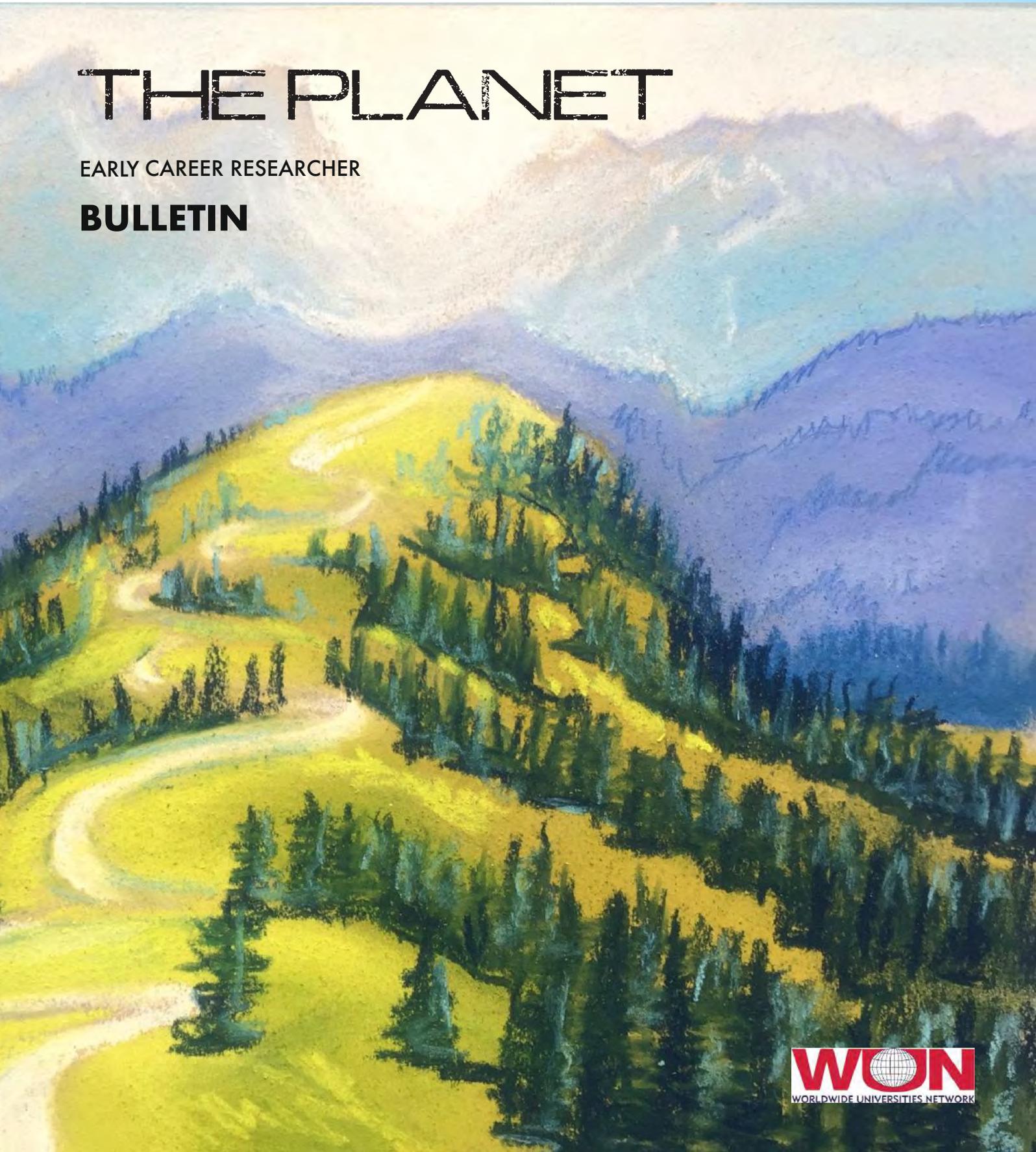


# THE PLANET

EARLY CAREER RESEARCHER

**BULLETIN**



# THE PLANET

*The Planet* is an Early Career Researcher (ECR) Bulletin published on a quarterly basis by inVIVO Planetary Health. *The Planet* contains global and local planetary health news stories, *Spotlight* - an ECR interview or article, advice from senior researchers, events and quizzes!

