional ocean dynamics, like tidal movements and the water receding from the Wadden Sea.”

**Drifters**

As Rühs explains, it will be crucial to validate the model’s output “in the real world”. This will require drifters: reusable, floating buoys the size of a frisbee, with built-in GPS. The drifters are carried by the same ocean currents as the plastic, and their location data provide valuable information that can be used to verify the model’s output.

The Utrecht University Fund has launched a fundraising campaign to help Van Sebille and Rühs finance these drifters. The target amount of €25,000 covers the purchase of some 40 to 50 drifters, enough to map variations in the ocean currents. In addition to being useful, that process is also fun to observe, as Van Sebille explains, “People can also track the drifters in real time on a website, and they can even name their own drifter. That means you’ll be able to monitor currents in the North Sea and the Wadden Sea in real time soon.”

Dr. Siren Rühs is a physical oceanographer and has been working as a postdoc at Erik van Sebille’s research group since January 2022. She previously studied and obtained her PhD at the University of Kiel in Germany.

Geke Poolen (25) is researching the use of artificial intelligence in predicting recurrent thrombosis. Her research is partly funded through the bequest of Medicine alumna Annie van Leerzem (1933–2018) www.uu.nl/en/van-leerzem-fund.
The legal aspects of water
What role do the oceans play in sustainability issues? How do you prevent rivers from flooding? And what happens when we cannot meet our water quality standards? Seline Trevisanut and Herman Kasper Gilissen explore these and other “water issues” on a daily basis. While both researchers have their own specific area of expertise, they are focused on the same overarching question: what role does the law play in all these processes?

words Hanneke Olivier
image Bas van Hattum

There are no rules at sea, right? Seline Trevisanut, professor of international law and sustainability, regularly encounters that misconception. “The age-old notion of a raging sea teeming with pirates where anyone can do as they please has proven persistent. In reality, however, the seas are a highly regulated space. And that’s my area of expertise: the sustainability and governance of our oceans.

“When it comes to the ocean, I’m fascinated by the sense of interconnectedness. All the world’s oceans are interconnected, and we depend on them for our survival. They’re the planet’s lungs; we need them to breathe, for biodiversity, for food. Organising a robust international governance system is both crucial and complex, as you can imagine.”

“This won’t end well”
The year is 1995, and Herman Kasper Gilissen is driving along the dyke bordering the Lower Rhine with his mother. The water is almost sloshing over the embankment. Twelve-year-old Herman Kasper watches the scene with wide eyes and thinks to himself, “This won’t end well.” Back home, he learns about large-scale evacuations in the river area and is deeply affected. In fact, that one childhood experience led him to choose his future field; he would go on to become assistant professor of Environmental Law: “Whereas Seline focuses on sustainability and oceans and approaches things from an international law perspective, I’m more focused on national water systems: rivers, ditches, streams, dykes and catchment and storage areas. On a more specialised level, I focus on aspects like water quality, flood protection and the effects of desiccation.”

People usually fail to associate water with legislation, but there are so many legal aspects and organisational, societal, economic and environmental interests at play. “Water quality is also a major issue,” Herman Kasper continues. “The Netherlands is expected to comply with the Water Framework Directive by 2027, but there’s no way we’re going to make it. So who’s really responsible for that? There’s no clear-cut answer. To some extent, we’ve been kicking the problem down the road, using every possible loophole to avoid imposing any harsh measures on major polluters like the agricultural sector. Still, it’s not just the government’s responsibility; the market, businesses and citizens also have some degree of control and responsibility.”
“The same applies to desiccation. We need to find solutions on different scales, from a rain barrel in the garden to more efficient storage and retention systems for huge volumes of water. You can also avoid using drinking water for unnecessary purposes, like cooling barn roofs or washing tractors. We need to be more conscious of water scarcity and consumption issues across the board, and that’s something we’re all responsible for.”

Political and moral aspects
And what about our responsibility as scientists? Are researchers basically activists in a way? Seline: “I suppose you could see us that way. In a sense, it’s actually impossible not to be an activist. We’re drawing attention to specific problems and potential solutions, which basically means taking a stand. And once you take a stand, that inevitably has some political and moral ramifications.

“For years now, the importance of our oceans hasn’t really been factored into broader sustainability processes. We still need to convince people that the sea plays a key role in sustainability and highlight the need for regulations. Oceans help to keep the earth’s climate stable by absorbing rising heat from the atmosphere. They’re also the most important “sink” for greenhouse gases. I see it as part of my job to make people more aware of that. If that means I get labelled an activist, so be it.”

Herman Kasper: “We are quite activist in a sense, but everything we do is based on facts and arguments. All our research is based around the question: how can the law, and by extension policy, help solve the major problems of the future? Looking beyond existing frameworks will take creativity and the ability to think outside the box.”

Seline: “Sustainability transitions are critical to our future, so we need to educate young people. We’ve launched a new Master’s programme focused on sustainability and law in Europe. The programme emphasises the crucial role of legislation in sustainability transitions. When does
legislation create problems and how can we solve them? Where does it create opportunities and how can we use them?”

