

# How do we build a sustainable and just future together?

Navigating the Anthropocene

Programme

# Introduction

How do scientists from all disciplines, policymakers and practitioners, address the complex issues of the Anthropocene? We are living in an era where human activity has become a dominant influence on Earth's climate and environment, leading to new problems of social justice and sustainability. From dealing with increasing polarisation to growing environmental crises and disasters, and from rising healthcare costs to widening inequalities on Earth. How do we deal with this as scientists and as human beings? How can we work together to address these problems?

At the conference *Shared Pathways to a Sustainable and Just Future: Navigating the Anthropocene* on Thursday 30 January, researchers, staff, professionals from inside and outside VU Amsterdam will come together to attend interactive workshops, lectures, panel discussions and keynotes. In this conference book the twenty-five sessions are described along with their location and timing during the day. You can also check out Campus Online for additional information about the 25 sessions, including video material → [VU Campus Online Conference Navigating the Anthropocene](#).

For the first time in the history of the Vrije Universiteit a wide range of all faculties is represented in the sessions and demonstrate the multi- to interdisciplinary challenges that our global society is currently facing in social unrest, chaotic climate, as well as declining biodiversity, health, housing and land space problems. The keynotes and 25 sessions discuss this wide range of 'Anthropocene' problems, and present new and alternative ways of navigation in this complexity. Each session will provide a 'deliverable' resulting from the session content and discussion on the conference day and which will also be posted on Campus Online.

We wish you a fruitful conference, a new way of experiencing discussing interdisciplinary solutions as well as meeting new and diverse ranging perspectives on the urgencies and needs of our diverse communities in and out of nature and within the contemporary society.

## **On behalf of the four Profile Teams of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam**

- Connected World (main organiser): Sjoerd Kluiving, Mariken van der Velden
- Governance for Society: Jacquélien Stekelenburg, Joris Amin
- Human Health to Life Sciences: Richard Jaspers, Daphne Beek
- Science for Sustainability: Philipp Pattberg, Neele van den Bongardt

# 1 The SDGs in the light of the Digital Transformation

Session leaders: **Hans Akkermans, Anna Bon, and Francis Saa-Dittoh**

This session dives into the intersection of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the ongoing Digital Transformation, with a spotlight on how advanced technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) can drive sustainable global progress. While AI has evolved from a niche concept to a mainstream conversation, its connection to achieving tangible results for the SDGs remains underexplored. This event seeks to bridge that gap.

The session emphasizes the societal impact of AI, particularly in fostering sustainable food systems in the Global South. It will showcase innovative student projects with measurable results and introduce concepts like the "Plug-In Principle," which emphasizes community-driven approaches for sustainable development through ICT.

Participants will critically examine not only the role of AI in promoting sustainability but also its own environmental footprint. The discussion will balance optimism about AI's potential with a nuanced understanding of its limitations and challenges.



This workshop aspires to inspire practical strategies for leveraging digital technologies to meet the SDGs, ensuring that progress is inclusive, localized, and environmentally conscious. The session encourages a critical and collaborative approach, making a compelling case for AI as a tool for transformative societal impact.

## 2 Swipe right for connection? Exploring dating apps as an avenue to less segregated societies.

Session leaders: **Giulia Ranzini**  
and **Ainhoa Arranz Aldana**

This workshop explores how dating apps, often seen as modern matchmaking tools, could be catalysts for reducing societal segregation and polarization. While people naturally gravitate toward similar partners, this tendency reinforces divisions in education, religion, and political ideology. Yet, dating platforms introduce “absent ties”—connections outside one’s usual social circles—offering a chance for greater diversity in partner choices.

The session blends theory with action. It begins with a research overview, highlighting both the potential and pitfalls of dating apps in addressing societal inequalities. While such platforms can disrupt conventional segregation, discrimination experienced by minorities often limits their inclusivity.

In an interactive segment, participants will brainstorm improvements to algorithms and features that promote social inclusion. Using tools like Mentimeter and hands-on activities, the session encourages diverse perspectives to inspire innovation. Beyond dating apps, participants will also reimagine inclusivity on platforms like Airbnb.



Insights from this workshop will be synthesized into a blog post, offering tangible solutions for building technology that connects rather than divides. By leveraging creativity and collaboration, the session seeks to unlock the potential of dating apps to foster more inclusive societies.