If you have any feedback or would like to contribute to *The Planet* in the future, contact our editors:

**Jake: [jmrobinson3@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:jmrobinson3@sheffield.ac.uk)**

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Background art throughout *The Planet* by Susan Prescott



*Professor Susan Prescott*  
*Pediatrician and Immunologist*  
*Founder and President of inVIVO*  
*Planetary Health*

# Planetary Health in the News



## Nested ecology and emergence in pandemics

Aaron Jenkins, Stacy D Jupiter, Anthony Capon, Pierre Horwitz, and Joel Negin

A recent article in the Lancet Planetary Health journal covers this topic:

In the article, the authors discuss how interconnectedness between humans and the environment has become very apparent in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. They also discuss how our ability to respond to and prevent future pandemics will benefit from a complex systems perspective.

*"We live in a world that is complex, deeply interconnected, and human health and planetary health are woven into one. So governments need frameworks and ways of thinking that can hold that complexity - that can think about climate and health and jobs and financial stability and inequality in one space".*



**To find out more, visit the article here:**

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(20\)30165-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(20)30165-0/fulltext)

# Zero Waste School: A Scalable, Educative, and Sustainable Waste Management Model

*Manila Poudel, Rajina Shrestha, Garima Thapa, Rahul G. Rajkarnikar, Goma Gurung and Bibechana Dhital (Kathmandu, Nepal)*

This project aims to create a zero waste model for a community school in Nepal. Through intensive research, waste indices, and identification of key indicators, a workable model of reducing, reusing, and recycling waste inside school campuses has been designed. The project is accompanied by curriculum integration of waste management, environmental economics, and science. A successful project can be replicated in other schools and in turn, an entire city. Growing population, booming economy, rapid urbanization and improved living standards have significantly accelerated solid waste generation across the planet. According to the World Bank, about 2.01 billion metric tons of solid waste are produced annually worldwide. Also, the world produces over 300 million tons of plastic each year, of which only a small fraction (13.5%) is recycled. Solid waste has become one of the primary global environmental issues. To prevent further environmental deterioration, a strategic waste management system is required. One approach that has a lasting cultural impact is the concept of "Zero Waste". It can be a valuable solution for the minimization of the ever-increasing solid waste.



**A gannet nesting in plastic. Solid waste such as plastic is extremely detrimental to the environment.**

Children and teenagers learn by seeing, hearing, exploring, experimenting and asking questions. So, they are the ones who can ultimately have a societal impact in the future. Thus, we've chosen schools as our target area. It is hoped that this project will inspire students to continue waste minimization in their home and communities. Furthermore, as the child gets older, they'll hopefully enjoy taking more responsibility for their learning, and inspire the future generation while getting involved in building a sustainable future.

## **The key objectives of this project include:**

- (a) identification of the major waste products within the school and their sources through collaboration with school administration;
- (b) develop curriculum and facilitate classes on the science behind composting, the economics behind waste, and understanding human behaviour towards the environment;
- (c) in partnership with school teachers, implementation of a 3 R system of Waste reduction;
- (d) collaborating with middle school students to create an effective waste segregation system; and,
- (e) collaborating with high school students to develop waste management strategies including reducing, reusing, and composting.

The project expects qualitative as well as quantitative outcomes. These will include effective engagement and empowerment of school students, as well as teaching and non-teaching staff, to manage the school's environment and their immediate surroundings, and improve waste management practices among students' families and communities. Considerable reduction in the waste and litter in school areas is also expected. Finally, we hope to promote the concept of reusing and recycling (utilization of products to their fullest extent).



**Kathmandu, Capital of Nepal**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, strict lockdowns were implemented in Nepal. The team (Sustainera) used this time to develop a curriculum for schools to teach students effective waste management through a Knowledge, Behaviour, and Attitude (KBA) approach. The KBA approach aims to instil theoretical information as well as behavioural and attitudinal change in participating schools and students. Since the schools are still closed and will remain so for an unforeseeable amount of time, Sustainera has pivoted the training towards Teachers as trainers instead. Currently, Sustainera has built partnerships with five schools. The training is being provided to volunteer teachers on an online platform and will be conducted in person for students once the lockdown is lifted. Through this initiative, we are hoping to create a better tomorrow for all of us.



# Spotlight

## Early Career Researcher Article



**Author:** Winne van Woerden

**Discipline:** Degrowth and the Commons

### Degrowth and a call for utopias

We are living in daunting times. As the COVID-19 pandemic is exposing the weaknesses of institutions we have built to address global crises, many are looking for ways to mitigate the risk of more pandemics in the future. A dominant study area where this discussion on risk management takes place is the field of Global Health. But truly having a fruitful discussion here, means asking ourselves: what exactly is the problem we are talking about? What disease is it that is causing a sick world?

### Diagnosing the right disease

It has been said before already: the current COVID-19 pandemic may turn out to be a test run for a much bigger global crisis looming in front of us: the collapse of the global climate. As a matter of fact, the emergence of the coronavirus can be understood as a symptom of the same disease that is already exposing many today, and especially the most vulnerable ones, to climate change-related health risks. The name of the disease? One way to call it is 'growthism': the unquestioned desirability for economic growth which has infiltrated all spheres of human society.