**A single cog in the machine**

**Herman Kasper**: “Utrecht University is the only Dutch university with a specialised research centre on water and sustainability, chairs in water law and international maritime law, and a wealth of specialised knowledge. UU has broad expertise in the fields of water, climate and sustainability, and that’s not limited to the legal perspective. I think that’s crucial: law is just a single cog in the machine. Utrecht University also has an excellent network for interdisciplinary cooperation. Our external network is also improving thanks to strategic knowledge alliances with partners like the universities of Eindhoven and Wageningen and UMC Utrecht.”

**Seline**: “We’re also collaborating and co-creating with a diverse range of international partners, including other research institutions, policymakers, the UN, think tanks, the EU, companies, the Dutch government and international organisations. We also make a real effort to stay in touch with all our stakeholders.”

**Hopeful**

**Seline**: “The knowledge that we’re educating good lawyers who will be able to work on sustainability issues at different levels of governance and management in the near future fills me with optimism. I think there’s definitely hope if we can keep working on sustainability issues across the board with our partners. Still, there’s a lot of work to be done.”

**Herman Kasper**: “I’m a bit more pessimistic when it comes to water quality.” Our failure to meet environmental standards has implications for the economy, ecosystem quality, biodiversity and our health. On the bright side, we’re investing in these problems and working to solve them. I’m also glad to see a lot of positive developments in terms of policy, regulations and the public debate.”

---

**Seline Trevisanut**

(Agen, 1979) has served as professor of international law and sustainability since 1 February 2018. She joined Utrecht University in 2012 as a “Marie Curie Fellow” and received an ERC Starting Grant for her “Sustainable Ocean” project in December 2014. Before coming to Utrecht, Seline conducted research and taught at institutions including Columbia University, the European University Institute, UC Berkeley and the universities of Cagliari, Milan and Trento. She studied law at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and obtained her PhD at the University of Milan. Seline is affiliated with the Utrecht Centre for Water, Ocean and Sustainability Law.

---

“**It’s really important that research isn’t just published in professional journals. It should have a much broader reach**”

---
Things need to change... and adjusting the central heating system is just not enough
Utrecht University contributes to a better world and a more sustainable society by promoting impactful sustainable solutions through its education and research. But how sustainable are the University’s own operations? The goal for 2030: climate neutral, zero waste and more biodiversity.

Iluster visited Lysanne van der Lem, Sustainability Office manager, and Dorinne Raaimakers, Biodiversity project coordinator at the same organisational unit, to find out just how sustainable the University currently is. We met up with them in the Green Office — what’s in a name? You know, that “little office behind the Alumni Office with all those plants”.

**A driving force for sustainability**
The Sustainability Office, a department with a staff of 10 full-time employees supported by interns and volunteers, aims to be the driving force for sustainability at UU. The Office has a three-pronged approach. First, it will be working from the bottom up by engaging as many people as possible and listening to their ideas. The Green Office — headquartered in the heart of Utrecht Science Park on Heidelberglaan — was created for that very purpose. The well-lit, spacious office serves great (and sustainable!) tea and welcomes students and staff looking to discuss their sustainable ideas. A fund aimed at providing financial support for high-impact initiatives is set to be established over the course of 2023 as well. The Green Office is also set to introduce satellite teams made up of students and staff at all faculties.

A lot of people here are intrinsically motivated to make the University more sustainable,” Dorinne happily explains. “That was great to see when I started working here years ago. It’s definitely not like that at every organisation,” Lysanne adds. They are only too happy to nurture those seeds.

The Sustainability Office is also taking a more experimental approach, whereby the entire campus serves as a living lab. A total of 21 sustainable university development labs — also known as UULabs — have been set up. Here, students, researchers and social partners experiment together in live scenarios to find ways of making the University more sustainable. The Van Unnik building, which is due for a thorough renovation after 50 years, is a case in point. Research areas include solar energy, bio-based building materials and behavioural psychology. All UU Living Labs apply a scientific, innovative and experimental approach. While concrete results may not necessarily be guaranteed, more knowledge certainly is.

Finally, the Sustainability Office works to connect all activities on operational sustainability. The office ensures that all activities across the University are monitored and based on quantifiable targets. “We’re a major organisation at the vanguard of the public debate on sustainability,” Lysanne explains. “That means we need to have our own clear vision on sustainability. Practise what you teach.” The issue of sustainability is firmly anchored in the University’s long-term strategic plan. Everyone can read about our targets and hold the Executive Board accountable if necessary. The Sustainability Office publishes the results of all sustainability efforts in the annual Sustainability Monitor.
So has the Sustainability Office been fulfilling its role as a driving force so far? “All the road sides and lawns — which jointly make up 10 per cent of the Science Park grounds — have been managed in an eco-friendly way since last year. We’re letting the grass grow tall to accommodate more flowering plants and insects. That will help tie together the various landscape elements and create nature corridors within Utrecht Science Park. The park is surrounded by wildlife areas and estates on three sides. For example, we’re creating a green corridor between the Oostbroek Estate and Fort Rhijnauwen — a 1.6-kilometre eco corridor that will eventually become a haven for all kinds of indigenous plants and animals.” The photos on these pages were also taken here.