### 3 Colouring Connections: Researching Gender and Health in the Anthropocene

Session leaders: **Petra Verdonk and Katinka Feijs**

This creative session, inspired by the colouring book *Colouring Connections: Researching Gender, Intersectionality, and Health in the Climate Crisis*, invites participants to draw, colour, and engage in discussions on integrating gender dimensions—alongside other aspects of diversity (intersectionality)—into health research within the context of the climate crisis. Topics of interest include heat stress, violence, health systems, and urban planning.

Through colouring and drawing exercises, we will clarify concepts and methodologies, exploring questions such as: What factors contribute to heat stress? How can we effectively interview individuals about petro-masculinity? What is the positionality of the researcher? What aspects remain invisible in photovoice methodologies? These questions may be equally relevant for experienced researchers and or students conducting research assignments/ bachelor- or master thesis.

Research on the interplay between the climate crisis and health is both overdue and urgently needed. Emerging fields such as genomics, 3D printing, the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalization, and planetary health often neglect sex differences, gender, and other inequalities, perpetuating bias.

This session aims to creatively inspire researchers and students to incorporate gender perspectives into their studies on health in the Anthropocene.



# 4 Together connecting to the rhizome to address questions of Governance for Society

Session leaders: **Renée Hartog and Baukje Spaltro**

This experiential session, led by an academic and an artist offers a unique blend of art and science to address the global poly-crisis through local solutions. Using the Tekendialoog method, participants will collaboratively envision and create pathways for building neighbourhoods that prioritize usage and connectedness over possession.

The session includes guided exercises such as observational walks, drawing activities, and discussions on social

capital, education, and citizenship. Participants will explore innovative, heart-based, and cognitive approaches to societal challenges, fostering equity, sustainability, and resilience. Inspired by Baukje Spaltro's *City Spheres* project, which emphasizes the unique "soul" of urban districts, the workshop encourages participants to reimagine neighbourhoods through a creative and inclusive lens.

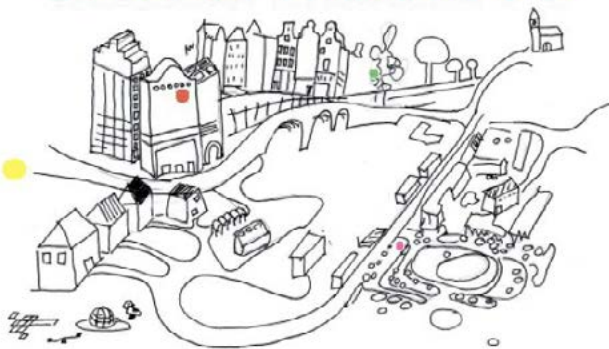
The program culminates in a collective artwork reflecting participants' ideas and commitments, alongside actionable questions for future exploration.

Deliverables include personalized artwork pieces and opportunities for

continued engagement through a follow-up lunch.

This session empowers participants to co-create solutions that balance individual freedom and collective interests, providing tools for convivial citizenship and resilient urban design.

## TEKEN DIALOOG



## HOE KLEUR JIJ JE STAD?

# 5 Climate Change: Barriers of Time, Scope, and Complexity

Session leaders: **Paul van Langen and Reinout Wiers**

This thought-provoking symposium will look into the psychological and social barriers preventing effective climate action. Five leading researchers explore how to motivate individuals and societies to prioritize long-term climate-friendly behaviours despite immediate challenges and complexities.

Hilde Huizenga (UvA) examines how adolescents' decisions are shaped by peer influences and their openness to exploration, proposing strategies to counter their insensitivity to future consequences.

Reinout Wiers (UvA) investigates whether short-term climate-harmful

behaviours, like meat consumption, resemble addictive tendencies and how they can be mitigated.

Marleen Onwezen (WUR) explores the ongoing protein transition, addressing behavioural drivers behind the shift to plant-based diets.

Sezin Ekinci (VU) probes whether simultaneous crises, like COVID-19, amplify or undermine climate-conscious actions.

Finally, Paul van Lange (VU) highlights the social dynamics of climate-related behaviour, examining perceived social gains and costs tied to eco-friendly choices.

The session concludes with an engaging plenary discussion on overcoming barriers to long-term thinking and shortening the psychological distance to climate goals. Designed to inspire

interdisciplinary innovation, this symposium invites participants to rethink human behaviour's role in addressing one of the most urgent global challenges.

**Deliverables:** New insights and collaborative strategies for policymakers to combat the barriers of time, scope, and complexity in climate action.