A desire that is, as it turns out, both ecologically unsustainable and socially unjust. It is unsustainable because it is already pushing the Earth's life-supporting cycles beyond their natural boundaries. And it is unjust because it fails to provide all people with the basics to live a dignified and healthy life, worsening socio-economic inequalities both within and across nations worldwide instead.

So if the world is suffering from growthism, what does this mean for ways of doing risk mitigation within the Global Health field?

The usual approach taken by many risk mitigation programs within global health is what you could call a 'predict and control' approach, where the goal is to return safely to a state of "normal". But what if our idea of "normal" is what is making us sick in the first place?

It would mean that we shouldn't bounce back from the adversity of the COVID-19 pandemic to where we came from, but instead embrace change and bounce forward into new ways of thinking, doing and being. It would require openness to alternative, transformative ways of imagining the world we want to live in. In other words, being truly serious about finding a cure for the disease that causes global crises like viral pandemics and climate collapse, requires an open mind to utopias.

## **A call for utopias**

The landscape of the social imagination is what can be called a worldview. It guides our beliefs and actions, framing the way we imagine the past, the present and the future, how we see ourselves and others. When discussing worldviews, a distinction can be made between ideologies and utopias. An ideology can then be explained as the orthodoxy that is inherently conservative and seeks to explain and justify the status quo. A utopia on the other hand it is the heterodoxy that aspires to become the orthodoxy, and it can thus be understood as a counter-ideology.

Utopias always stand in opposition to the social reality, or “society-as-usual”, so utopian imagination will always require active effort. Utopias help us free our imagination to conceive new worlds. We need that imagination to change our ways. We need a utopia to replace growthism as the ideology that dominates our lives.

## **If growthism is the disease, what does degrowth have to offer?**

Over the last couple of months, as part of my master thesis in global health, I have been trying to understand a proposed utopian cure for growthism as a disease which goes under the name of ‘Degrowth’.

In essence, degrowth is an alternative vision for human development and well-being, based on the hypothesis that we can live well without increasing our use of energy and materials. It is both a scholarly theory and a social movement calling for the decolonization of the public debate from the idiom of economic thinking and for the abolishment of economic growth as a social objective. As an alternative, degrowth calls for transforming the metabolism of societies, and is based on principles such as autonomy, care and sufficiency. Redesigning the institutions based on this idea of what constitutes the “good life for all” is what degrowth is all about. Consequently, although degrowth aims to enhance human well-being while promoting ecological integrity on a global scale, the degrowth movement primarily focuses on socio-ecologically transforming Western, industrialized societies of the Global North.

## **Towards transformative change**

Currently, the worldview of global health sits uneasily with that of the degrowth movement. Yet, the current pandemic can teach those committed to promote and protect human health and well-being on a finite planet (which is to my believe many of those who identify with the global health field) many things. One of these lessons is the need to step away from conventional ways of doing risk management and start walking – or rather running, since time is not really on our side – on the path to transformative change that is paved with utopias. It is a path that will feel unconformable and unknown, but it bursts with inspiration and holds many different narratives waiting to be explored. Each narrative will unfold in different directions and none of them will hold all the answers. But when the “normal” way of doing things doesn’t suffice anymore, utopian imagination can show us the way.

**Winne van Woerden**, Graduate Msc Global Health at Maastricht University and Researcher at Commons Network

Please check out the original version of this article via the Commons Network:  
<https://www.commonsnetwork.org/news/rethinking-not-repairing-a-call-for-utopianism/>

# An Imposter, to Impose

*Jacob Mills*

He's getting tired and weak now. The stones and arrows clutter the ground around him. There are too many. But this proud old warrior burns with the need to stand, sword raised, shield strong. He will keep charging, stubborn, eyes-closed and unforgiving. And unaware. Unaware that the stones and arrows won't kill him but carve him into something new, if only he would open those tired old eyes.

He is Narcissus, he is battle-hard, and he is ego. But he is in the fade.

He fights through fear. Afraid to embrace the randomness with which the stones carve him. Afraid to confront his flaws where the arrows dig in, sharply and with the stinging illusion of pain. He is a warrior because he is afraid to let go. He is afraid of uncertainty. He is afraid of not being good enough for the world outside his walls. So he fiercely defends his castle, where he pretends to be King. Unknowing that choosing to be a peasant beyond the walls will make him rich in ways that he can't imagine.

~

She adjusts the focus on her microscope, tired and alone. It's after midnight and she makes another note in her lab book. She's just collected the last data point that will revolutionise the treatment of malaria and save countless lives. She will be lauded, glorified, and celebrated. But she doesn't know that yet.