“We’ve managed to make biodiversity a stakeholder,” Dorinne explains. She means the University is now factoring the need to enhance and restore biodiversity into new spatial development plans. A biodiversity council made up of in-house researchers with their own specific operational management expertise has also been established. “Reducing the University’s ecological footprint can also help reduce the burden on biodiversity elsewhere in the world,” Dorinne explains.

Another practical example from 2022 would be the “Flip the switch” campaign, which is set to continue throughout 2023. The goal is to achieve a 15% annual energy saving. That means literally turning down the heating, installing solar panels on almost all suitable roofs, replacing outdoor lighting with LED lights and switching them off at night, among many other measures. New policy initiatives include our sustainable travel policy: trips under seven hundred kilometres will no longer involve air travel unless the journey lasts longer than eight hours.

**Time for debate as well as action**

Climate change is ultimately about the cumulative amount of CO2 in the atmosphere. In other words, the sooner we reduce emissions, the better. Things need to change, and that also applies here at the University. “We are taking a stand and highlighting challenges and problems further down the road. In the end, we want to maintain close ties with all our stakeholders, including those with a more critical attitude, like University Rebellion and Scientists4Future. The University is basically one big living lab.”

For more information, visit uu.nl/organisatie/duurzame-uu
I’m on a research expedition high up in the Himalayas, at Rara Lake — Nepal’s largest freshwater lake. We spend days chugging along in our jeep at 10 kilometres an hour until we reach the lake. Along the way, we install weather stations and soil moisture sensors. We’re immersed in a huge variety of landscapes and climate zones over the course of our journey.

My wife and I spent four months trekking through the Himalayas on our honeymoon in 1999. It turned out to be the start of a long and close relationship with Nepal, its mighty Himalayan peaks and its people. We lived and worked there for two years in 2003 and 2004 and returned for many research expeditions. I study the impact of climate change on water cycles in the high mountains, especially the Himalayas. You could do that using computer models or satellite images, but you’ll need to take measurements in the mountains and combine those with other methods to truly understand how the system works.

We crossed the low-lying part of the immense Karnali River basin earlier on in the expedition. I’m travelling with a PhD student who is studying the combined impact of changing land use and climate change on the flow of water to the low-lying Bardia National Park. The research is being conducted as part of the Save the tiger! project, a collaboration between ecologists, sociologists, hydrologists and geologists aimed at understanding changes in the national park’s tiger habitat.

It proves to be an eventful trip, and we experience an earthquake on one of the first nights: its epicentre is just a few dozen kilometres away. Still, it’s a dream come true to be surrounded by tigers, crocodiles and tropical vegetation in the lowland plains one day and find ourselves among the world’s highest snow-capped mountains — crucial to human and animal water supplies — just a few days later."

“My close relationship with Nepal began during my honeymoon in 1999”

Walter Immerzeel studied Environmental Sciences and obtained his PhD at the Utrecht University’s Department of Physical Geography in 2008. As professor of mountain hydrology, he studies the impact of climate change on glaciers in Asia and the availability of water to the millions of people living downstream. Among other honours, Walter received a Veni and Vidi Grant from the Dutch Research Council and was awarded the prestigious Macelwane medal by the American Geophysical Union.
“I want to change the way the world works”

“I started studying Anthropology out of a desire to understand and change the world,” Carolijn Terwindt explains. She went on to study Law and became a human rights lawyer, artist and activist. Her current roles at Embassy of the North Sea and the Clean Clothes Campaign combine intellectual challenges and interpersonal contact.

Back in school, Carolijn Terwindt was more inclined to the sciences; she loved solving problems. She even briefly tried studying Mathematics but eventually settled on Cultural Anthropology. However, she felt the programme was a bit too theoretical and decided to study Law as well. “It seemed more concrete and practical to me. I’d always been fascinated by conflict and decided to specialise in criminal law and criminology.”

Carolijn discovered her love of research during a work placement at the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre in India as part of her Cultural Anthropology studies. “I was doing my final research project in Chile and became fascinated by the subject of criminal justice in times of conflict. Law is always presented as this objective thing, but it’s actually very much subject to interpretation. That inspired my subsequent PhD research. Those years of research also shaped me politically.”
From academia to activism

Meanwhile, she was itching to get that PhD. She ended up earning her JSD* at Columbia Law School with a study exploring why and when protests are criminalised and prosecuted in liberal democracies. After years of academic work, Carolijn consciously chose a different path. “I wanted to contribute to change in a more direct way. I was able to do that in my position at the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights in Berlin. It was a great way to combine my academic background and research experience. For example, I filed lawsuits against international companies to improve working conditions in their manufacturing countries. I really wanted to help change the economic system. Working with factory workers, local farmers and plantation workers was especially rewarding on a personal level.” She spent over seven years fighting for a better world but ultimately decided her legal work was not making enough of a difference. Carolijn quit her job in 2019 in search of more radical alternatives.