# 6 Post- Anthropocene Futures

Session leader: **Thomas Meier**

This visionary roundtable explores the transformative possibilities of a post-Anthropocene world.

Facilitated by Thomas Meier from the Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies at Heidelberg University, the session challenges the dominant narratives of preservation and restoration, which often prioritize the interests of the Global North.

Instead, it opens the floor to imaginative and interdisciplinary dialogue about the future of humanity and the planet. Drawing on indigenous philosophies and acknowledging the irreversible tipping points humanity has crossed, participants will engage in world café discussions envisioning near (5 years), mid (50 years), and far (200 years) futures.

These visions will be discussed in a plenary to evaluate their implications for current governance, academia, and societal transformation. How might a post-Anthropocene world differ from our current reality? Can we imagine something entirely new? What role should academia play in shaping and navigating these futures?



This session is an invitation to rethink global trajectories and governance frameworks, moving beyond the constraints of a deteriorating capitalist world towards imaginative, sustainable futures.

Outcomes include creative posters outlining three visionary futures, offering fresh perspectives on how today's academic and political practices can align with long-term planetary resilience.



# 7 Take a Break: Public Sabbath as a Catalyst for Hope-Driven Sustainability

Session leaders: **Jan-Jorrit Hasselaar, Evert van Beek and Egbert Wits**

This workshop invites participants to explore the transformative potential of a Public Sabbath—a deliberate pause that upends current societal priorities and creates space for empathy, reflection, and collaboration. Drawing on the concept theorized by Jonathan Sacks, the Public Sabbath offers a neutral, inclusive environment where individuals can envision a sustainable future and collectively shape new cultural patterns and habits.

This 90-minute session integrates theory and practice. Participants will learn about radical uncertainty, hope, and the Public Sabbath as tools for navigating sustainability transitions, collaborate in small groups to design Sabbath-inspired interventions relevant to their professional contexts and finally reflect on how these interventions can foster cultural change and address challenges of sustainability.

By emphasizing empathy, creative expression, and shared responsibility, the Sabbath becomes a “Utopia Now” where future solutions are rehearsed in the present. Participants will co-create actionable Sabbath-inspired strategies tailored to their organizational

challenges, contributing to a consolidated document on addressing radical uncertainty in transition processes. This workshop bridges governance, social innovation, and sustainability, equipping participants with tools to embrace uncertainty and drive transformative change.



# 8 Empowering Dutch Citizens to Invest in Greener Homes

Session leaders: **Sanchayan Bannerjee and Madeline Werthschulte**

The Dutch Climate Agreement sets ambitious goals for decarbonizing the built environment, including transitioning 1.5 million homes to natural gas-free heating. Success hinges on empowering citizens by addressing barriers like high costs, limited coordination, and complex information. This panel, rooted in insights from the Dutch Research Council's ALIGN4energy project, highlights how data and behavioural science can catalyse residential energy transitions. ALIGN4energy integrates citizen preferences, investment modelling, and innovative engagement strategies to streamline the transition.



Its decision-support platform, SAMEN, and tailored interventions aim to optimize energy investments for homeowners and policymakers alike.

Program Highlights:

## **Project Overview (45 min):**

- Welcome and ALIGN4energy updates
- Mini pitches from PhD representatives on six work packages covering citizen preferences, decision support tools, and engagement strategies.

## **Discussion and Outlook (45 min):**

- Moderated exchange between practitioners and ALIGN4energy experts, including Woonbond and Deelstroom Delft, focusing on practical applications of research insights.
- Open Q&A for participant reflections and dialogue.

## **Who Should Attend:**

City officials, energy cooperatives, housing corporations, NGOs, and researchers. Gain actionable insights into designing customer journeys, collective decision-making tools, and interventions that empower Dutch citizens to lead the energy transition.

# 9 Uncovering Underlying Assumptions in AI for Social Change

Session leader: **Eefje De Louw**

The current public and scientific debate on Artificial Intelligence (AI) shows a disconnect between AI being recognized as controversial, while still being treated as uncontroversial, hereby undermining meaningful change. Prominent topics include social justice concerns, such as racial and gender inequality, and the corporate control over knowledge production.

