

Freiburg Centre for Medicine and Society (ZMG):

Planetary Health: An assessment

Board of Directors:



Hajo Grundmann

Responsibilities: Managing Director, Postgraduate and Graduate Courses

Hajo Grundmann, studied Sinology, Nursing and Human Medicine at the Universities of Bochum and Freiburg, Germany. He specialised in Clinical Tropical Medicine, Medical Microbiology and Hygiene & Environmental Medicine and received his PhD at the University of Freiburg, Germany and an MSc in Epidemiology of Communicable Diseases at the London School of Hygiene. He worked clinically as a medical doctor at university hospitals in Freiburg, Berlin, and Nottingham and carried out extensive field studies in Taiwan, Venezuela and Tanzania. He was leading the European Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance System (EARSS) funded by the European Commission and the Dutch Ministry of Health. Currently, he is the Director of the Institute for Infection Prevention and Hospital Epidemiology at the Medical Centre - University of Freiburg, Germany and holds the Chair for Infectious Diseases Epidemiology at the University of Groningen. His major research interests are the molecular evolution, epidemiology and population dynamics of transmissible pathogens.



Judith Schlehe

Responsibilities: Members, Homepage, Public Relations

Judith Schlehe is a Professor of Sociocultural Anthropology at the University of Freiburg, Germany. She received her Ph.D. in 1987 and finished her *Habilitation* in 1997. She has published widely on the topics of religious dynamics, paranormal healers, cultural politics, globalisation and transcultural issues, gender, the anthropology of disaster, and, lately, on waste and environmental issues in Indonesia. Her main expertise is on Indonesia and Southeast Asia. Publications: <http://www.ethno.uni-freiburg.de/de/mitarbeiter/prof/schlehe>



Winfried V. Kern

Responsibilities: Finances, Personnel, Cooperation

Winfried Kern graduated from Ruprecht-Karls-University, Heidelberg, Germany, and had professional training and fellowships in Heidelberg, Ulm, Tübingen, Providence (Rhode Island), and San Francisco (California). His professional interests include antibiotic resistance epidemiology, bacterial multidrug resistance mechanisms, antibiotic stewardship programmes, healthcare-associated infections including infections in the immunocompromised host. For many years, he has worked within the EORTC Infectious Disease Group on clinical trials in cancer patients with infection, and has been the head of the ESCMID Study Group on Bloodstream Infection, Sepsis and Endocarditis. He was involved in field studies in Southern Sudan and Tanzania. Since 2007 Dr. Kern has been a member of the Pharmaceutical & Therapeutics Committee of the German Federal Medical Association. He was an elected member of ESCMID's Executive Committee 2009-2013, deputy programme director of ECCMID 2014, and ECCMID programme Director 2015-2020. Since 2002, Dr Kern has been Professor of Medicine and Clinical Infectious Diseases and is currently Head, Division of Infectious Diseases, Department of Medicine, University Hospital, Freiburg, Germany. The division runs a refugee health unit at the Freiburg asylum seekers reception center as well as a large travel medicine and vaccination center.

Planetary Health: an assessment of the situation

- Never in the history of humankind have social and demographic conditions changed more rapidly than in the 21st century. These transitions cause unfathomable risks to social and physical wellbeing not only in so called “Low and Middle Income Countries”. As a consequence, the underpinning for strategic health planning is increasingly being eroded. Political and economic turmoil accompanied by human rights violations and breaches of international law lead to marginalisation, displacement and migration of populations. Environmental decay and climate change threaten the sustainability of societal support systems. Increasingly, global health initiatives are fraying under the multiple challenges they face, and under the prevailing conditions they can no longer deliver on their promises by conventional means. Most contemporary health threats develop at the dynamic and increasingly changing interfaces between physical presence of humans (man), human interference (culture) and the environment (nature). In the unremitting interplay of these different factors, self-dynamic entities emerge, are released, and transmitted. These may either be animated/organic/material, such as pests, infectious agents, mobile genetic elements, possibly toxins/radioactivity, but also immaterial/artificial/metaphorical, such as faith, suppositions, assumptions, information, disinformation, rumours, fake news. All the entities mentioned have one thing in common: selfishness, - once created and released they continue to be effective and capable of continued propagation.
- In view of the pandemic potential of these entities and their network dynamics, the Freiburg Centre for Medicine and Society (ZMG) seeks to address fundamental questions on a comprehensive, relational health concept that will also prepare for future challenges. This will tie in with questions of sustainability and the current anthropocene debate, while at the same time focusing on the field of health care.
- There is consensus that issues relating to health and illness (and everything in between) can be viewed not only in relation to man as an isolated being, but also relationally, i.e. in the context of the various interrelationships with other entities (animals, pathogens, plants/plantations, climate, in short: the environment or contemporary world / ecosystem, and possibly also spirits, deities etc.). These relationships are always embedded in socio-cultural contexts and networks, which any research must consider. Religious worldviews and images of man, different knowledge systems and subjectivities are considered to be just as important as governance and care structures, inequalities and approaches to overcoming them.
- We therefore propose that the Centre should focus on the concept of "Planetary Health", which was introduced in 2014. This concept has been defined elsewhere as follows:
 - „Planetary health is the health of human civilizations and the state of the natural systems on which it depends” (<https://www.globalhealthnow.org/2017-09/whats-difference-planetary-health-explained>);
 - “Planetary health is a field focused on characterizing the human health impacts of human-caused disruptions of Earth's natural systems.” (<https://www.planetaryhealthalliance.org/planetary-health>).