From the head to the heart

Her newfound freedom led her to travel. In 2019, Carolijn became an artist in residence in Karachi (Pakistan), where she performed with Pakistani musicians and took up painting. She followed that with another artist residency in Goa (India) in 2020. There, she shot Free Pass, a short film on the impact of mass tourism and the disastrous effects of climate change on the people of Goa. This was followed by art projects in Berlin and Ruigoord. So what did her artistic forays bring her?

“Each new step was only possible following the step that had come before it”

“My academic and legal work is all about the intellect. My art focuses on human interaction. I don’t just want to spend my time fighting against things that aren’t working or are harming the planet. I also want to help build the kind of world I want to live in, a place with different kinds of values.” Among other activities, Carolijn is currently working for Embassy of the North Sea, where she is developing a European network of researchers and artists exploring ways to represent water bodies and marine organisms. So what will be her next step? “I don’t know yet. Each new step was only possible following the step that had come before it. I’ve just started a course in Taoism — the path to wisdom. I already thought that was something worth striving for, even as a child.”

* JSD Juris Scientiae Doctoris, a term unknown to many, is the official title for a PhD in law.

Want to learn more about Carolijn’s diverse range of projects?

- Huilen met Vreemden (Crying with Strangers) audio drama — carolinterwindt.wordpress.com/ performance/huilen-bij-vreemden;
- Campaign in collaboration with Peng! Artists’ Collective — youtube.com/ watch?v=vV4gg74Y4iU&t=378s;
- Short film Free Pass in Goa — vimeo.com/503836702/0f659c367d;
- Artist residency in Karachi — vaslart.org/jamming-in-karachi;
- Chris van der Borgh and Carolijn Terwindt (both UU): NGOs under Pressure in Partial Democracies.
“By the 1970s, the facts were all out there. We knew that depletion of the earth’s resources was a big problem, and we knew what had to be done to turn the tide. Why was so little actually done?” That is what students ask Liesbeth van de Grift, professor of “International history in relation to the environment”. De Grift feels it is a crucial question to reflect on. “For one thing, it could help us avoid having to ask exactly the same question about this period 20 years from now.”
“The word crisis signifies that we’ve reached a critical point”
Climate scientists at Utrecht University are researching glaciers and rising sea levels and co-authoring UN climate reports. Other researchers are working on solutions like alternative energy sources or are examining how policies can promote societal transitions. However, we will also need to take a good look at ourselves if we really want to understand the climate crisis. We will need to examine the culture that produced this crisis and is reproducing our destructive relationship with nature. We need to explore the factors that empower or impede change and the values that are — or should be — driving the much-needed transition. A historical perspective can be very useful in that process, according to Liesbeth van de Grift. If only to make us aware that our current frames of reference, the way we see things today, are not set in stone. She wants to expose the historically embedded ideas underpinning the current debate. “After all, the concepts we use — our frames of reference or discourse — ultimately shape the world.”

Van de Grift’s research focuses on environmental, consumer-protection, agricultural and rural development policies and explores the evolving relationship between governments, experts, NGOs and citizens. She has a keen interest in the philosophy of social engineering and its consequences and has studied subjects such as the establishment of communist regimes after World War II, internal colonisation in Europe and the development of agricultural policies. She subsequently focused on the history of interest representation.

Our ideas as to whose interests really matter are always evolving. The words we use have impact. Who gets to have a say in policy decisions? That changes over time. Environmental organisations were not seen as stakeholders until the last few decades. The same applies to our notions on who bears responsibility and what the right solutions are. Van de Grift’s inaugural lecture cited the example of the government’s “A better environment starts with yourself” campaign. An entire generation grew up with that slogan. It assumed that we could solve environmental problems by changing consumer behaviour. Van de Grift: “Separating your trash, cutting energy consumption and using sustainable cat litter: ‘We’ll all just do our bit’ and everything will be fine. Except things weren’t fine!”

It is important to recognise these sorts of frames, because they are based on very different world views. For example, a supermarket chain might claim it cannot predict whether it will keep offering two-
Management will claim it is “listening” to customers and “has a sense of consumer needs”, stating, “We just want to offer our customers options.” That implies it is all up to the consumer, with supermarket groups taking a wait-and-see approach. On the other end of the spectrum, we see advocates of “true pricing”, who want the damage to people and the environment to be reflected in product prices. They feel companies are too quick to pass the buck. In their view, consumers are actually quite willing to contribute to sustainability but are being held back by the current pricing system.

Van de Grift is trying to find out how such ideas arise and how they become dominant. Sometimes, she tries to exert some influence herself. For example, as a member of the Utrecht Young Academy in 2020, she joined other members in urging the University to accelerate its sustainability ambitions, sign a Climate Action Pledge and state unequivocally that the climate crisis exists. “The Executive Board wasn’t quite ready for that at the time, but that’s changing now,” Van de Grift observes. It is a development she is happy to see. Again: words matter. And while the word crisis does seem to have been devalued somewhat lately due to its use as a blanket term for all sorts of problems, there is strong scientific evidence that we need to stop warming now to save the climate. Van de Grift: “The word crisis signifies that we’ve reached a critical point. As the work of UU researchers clearly demonstrates, the much-needed systemic transition isn’t happening fast enough. We wanted to call on the University to critically examine our own organisation: what are we doing in terms of teaching, research and operations; how are we funded? Do those efforts justify calling ourselves agents of change? It’s not just about ditching plastic bottles and turning down the thermostat. We also need to reflect on what’s just and what’s right. We need to examine our history of exploitation and recognise that the University has played a role in the system that got us where we are today. We also definitely need to listen to our students more. We need to take their ideas and questions seriously and let them contribute their own perspectives to our research. We really need their input.”