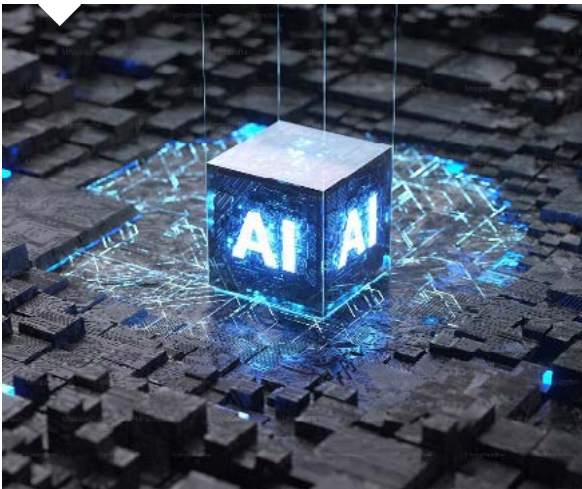
However, those who benefit from algorithmic outcomes are seldom involved in these discussions, allowing powerful entities to maintain the

narrative of AI as merely “magical techniques,” sidelining demands for inclusion and critical perspectives. The advent of Large Language Models offers a chance to bridge the digital divide, as their intuitive nature may enhance agreement and collective action. Yet, at the root lies the accuracy-fairness dilemma: striving for fairness may compromise predictive accuracy.

Still, at the root lies the accuracy-fairness trade-off: efforts to increase fairness in a model might lead to a reduction in predictive accuracy.

The persisting problem of AI is to connect the digital world with the physical world, with some scholars overly optimistic about algorithmic solutions, while others raise scepticism, but remain conceptual. This session aims to overcome these dichotomies and take a deep dive into complexities surrounding AI.

Output from this session will answer: How can participants contribute to action research that contributes to solving the digital divide?



# 10 Problematic and Promising Roles of Religion in the Anthropocene

Session leaders: **Peter-Ben Smit and Gijsbert van den Brink**

What roles do religion and theology play in the current Anthropocene-era? And how can both contribute to solutions of its well-known problems (climate change, biodiversity loss, etc.) rather than to these problems themselves?

This Interactive conference session will assume that the ecological crisis cannot just be solved by technological means, since it has been generated by a collective mindset. This mindset has profound roots in Western Christianity (White 1967). Even though the West

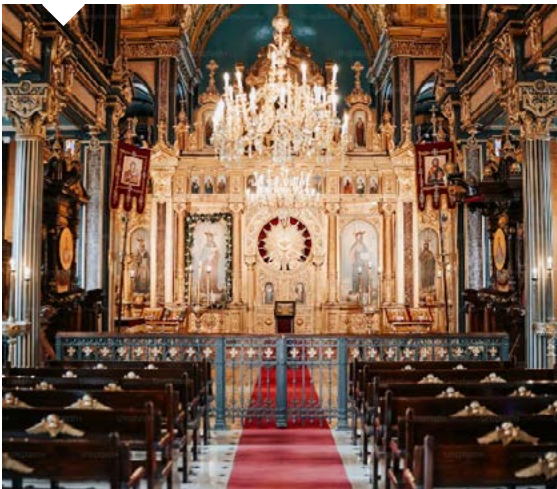
has become largely secular, a certain type of theology – sometimes called ‘Progressive Dominion Theology’ (Tyson 2023) – still informs this mindset.

To address the ecological crisis at this profound level, we should examine whether and how such detrimental forms of thinking might be improved on theologically.

In this session we would like to consider two kinds of sources for reimagining human to more-than-human relationships: (a) traditions with a transcendent anchoring point that decentre the human being and reposition it as just one among the earth’s inhabitants; (b) premodern traditions

that are not yet inhibited by modernity’s problematic conceptualization of the human – more-than-human nature relationship.

In particular, embodied imaginations in ritual and in modes of communal life in general (e.g., in monastic settings) may be highlighted.



# 11 Increasing Ecological Awareness through Nature-Based Educational Interventions

Session leaders: **Serxia Lage Arias, Katinka Quintelier, Amba van Erkelens, Karen Verduijn, Jaro Pichel, and Jessy la Faille**

This session explores how to enhance students' awareness of the interconnection between human and non-human nature. While spending time in nature has been shown to improve health, reduce stress, and enhance well-being, there is limited research on its effectiveness as an educational intervention for increasing ecological awareness, particularly in relation to the Anthropocene.