- In contrast, the Freiburg Centre for Medicine and Society does not assume unilateral dependencies or cause-effect relationships; rather, it understands a planetary health approach to be the synopsis and entail recovery processes of all life on earth. In this respect we rather agree with a definition given by the "Planetary Health Academy": "The Planetary Health Approach examines the interrelationships between human health, political, economic and social contexts as well as the natural systems of our planet" (<https://planetary-health-academy.de/ueber-uns/>).
- A transdisciplinary and global perspective, or more specifically, perspective pluralism underlies all the Centre's work.
- Methodologically, the Centre aims to promote innovative collaborative approaches, not only across disciplines and faculties in teaching and research (which is already happening with great success in the Global Urban Health programme), but also through tandem and team research within our global networks. This should also involve professional practitioners, civil stakeholders (activists) and the perceptions, knowledge constructions, experiences and relationship between the environment and broad sections of the population. It is therefore not only a question of transfer into society(ies), but more importantly about mutual learning. To expand classical, anthropocentric research methods in this context, cooperation between social and natural sciences/medicine holds special promise.

Cooperation

Internal networking opportunities at the University of Freiburg

- Center for Transcultural Asian Studies (CETRAS), Center for African Studies (CAS), Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS), Research area "Sustainability and Environmental Governance" Collaborative Research Centre 1015 "Otium".
- International Master Programmes in English: Global Urban Health, Global Studies Program, Environmental Governance; German: Interdisziplinäre Anthropologie.

Networking opportunities in Germany

- The German Alliance for Global Health Research
- Heidelberg Institute of Global Health
- Focus Group Tübingen "Globale Gesundheit/Global Health"
- Global Health Hub Germany

International networking opportunities

- The Planetary Health Alliance is a consortium of over 200 universities, non-governmental organizations, research institutes, and government entities from

around the world" (Harvard based, founded 2016
(www.planetaryhealthalliance.org/planetary-health)

- The Planetary Health Academy (founded in 2020 by the German Alliance for Climate Change and Health (Deutsche Allianz Klimawandel und Gesundheit (KLUG): <https://planetary-health-academy.de/>)
- Institute of Public Health, Gothenburg University, Sweden: Joint project between WHO-TDR/NTD on the topic of Early Outbreak Warning Systems for arboviral diseases; in future also on "Migration and Violence". Joint supervision of Master's students.
- WHO Dept. of Public Health (PHE), Environmental and Social Determinants, Cooperation in the area "climate change and vector borne diseases" and "Housing and Health".
- Penn State University (USA). Student Exchange Programme - Cooperation in the area of Global Health.
- London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine: the Planetary Health Network (www.lshtm.ac.uk/newsevents/events/series/planetary-health-network)

Projects under preparation

- "Covid-19. Strategies in poor countries, a social catastrophe" The importance of a more socio-political rather than a purely medical-epidemiological perspective.
- "Interventions to improve mental health among civil war refugees in Colombia". (DAAD-Pagel project together with the Department of Psychosomatic Medicine of the Medical Center, Freiburg).
- "Migration and Violence: The Example of Colombia. Training and Research at the Interface between Medical-Psychological and Criminal-Technical Challenges" (DAAD application, ERASMUS application with an international consortium, in progress).
- "The science of disease elimination/eradication. Towards elimination of visceral leishmaniasis in the Indian subcontinent." Together with WHO/TDR).
- "Climate change and vector borne diseases": The most important vector mosquitoes have arrived in Southern Germany. (Together with WHO/PHE).
- "Control of Aedes borne diseases (Dengue, Zika, Chikungunya) with novel intervention strategies" (including social mobilization through digital devices).
- "Surveillance and outbreak detection/response: The gap between the reality and what should be done in 5 Andean countries." In collaboration with 3 Latin American Universities.

Proposed new research projects

Distribution dynamics and contagiousness, medical pluralism, value and climate change, religion/worldviews, conceptualizations of human and other-than-human beings, understanding of nature and the environment, food and social security, migration and violence mitigation.