“If history has taught us anything, it’s that major changes tend to happen unexpectedly”

“In other words, there are very different perspectives on who the consumer really is, and their interests are defined and understood in different ways,” Van de Grift explains. “It’s important to be aware of those differences. After all, the dominant perception and frame ultimately shapes the political and social debate and determines our potential solutions. In other words, do you make consumers pay deposits for bottles, or do you impose a plastic tax on business?”
Fellow historian Beatrice de Graaf recently wrote a column in the NRC newspaper entitled, “What if that systemic climate transition actually means real revolution”. As she points out, revolutions of the magnitude we currently need have never been uncontroversial. “When it comes to the current crisis, almost everyone is to blame and has something to lose. We’re all afraid of the coming revolution, so we prefer to divert attention from the real drama by creating minor ones elsewhere.” Van de Grift agrees. “We’ll need to make massive changes. We’ve been putting off asking who will foot the bill for a long time. We didn’t want to accept that the sky actually wasn’t the limit. We’ll need to shake up so many power structures and vested interests.”

“I do feel pessimistic sometimes,” Van de Grift admits. “But still... If you look at the issue of pollution, we have actually regulated and improved a lot since the 1970s. The judiciary has also been playing a more active role lately. Examples include the recent ruling on nitrogen and the Urgenda case. If history has taught us anything, it’s that major changes tend to happen unexpectedly. When you look back on those events, you can see how certain actions and events had a cumulative effect. Many changes started with a radical idea that initially seemed unimaginable to people at the time but eventually became a reality. For example, take democracy, the abolition of slavery or women’s suffrage.”

“That’s why this is such an exciting time to do research. A lot of people — especially students — are starting to ask questions and taking a broader, more multi-disciplinary approach. For example, researchers are trying to find out how we arrived at the notion that economic growth is some sort of prerequisite for our existence. They’re also trying to figure out how we came to see ourselves as disconnected from the natural world rather than part of it. That mindset might explain why we still aren’t fully aware of the dangers facing our planet and its inhabitants or the fact that some people are far more exposed to them than others. Environmental Humanities is a rapidly developing field, in which humanities researchers collaborate with natural scientists or even artists. It’s very interesting.”

“On a personal note, I hope my historical research can help to highlight that fluidity. Existing ideas and institutions aren’t necessarily the ‘best’ option because they’ve come out on top. They’re the product of a lingering history. I’m trying to show people how transitory they are and contribute to more self-reflection on an individual and collective level. As a society, that can help us figure out whether those frameworks are really still helpful and relevant in understanding the world around us and shaping our societies. As far as I’m concerned, that need for reflection also applies to the University. That is why I am glad this year’s Anniversary Day is themed around the climate crisis. I hope that sparks more critical self-reflection and ultimately change.”

**Are those frameworks really still helpful and relevant in understanding the world around us?**
A week of interaction and inspiration

Utrecht University and the Utrecht University Fund are working to build a better world for tomorrow. That involves conducting research on complex issues, connecting thinkers and doers and offering students and alumni the opportunities they need to develop. However, we cannot do it all on our own. We really need the support of the academic community — including our alumni! Together, we share knowledge, volunteer our time and donate money to make those things happen on a daily basis.

The Sharing Days will be taking place from 5 to 10 June: a week of special encounters in inspiring locations, with lots of opportunities to contribute to Utrecht University’s growth and success.

A selection from the diverse event programme:
• Come and experience the new University Museum before it opens, especially aimed at alumni with children aged 8–14.
• Share your knowledge in a citizen science project at the Faculty of Science.
• Go on a poetry tour of Utrecht’s historic city centre.
• Roll up your sleeves in the Botanical Gardens.
• Enjoy a dinner with old friends at the Faculty Club.

Register now

For more details on the programme, visit: www.uu.nl/sharingdays. Make sure to register soon, as some programmes have a limited number of places!
New knowledge is developing at a phenomenal rate. Your job undoubtedly requires knowledge that was not covered during your studies. Utrecht University’s Continuing Education programme provides the up-to-date knowledge and skills you need to remain permanently employable on the labour market, all based on the latest academic insights. From short courses to Master’s degrees, Utrecht University offers a wealth of opportunities for lifelong learning.

words Ulrike Schmidt
image Aad Goudappel
“Maybe I was born to learn”

Andreas van Grootheest studied theology after finishing secondary school, convinced he would go on to become a pastor. However, his beliefs changed over the course of his studies. He quit theology halfway through his Master’s programme and spent the next eight odd years working with his hands: as a mail prep worker, postman and cleaner. He also worked as a korfbal coach until recently.

So why go back to university?