In this interactive session, participants will experience a walk in the park as an educational intervention designed to foster ecological awareness and understanding of the Anthropocene. Participants will be divided into three groups, each engaging in a different nature-based educational approach:

1. Art-based walk: A creative exploration of nature through art, stimulating imagination and reflection.
2. Walkshop: A discussion-based walk where provocative questions aim to reconnect individuals with nature.
3. Meditative walk: A sensory experience inspired by the Japanese practice of Shinrin-Yoku.

Following the walk, participants will return to the venue to ideate art forms or local solutions for addressing the crises of the Anthropocene. The session will conclude with reflections in focus groups, synthesizing the potential of nature-based interventions for sustainability education.



# 12 From Past to Future: Long-term Patterns of Connectivity and Fragmentation in Network Societies

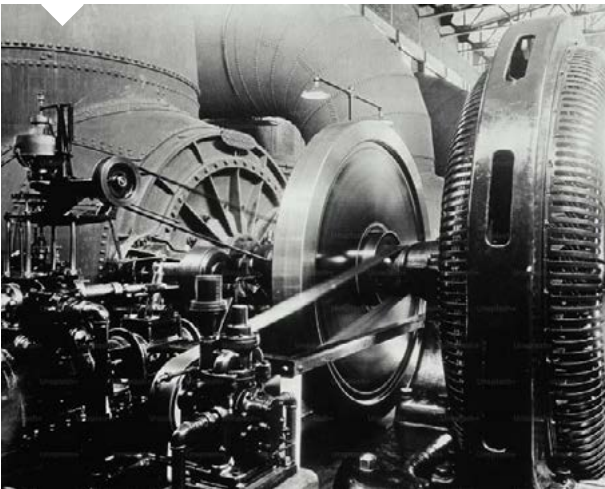
Session leader: **Dries Daems**

Human societies are inherently social, built on the exchange of information. Connectivity has long been seen as a force for progress, linking people, fostering trade, and resolving conflicts. However, recent trends show growing geopolitical divides, economic protectionism, and the return of conflict, highlighting the tension between connectivity and fragmentation in modern societies. Understanding these shifts requires examining long-term patterns, as most studies focus on short-term trends and overlook historical contexts.

The technological revolution of the late 20th century created “network societies,” but these shifts in connectivity and isolation need a historical perspective to understand their full implications. This session aims to explore the long-term dynamics of connectivity and fragmentation, considering how historical events, technological advances, and information transmission have shaped modern and future societies.

The panel discussion will feature 3-4 experts from diverse fields, including history, sociology, and environmental sciences. It will explore how past examples of connectivity and fragmentation can inform today’s global divides, the role of digital communication

in modern societies, and how interdisciplinary research can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding. The session will also outline a collaborative research agenda for further exploration of these topics, potentially forming the basis for future studies.



# 13 How Would You Spend Your Personal Carbon Budget?

Session leaders: **Jan Willem Wieland and Lieven Decock**

This session invites participants to engage with the ethical implications of individual responsibility in the context of the Anthropocene.

Drawing from Peter Singer's concept of a global carbon budget, the session challenges attendees to consider how they would allocate their personal carbon budget of 2 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year, the estimated fair share for each person. In countries like the Netherlands, where the average carbon footprint exceeds 7 tons per person annually, participants will be asked to make difficult choices

regarding daily activities like flying, meat consumption, driving, and heating their homes.

The first part of the workshop will involve small group discussions, where participants will work through these choices and the trade-offs involved in living within their carbon limit.

The second part will focus on reflecting on the viability and fairness of personal carbon budgets, questioning whether it is realistic to expect equal consumption across all people. Through these discussions, participants will explore broader questions of sustainability, equity, and moral responsibility.

The workshop will conclude with a plenary discussion led by staff from the philosophy department, who will offer insights on achieving a fair, sustainable world. Participants will leave with personal carbon budgets and recommendations on reducing their footprints.



# 14 Invisible Threats and Expectations in a Visibly Ruined Planet: The Guyanas.

Session leaders: **Dimtiris Dalakoglou, Leonidas Oikonomakis and Marjo de Theije**

This discussion will explore the overlooked region of the Guianas, where colonial legacies and modern extractivism intersect with the looming impacts of climate change. Historically, the Guianas—comprising Guyana, French Guyana, and Suriname—have remained largely invisible on the world stage despite their colonial history and geographical significance. These countries have seen numerous shifts in power, yet no major global political events have drawn attention to

them. Today, however, the discovery of massive oil reserves—estimated at 11 billion barrels—has brought the region into the global spotlight, yet its impact remains largely invisible.