She values science above all else for progress, she has placed it on a pedestal, but she doesn't see herself upon it. She feels out of place amongst her peers, those that have already tasted success and been well received, and those that she admires as heroes the way some see sports stars. She has internalised the systemic, institutional abuse of being an over-worked and underpaid graduate student, and now that she has her own lab she is viscerally insecure as a lead scientist. And it is a viciously competitive world where failure is buried, and bullies get it all. She tells herself that she's just one mistake away from a failed career, a failed dream. Her belief in her abilities is failing her, though she perseveres through anxious feelings of inadequacy.

But deep inside her, ego is strong and fighting hard with the dissonance to her reality. Her ego tells her that she must be on that pedestal. But her struggle to be accepted by her peers, to make a breakthrough in a world built on half-truths, only stories of success, is telling her that she's not going to make it. She wants to be everything to her field, but she can see now that that won't come easily.

An identity built by ideals internalised from the barrel of toxic norms around her, she is saturated with a singular goal with ideals of perfection. But, she knows she's not perfect, except, perceives that others are, so she acts that way and the dissonance makes her feel like an imposter. Her self-confidence is collapsing, and, long after her success, feelings of an imposter will remain until she opens her eyes to her deeper truths, and the humbling truth of an imperfect world – an idealogue struggling to fit systemic ideals.

He's fifteen years-old and standing on a grassy amphitheatre. Sex, drugs, and alcohol rock'n'roll around him. He's overwhelmed. He compares himself to the beautiful people. The care-free. Those caught up in the moment. They are 'cool' and he is struggling to figure out who he is above the bosom shelf, amongst the boho and the muscular, the sun-tanned and surf-hardened. He doesn't feel good enough. The social imagery of perfection is internal.

Popular at school and dominant in the socially important world of junior sports, his ego became carved with chiselled machismo. But now, out in the real-world he is naked and unsure. He's overwhelmed by the real people that fit the wishful image that he has for himself, and suddenly he realises that he's not that.

Internalised social expectations, the augmented imagery of perfect, materialistic, aesthetic lives, are his measure. And he's out in the open, exposed and surrounded. He's an imposter amongst the plasticene, but he doesn't know it's a fake.

Now he's twenty-nine and slightly mouldy, stagnant. He's an emotional sleepwalker. His identity has been built on comparisons to others in a world of augmented, projected perfection. He became the world around him, egoic and calcified. Narcissism came as a survival mechanism.

But he's waking up now. A series of toxic relationships shook him so hard that now his eyes are wide open and he's in perpetual motion. He began a journey that would ultimately lead him right back to himself. His emotions, needs, desires. He remembered what he'd seen about the goodness in the world and found that he liked who he was at a deeper level. He'd found self-acceptance and with that, he began to sonder. To see that others were living their own complex and flawed lives in a world that expects artifice - imperfect people, perfectly pretending. He found empathy and became kinder.

Coming to self-acceptance and to sondering vanquished the old warrior and vanished the anxious imposter. He could see clearly now that he was just one porcelain shard amongst the stunning mosaic of humanity. He didn't need to be on a pedestal because he realised that the pedestals and their pain were just an illusion that fostered ego, insecurity, and envy. The realisation that he wasn't an imposter, that the imposter is the society around him, was profound. Nothing was as important as just being. And letting be.

~

It is neither alive nor dead. It is the biological material of its slaves and only reproduces by manipulating them to enjoy it. It is psychology and marketing, greed, insecurity, envy and ego, identity politics and being holier-than-thou. It is the 9-to-5 and the lack of time. The neighbour's new car and the bosses' bigger house. It's Mark Zuckerberg and the vacant influencers, the Insta-babes. It's Hollywood and eating disorders. It's racism and the patriarchy. It's a proud old warrior.

We're told it's the umbrella protecting us from the rain, but it's a beautiful day. We can open our eyes and challenge our egos to grow into better beings, but what if we started in a healthier place, an environment that wanted the best for us? Society gaslights us, makes us feel inadequate to hide that it is the fraud. Our constructed systems build us as imposters, but what if we turned around and began to impose, to agitate and activate, to throw stones and fire arrows at society, the real imposter?

# Planetary Health Webinars

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## THE PLANET'S Media Picks

### Media Recommendation:

Check out Sustainable World Radio:

<https://sustainableworldradio.com/>

*Sustainable World Radio interviews experts from around the globe; teachers, designers, environmentalists, and earth activists who learn from and work with Nature.*



Also, check out the Students for Planetary Health website:

<https://studentsforplanetaryhealth.com/>

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