“After years of unskilled work, which was a conscious choice on my part, I realised it wasn’t giving me much satisfaction anymore. I felt I had more to offer the world than just sorting mail! I’d always been into the sciences, and I’m fascinated by nature, so I ended up studying biology. Utrecht University was the only place where I could already take specific marine biology courses during my Bachelor’s. I already felt at home in Utrecht, so it was all pretty easy for me. I still had some study room in my final year and stumbled across the TIC course on ‘Drowning deltas’. That’s obviously a very relevant topic in the Netherlands, and I wanted to learn more about it.”

A broader perspective

Andreas’ fellow students had backgrounds in fields like physics, marine sciences and geography. “That really challenged me to take a broader perspective and explore other disciplines. We worked together to analyse what the Dutch delta might look like in 100 years for our external client the Directorate-General for Public Works and Water Management. We talked a lot about our relationship with nature. Here in the Netherlands, we tend to view nature as something external, but it makes perfect biological sense to see humans as part of the ecosystem. Apart from the actual curriculum, I also learnt some really useful skills. I love knowledge, but it tends to fade away again. Skills are much harder to learn. That’s what made this course so important for me. If nothing else, I hope I can apply that reflective attitude in my future professional life.”

Unlocking future food solutions (MOOC)

START: 4 May 2023
DURATION: 15 hours
COST: free

This Massive Open Online Course will see over 10 Utrecht University food researchers address key issues in the area of food consumption. We will be covering two interrelated themes: Food Shortages and Healthy Choices.

Sustainability in biology classes

START: 3 April 2023
DURATION: three sessions
COST: free for U-Talent and Science Partners, €150 for external participants.

What biology teacher is not looking for opportunities to tie the latest news stories on sustainability in with their own curriculum? How can we address our pupils’ major questions in an accessible way? We will give you the knowledge and tools you need for your lessons over the course of three interconnected sessions on the topic of sustainability.

Visit uu.nl/duurzaamheidbiologie

Want to keep learning?

For our full range of Continuing Education programmes, visit uu.nl/professionals.
Science

The search for hydrogen recipes

We are seeing a quiet revolution in materials research. When Nong Artrith first started her career in physics and chemistry, new chemical reactions were only being discovered in laboratories. “These days, the process is a lot faster, safe and cheaper thanks to computer simulations and artificial intelligence.”

When it comes to the energy transition, hydrogen is one of the most promising materials we have: it can be used for energy storage and serve as the basis for synthetic fuels. However, there is still a lot of work to be done, as interdisciplinary materials scientist Nong Artrith explains. “Hydrogen is already being used in industrial applications, but it still isn’t efficient and cheap enough to be used in smaller quantities — in our cars, for example. Most industrial hydrogen is also still being produced with fossil fuels, so we still have a long way to go in that respect too.”

That is because green hydrogen is not easy to produce, as Nong explains. “Admittedly, the chemical reaction is pretty straightforward: if you split a water molecule, you get one oxygen atom and two hydrogen atoms. The problem is, it’s very difficult to split a water molecule into those individual atoms; that takes a lot of energy. We can simplify that process by using a catalyst: another material that speeds up the chemical reaction. The thing is, those
Nong Artrith does not let borders between countries or between research disciplines stand in her way. Having completed a Master’s in Physics in Thailand and obtained a PhD in theoretical chemistry in Germany, she moved to the US to pursue research positions at MIT, UC Berkeley and Columbia University. She joined Utrecht University in 2021 as a tenure-track assistant professor at the Debye Institute for Nanomaterials Science.

Promising recipes
That search for a cheaper catalyst is proving to be quite challenging. “We’re studying new catalysts based on cheap materials, like iron, copper, nickel or sulphur,” Nong explains. “But there are so many ways to combine those elements, in different quantities and under different experimental conditions like temperature and pressure.”

To avoid having to test millions of different catalyst options in the lab, Nong is effectively harnessing developments in big data and AI (artificial intelligence). She has developed an AI system that can predict chemical reactions. “We trained the system to apply the physics and quantum mechanics of chemical reactions and fed it all the relevant experimental data we could. For example, you can now ask the AI system to produce a better catalyst for hydrogen production, and it will come up with some promising recipes.

We still need to test them in the lab to see if they actually work, but we’ll have fewer failed experiments, because the AI system has already made an initial selection. That makes the materials research process faster, safer and cheaper.”

Joining forces
Nong has a clear vision for the future of her field. “We could significantly improve our AI models by training them with lots of experimental data from chemistry research groups around the world. That’s why open science is so important. I am proud that we’re leading the way here at Utrecht University, and I’ve noticed more and more research groups are joining the movement lately. My own AI models and database are already open access.”