Despite the looming environmental catastrophe, as the Guianas are expected to face severe climate consequences, the exploitation of oil resources is set to accelerate the climate crisis both locally and globally. This session brings together experts from various disciplines, including extractivism, infrastructure, and geography, to address the invisible threats posed by resource extraction in the Guianas and the expectations tied to economic growth.



Participants will reflect on the tension between development promises and environmental destruction, emphasizing the human and ecological costs of extraction in one of the world's most vulnerable and neglected regions.



# 15 Oral history, literacy education and belonging

Session leaders: **Norah Karrouche, Guido Löhr, Gudrun Reijnierse, and Camille Welie**

The “Oral History, Literacy Education, and Belonging” workshop aims to explore the relationship between language proficiency, identity, and belonging, particularly for migrants in the Netherlands.

In light of recent legislation linking language proficiency to integration, the session questions whether stricter language requirements actually foster a sense of belonging or affect migrants’ perceptions of their identity and cultural heritage.

Using oral history—a method that amplifies marginalized voices—and AI tools, the workshop will focus on NT2 (Dutch as a second language) education for “oudkomers” (long-term migrants), many of whom arrived in the 1980s and 1990s but remain underrepresented. Participants will engage in interactive discussions, examining how oral history and AI can enhance literacy programs and inclusion efforts for this group. The session also aims to link humanities research on language acquisition, storytelling, and cultural heritage, while addressing social inequality and polarization.

The workshop will facilitate the exchange of best practices from the fields of education, research, and heritage, ultimately contributing to more inclusive literacy education and strengthening a sense of belonging among migrants. Within the session Dutch is a preferred language.



# 16 Social Emotional Learning - A New Direction in Academic Education

Session leaders: **Joris Aarts and Jaro Pichel**

This workshop addresses the need for a more holistic approach to problem-solving in the Anthropocene, where global challenges require both cognitive and emotional intelligence.

While academic education has traditionally focused on developing cognitive skills, especially for technological solutions, these alone are insufficient for creating sustainable responses. Effective problem-solvers must also be attuned to their own emotions and sensitive to those of

others to communicate and collaborate effectively.

The workshop will explore how universities, like VU, are incorporating social-emotional learning into curricula, but emphasize that more can be done beyond cognitive training.

Using the emotion networking method developed by the Reinwardt Academy, participants will engage in mapping and communicating their emotions related to a controversial issue.

This experiential approach will foster a better understanding of emotional responses and how they can complement cognitive abilities in addressing world problems. Student assistants from the VU Centre for Teaching and Learning will provide their perspectives and offer feedback on how social-emotional learning can be integrated into academic programs and courses.

The goal is to develop more well-rounded problem-solvers capable of creating sustainable solutions for today's pressing global challenges.



# 17 Commons-Friendly Value Translations



Session leaders: **Tamalone van den Eijnden, Anna Kooi and Ciska Ulug**

This panel presentation/ collage workshop will explore the complex process artists, researchers, and community practitioners reflecting on their roles in resisting the financialization of socio-ecological values.

Artist and researcher Anna Kooi will revisit a 2018 conversation on “translating the commons,” offering insights into how artists contribute to value translation.

Ciska Ulug, with her experience in diverse food economies in the Netherlands, will emphasize the importance of recognizing informal and unexpected relationships that are often overlooked. Tamalone van den Eijnden will present speculative propositions based

on her action research with Foodpark Amsterdam, exploring alternative ways to translate the socio-ecological values of the commons.

Following these presentations, the audience will be invited to participate in a collaborative collage activity, where they will cut, glue, and rearrange ideas to create a visual representation of how commons values can be translated.

The collage will serve as a deliverable, offering a set of insights on commons-friendly value translations and their potential application in policymaking.

# 18 Woven Waters: Crafting Resilience Through Social Hydrology and Creative Collaboration

Session leaders: **Danai-Maria Kontou, Heidi Mendoza, Ruben Weesie, Alessia Matano and Anne van Loon**

This session introduces the interactive and creative *Perfect Storm* project, which explores social hydrology in the context of climate change-driven water extremes.

This mobile exhibition, debuting at the conference, will travel to Kenya, Peru, Japan, and Canada, engaging local communities, scientists, artists, and policy-makers.

It combines global data with local narratives, examining the impacts of drought-to-flood events and encouraging cross-disciplinary collaboration. The session will feature a woven tapestry, interactive maps, and a Flower Atlas to visualize the global and local effects of hydrological extremes.