She sees clear benefits in collaboration, and that does not stop at just the academic world. “We need to start talking about sustainability with our parents, our cousins, our children — our entire village. We need to talk to them about their experiences: Why is it so hot? Why are there more frequent floods? That will help them understand the effects of climate change and the importance of sustainability more easily. Many people feel there’s nothing they can do on their own, or they’ve just got other things on their mind. Maybe they have to work seven days a week to support their families and don’t have time for activism or money for more expensive eco-friendly products. Even then, it’s important to let them know they can still make an impact by voting. If we join forces, we can elect leaders that make the right decisions.”
Ulrike Schmidt

Robin Alysha Clemens

When Jesse Boeve first started university, he dreamed of becoming CEO of a major company. Seven years, two Bachelor’s and a Master’s degree down the road, he started his first job as a policy officer at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and realised the work was too abstract for him. He now dreams of starting a vegan butcher shop. That ambition has led him to pursue an apprenticeship at Mari Pitkänen’s Kasvio* restaurant, which serves 100 per cent plant-based meals.

You just graduated as an economist, so why did you choose to work in a restaurant?

I was working at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, monitoring spending under the Sickness Benefits Act, but I never actually spoke to anyone on sickness benefits. I felt removed from the real world. I realised it’s important to me to see how my work affects people. I spent a lot of time reflecting while I was figuring out my next step. I realised it’s important to me to see how my work affects people. I spent a lot of time reflecting while I was figuring out my next step.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

My job is all about making sure people have a special evening. Still, the concept behind it goes a bit deeper than “great food’. If we can surprise guests with delicious plant-based dishes, they’ll remember that when they go home. I think that can have a real impact. Ideally, we’d love it if lots of people started eating a plant-based diet because they realise it tastes good.

What’s next ...

I want to find new ways of making plant-based food appealing to a wider audience. I want to discover amazing new things and work with great people like the ones in my team. And who knows, maybe I’ll open my own vegan butcher shop soon.

* Kasvio is located in the Metaalkathedraal on Rijksstraatweg.

A longer version of this article has been published on DUB, Utrecht University’s independent news site, featuring an interview with Mari Pitkänen. Visit dub.uu.nl for all the latest news and background information on our academic community.
“People with a plant-based diet don’t need to miss out on anything”
When it comes to sports, rowing has always been a student favourite. Utrecht is no exception, with no less than two student rowing clubs — Triton and Orca — and a local association in the form of Viking. The “Schering en Inslag” team at U.S.R. “Triton” won the first University rowing races, better known as the Varsity, on behalf of Utrecht University in 1895. The photo shows the winning team proudly posing in front of the boatshed on Kruisvaart near Croeselaan. That year’s edition of the Varsity was held on the Spaarne in Haarlem. A first place at the Varsity means “eternal glory” for the winning team, an honour no Olympic medal can compare to.

Every year, Triton — the dark blue rowing association — welcomes a new crop of about three hundred students from both Utrecht University and HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht. After an initial introduction to the sport, the novices form teams and learn the ins and outs of rowing from senior members. This period culminates in a series of competitions. The photo shows the first-year teams proving themselves in a 500-metre race on Merwedekanaal, ending at the current boathouse on Verlengde Hoogravenseweg. The new members must be dreaming of winning the Varsity someday soon.

*words* Michiel Jekel
*image* Archief- en Fotocommissie U.S.R. “Triton”
**“Out of the shade” exhibition**

The Botanical Gardens and Dutch Botanical Artists Association present “Out of the shade” (Uitgelicht!), an exhibition on shade plants. In addition to shining a light on this special plant group, the exhibition will also feature a collection of botanical art. Botanical artists have created large portraits of some 40 plant species, which can be found scattered throughout the Gardens. Shade plants, as the name suggests, prefer a somewhat darker environment. This does require all kinds of evolutionary tweaks, like large leaves capable of catching light, lots of chlorophyll, leaves with red undersides and so on.

On display at the Botanical Garden from 10:00 to 16:30 through 2 July. uu.nl/botanischetuinen

---

**FACULTY CLUB**

**Anniversary Celebrations**

The Faculty Club will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2023. In advance of the festive event this autumn, a “Fifth Anniversary Launch Party” will be held on 6 April. Visit the website for more information about the programme: uu.nl/faculty-club.

The Faculty Club also organises drinks every Thursday and a Happy Hour every first Thursday of the month. Drinks are half-price during Happy Hour, with snacks provided by the Faculty Club and caterer Vineyard. You can enjoy a hot meal after Happy Hour in the form of a daily special. Dinner reservations are not compulsory, but we do recommend securing a table in advance. Feel free to invite colleagues or friends!

Anniversary launch party on Thursday 6 April 2023 from 5 pm to 10 pm. Drinks every Thursday from 5 pm and Happy Hour every first Thursday of the month from 5 pm.

---

**FILM SERIES**

**Science & Fiction**

The School of Governance and the Louis Hartlooper Complex arthouse cinema will host the twelfth edition of the Science & Fiction film series in May and June. Over the course of four evenings, they will be screening four unique films with introductions by scientific researchers. Visitors can discuss the films with the researchers after the screening. This year’s theme is “Who’s in?” The film series will take place on 16 and 30 May and 13 and 27 June 2023.

For details, visit uu.nl/usbo/sciencefiction.
Doctor Atomic

The Utrecht Student Concert is celebrating its 200th anniversary and will be organising an ambitious project to mark the occasion: seven performances of the exciting and topical opera Doctor Atomic. In July, the Werkspoorkathedraal in Utrecht will be transformed into a festival site and opera theatre where audiences can immerse themselves in the “Manhattan Project”: the development and testing of the first atomic bomb. The opera and festival recount the story of the scientists’ incredible effort and their own doubts and fears about their creation.