The exhibition invites conference participants to contribute their insights, creating a collaborative, evolving space that fosters empathy and knowledge exchange. The hackathon aspect allows attendees to analyze drought-to-flood datasets, brainstorm creative solutions, and engage in problem-solving activities like eco-poetry and model-building.

By integrating scientific data with artistic and community-driven insights, the session aims to build resilience and envision sustainable futures in the face of environmental change. Expected outcomes include creative representations, actionable solutions, and a network of global participants contributing to the exhibition's ongoing evolution.

This session directly supports the conference's theme of shared pathways to a sustainable and just future by emphasizing collective action and the integration of local knowledge.



# 19 Stitching Sustainability: Enhancing Carbon Literacy and Responsibility in the Apparel Industry

Session leaders: **Jane Tynan**

This panel discussion and workshop explore the environmental impact of synthetic textiles, such as polyester and nylon, and the chemicals used in textile manufacturing, including dyes and finishing agents.

The context for the event is the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles, which aims for all textile products to be made from recycled fibres and be free of hazardous substances by 2030. While sustainability has become a buzzword in the fashion industry, much of the sector still relies heavily on non-renewable resources and harmful practices.

To transition to a more sustainable clothing system, both science and lifestyle patterns need to be addressed. The session will begin with a panel discussion on clothing technologies and environmental sustainability, featuring designers, product developers, academics, and activists. This will be followed by an interactive workshop that invites participants to engage directly with textiles, improving their understanding of carbon literacy in the process.

The aim is to highlight corporate and consumer responsibility in making fashion practices more ethical, responsible, and environmentally safe. The key deliverable of this session is

to foster partnerships with fashion brands and create internship opportunities for VU students interested in environmental justice, ultimately helping to address the environmental degradation caused by the apparel industry.



# 20 Experiments and Demonstrations Driving the Transition to Circularity

Session leaders: **Bart Bossink,**  
**Sandra Hasanefendic and**  
**Marjolein Hoogstraaten**

This presentation by Prof.Dr.Ir. Bart Bossink, Dr. Sandra Hasanefendic and Dr. Marjolein Hoogstraaten will explore the ongoing experiments and demonstrations driving the transition from a linear to a circular economy.

It will focus on how technical, organizational, and market experiments contribute to the sustainability and circularity transition, using examples such as plastic to illustrate these processes. Once hailed as an innovation, plastic has now become one of the major environmental pollutants, with microplastics and waste impacting ecosystems worldwide.

The session will examine current alternatives to plastic, such as biodegradable options, edible packaging, and reusable materials, considering their potential to address the plastic

crisis. However, the solutions are far from ideal, and the transition is complex. Questions will be raised about the role of the oil industry and lobbying, the persistence of industries and countries reliant on traditional plastic use, and the potential environmental consequences of switching to paper-based packaging.

Participants will engage in discussions after three concise presentations, deepening their understanding of these issues and exploring the nuances of what constitutes success or failure in the circular economy transition. The session aims to stimulate critical thinking about the challenges and opportunities in this path to sustainability and circularity, with a focus on practical insights for future progress.



# 21 Targeting Fossil Fuel Supply for Climate Action

Session leaders: **Clemens Kaupa and David Rossati**

This session will focus on the emerging discourse around targeting fossil fuel supply to address the root cause of climate change—fossil fuel extraction and use. While climate governance has long centred on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, efforts to tackle the supply side have been insufficient. Increasingly, however, the global community is recognizing that reducing the supply of fossil fuels is crucial to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement. This session will explore interdisciplinary approaches

to addressing fossil fuel supply through energy policy, legal strategies, technological advancements, and digital tools.

The session will begin with an interview with Rebecca Byrnes from the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative, who will discuss diplomatic efforts to create a treaty that complements the Paris Agreement by focusing on the phasing out of fossil fuel extraction. This will set the stage for a roundtable discussion with experts such as Tim Bleekers, Mathieu Blondeel, Robin Kautz, and Clemens Kaupa, who will share their insights on legal and political strategies, including the *Milieudefensie v Shell* case, due diligence frameworks for fossil fuel companies, and claims against extraction projects under international law.

The session will conclude with a pitch showcasing *The Last Coal*, a digital tool designed to visualize and query data on fossil fuel infrastructure, highlighting the role of technology in rethinking climate governance.



# 22 Green Colonialism

Session leaders: **Julia Jouwe and Anne-Linn Machielsen**

This workshop explores Indigenous approaches to climate change and their implications for justice and sustainability. Participants will investigate how Indigenous communities worldwide leverage traditional knowledge and ecological principles to combat climate change, particularly in the context of green colonialism.

The session will begin by reflecting on the importance of integrating Indigenous perspectives into global climate policies, emphasizing their role in preserving biodiversity and promoting environmental justice.

Key themes such as climate justice and the inequities faced by Indigenous peoples will be addressed, focusing on the impacts of “green” projects that can violate Indigenous rights and lead to land dispossession, particularly in regions like West Papua.

Attendees will analyse current examples of these issues, including deforestation for palm oil and large-scale mining operations, fostering critical discussions about the intersection of environmental sustainability and Indigenous rights.



Throughout the workshop, participants will have the opportunity to delve deeper into how they, as students and scholars, can be allies in this movement. By analysing specific cases of green colonialism and exploring Indigenous knowledge, attendees will develop strategies to advocate for justice and empowerment within their academic and professional spheres.

Ultimately, this workshop aims to promote a more just and inclusive approach to climate solutions, highlighting the crucial role of Indigenous knowledge and activism in shaping effective strategies for a sustainable future.



# 23 Empowering students as partners for planetary health

Session leaders: **Jorim Tielbeek and students**

This 90-minute workshop run by Jorim Tielbeek invites course coordinators, program directors, and students to collaboratively explore how to integrate the Anthropocene theme into curricula and empower students as active partners in shaping their educational experiences.

The session will introduce the concept of co-creation in education, showcasing best practices, and then engage participants in a hands-on redesign of course content using real-world, interdisciplinary case studies.

By challenging traditional curriculum design, which often excludes students from the process, the workshop aims to tap into their innovative ideas and create more relevant, solution-focused learning experiences.

Participants will leave with actionable strategies for incorporating Anthropocene-related challenges into their teaching, as well as tools to empower students to contribute to planetary health from within their own disciplines.

This session emphasizes interdisciplinary collaboration and provides educators with concrete case studies and insights for making

teaching more engaging, impactful, and aligned with sustainable futures.



# 24 Navigating the Anthropocene: Shared Pathways for a Sustainable Future

Session leaders: **Sjoerd Kluiving, Jacqueline Stekelenburg, Richard Jaspers en Philipp Pattberg.**

This session addresses the challenges of the Anthropocene, focusing on integrating science, technology, culture, values, and identity. Aligned with VU's Strategy 2020-2025 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it emphasizes four key profile themes: Connected World (CW), Governance for Society (GfS), Human Health and Life Sciences (H2LS), and Science for Sustainability (SfS).

The session includes keynote presentations by Nathanael Wallenhorst (*A Critical Theory for the Anthropocene*) and Esther Turnhout (*Why Transform Environmental Science*). Four profile team keynotes explore thematic challenges: Yarin Eski discusses Earth escapism and space governance (GfS), Luisa Schneider examines inequality in the Anthropocene (CW), Marjorie van Duuren highlights the chemical world's impact (H2LS), and Jampel dell'Angelo addresses water and commons (SfS). The program also features 11 lectures, including contributions by ASI Distinguished Fellows.



# 25 VU Dream Teams and innovative VU start-ups for a Sustainable Future

Session leaders: **Marike Oostveen and Bram Bark**

This session showcases the VU Entrepreneurship & Impact team, which supports start-ups and Dream Teams by providing workspace, networking, and resources. These initiatives help participants develop entrepreneurial skills and address sustainability challenges.

Dream Teams consist of 8–14 students from diverse disciplines, collaborating on impactful projects. Featured Dream Teams include VU-Vital (improving health and reducing biological age), Burning

Lowlands (balancing biodiversity and fire safety), Reduce Food Waste (promoting awareness and better choices), Pulse Racing (enhancing mobility for spinal cord injuries through robotics), and RISE (sustainable rocketry and space debris removal).

Next in this session seven VU start-ups are presented. They will show their ideas about a sustainable future. Think about shorter lines in medical assist, a switch to bamboo toilet paper to contribute to a cleaner world, a start-up who harnesses the power of fungi to remove pollutants from water, reducing the environmental impact of farming, and one who helps businesses to achieve their Sustainable Development Goals by providing 100% hemp paper packaging.