Werkspoorkathedraal, 13 to 25 July. Information and tickets: doctoratomic.nl To participate in the crowdfunding campaign, visit: steun.uu.nl/project/doctor-atomic

What makes people rise up in protest?

Under what circumstances do people rise up in protest and why? What role do social networks, ideas and skills play in these processes? And why are some resistance movements fundamentally non-violent while others are specifically violent? Historian and Professor Ismee Tames (Utrecht University & NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies) studies people’s experiences in times of war and mass violence.

She will be delivering a lecture after the commemoration of UU staff and students who died in the war at the monument outside the entrance to the auditorium and the public commemoration on Dom Square.

Thursday 4 May 2023 from 20:00 to 21:30 at the University Hall auditorium

Pathways to Sustainability conference

Tuesday 4 April, Tivoli Vredenburg. Various researchers will be discussing the theme “See the future” between 9:30 and 16:30.

Botanical Garden

The Botanical Garden at Utrecht Science Park will be open again from 1 March, daily from 10:00 to 16:30. For more information: uu.nl/botanischetuinen

Veritas reunion 1973

The annual Veritas “Crown Year Reunion” — an event for members who joined in 1973 — will take place on Saturday 21 May. For more information and registration, please contact Betty Daniëls: e.c.m.daniels@ziggo.nl.

University College 25th anniversary

University College will be celebrating its fifth anniversary from 8 to 11 June, offering a wide range of activities. All former students are invited to attend the homecoming weekend.

Sharing Days

From 5 to 10 June: workshops, tours and lectures for alumni throughout the University. Registration and information: uu.nl/sharingdays

For all alumni events, visit uu.nl/alumni/agenda.

Save the date

Tips

What makes people rise up in protest?

Under what circumstances do people rise up in protest and why? What role do social networks, ideas and skills play in these processes? And why are some resistance movements fundamentally non-violent while others are specifically violent? Historian and Professor Ismee Tames (Utrecht University & NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies) studies people’s experiences in times of war and mass violence.

She will be delivering a lecture after the commemoration of UU staff and students who died in the war at the monument outside the entrance to the auditorium and the public commemoration on Dom Square.

Thursday 4 May 2023 from 20:00 to 21:30 at the University Hall auditorium

Pathways to Sustainability conference

Tuesday 4 April, Tivoli Vredenburg. Various researchers will be discussing the theme “See the future” between 9:30 and 16:30.

Botanical Garden

The Botanical Garden at Utrecht Science Park will be open again from 1 March, daily from 10:00 to 16:30. For more information: uu.nl/botanischetuinen

Veritas reunion 1973

The annual Veritas “Crown Year Reunion” — an event for members who joined in 1973 — will take place on Saturday 21 May. For more information and registration, please contact Betty Daniëls: e.c.m.daniels@ziggo.nl.

University College 25th anniversary

University College will be celebrating its fifth anniversary from 8 to 11 June, offering a wide range of activities. All former students are invited to attend the homecoming weekend.

Sharing Days

From 5 to 10 June: workshops, tours and lectures for alumni throughout the University. Registration and information: uu.nl/sharingdays

For all alumni events, visit uu.nl/alumni/agenda.
Changing of the guard

Shell CEO Ben van Beurden is making way for the company’s youngest ever CEO. Will 48-year-old Wael Sawan usher in a greener era?

I think back to my only previous experience with Shell — a recruitment event nine years ago. We played the Nexus Energy Game, a board game about the relationship between food, water and energy. Even then, the idea of multinationals flaunting their sustainability agenda at a recruitment event made me feel uncomfortable. The Nexus game makes the players build an economy around a lake. A classic example of the “Tragedy of the Commons”, in which players have to strike a balance in order to survive on a scarce water supply.

As an avid board game player, I dove right in. An economic optimisation puzzle that also involves solving a prisoner’s dilemma: Bring it on. I was assigned a country and immediately forged an alliance with a fellow player so we could claim the lake together. We crushed the competition. A consummate tyrant, I blackmailed my neighbours with the threat of draining the entire lake. After three rounds, my business partner and I divvied up a huge pile of money for the final score. For a second, I considered keeping some money from him as well. It wasn’t nice of me, but I was just focused on winning for a bit.

This doesn’t actually make any difference in terms of winning, by the way. After all, the Nexus Game doesn’t end with a winner. The score mainly reflects the players’ behaviour and its effect on the world. As is often the case with these kinds of management games, the primary school children scored significantly higher than the CEOs. After all, children would rather build a beautiful city than rule an empty lake. The game does have losers, though: I must embarrassedly conclude that I behaved like a CEO.

To the recruiter’s great credit, I was held accountable for my actions: I was not invited for another round. And that gives me some hope.

Tim Kroesen obtained his BSc in Life Sciences at University College Utrecht in 2013, followed by an MSc in Energy Science at Utrecht University. He won the Groninger Student Cabaret Festival in 2022.