

Planetary health literacy: a conceptual model for healthy people on a healthy planet

Global Health Literacy Summit
Rotterdam, 18.09.2024

Dr. Carmen Jochem
Department of Planetary & Public Health
University of Bayreuth, Germany
Email: carmen.jochem@uni-bayreuth.de

Carmen Jochem, Julia von Sommoggy, Anna-Katharina Hornidge, Eva-Maria Schwienhorst-Stich, Christian Apfelbacher

Humankind is facing a planetary crisis of enormous dimensions



Planetary health

The achievement of the highest attainable standard of health, well-being and equity worldwide through judicious attention to the human systems – political, economic and social – that shape the future of humanity, and the Earth’s natural systems that define the safe environmental limits within which humanity can flourish.

Education for planetary health could be among the key levers of the much-needed civilizational turn towards a sustainable and healthy future.

Education...

...goes beyond the sole information provision, teaching and acquiring of knowledge.

... includes socializing lifestyles built around reason and rationale as well as enabling individuals to develop and trust their intellectual competences and practical skillsets.

A large number of different literacy concepts from various research perspectives exist and target these competences.

Selected „literacy“ concepts

Health literacy

“[...] the knowledge, motivation and competencies of accessing, understanding, appraising, and applying health-related information within the healthcare, disease prevention and health promotion setting.” (11)

Eco-/ecological literacy

“The ecoliterate person has the knowledge necessary to comprehend interrelatedness and an attitude of care or stewardship. [...] Knowing, caring, and practical competence constitute the basis of ecological literacy. Ecological literacy, further, implies a broad understanding of how people and societies relate to each other and to natural systems, and how they might do so sustainably. It presumes both an awareness of the interrelatedness of life and knowledge of how the world works as a physical system.” (13)

“People who are ecoliterate cultivate compassion toward other forms of life. [...] This ability to feel empathy often stems from a deep understanding that humans are part of a broader community that includes all living beings. [...] Ecoliterate people collectively practice a way of life that fulfills the needs of the present generation while simultaneously supporting nature’s inherent ability to sustain life into the future.” (14)

Environmental literacy

“[...] is knowledge of environmental concepts and issues; the attitudinal dispositions, motivation, cognitive abilities, and skills, and the confidence and appropriate behaviors to apply such knowledge in order to make effective decisions in a range of environmental contexts. Individuals demonstrating degrees of environmental literacy are willing to act on goals that improve well-being of other individuals, societies, and the global environment, and are able to participate in civic life.” (15)

Sustainability literacy

“The knowledge, skills and mindsets that allow individuals to become deeply committed to building a sustainable future and assisting in making informed and effective decisions to this end.” (12)

Transformative literacy

“The ability to perceive, interpret and utilize information about societal transformation processes in a way that enables people to get actively involved in shaping these processes.” (10)

Climate and health literacy

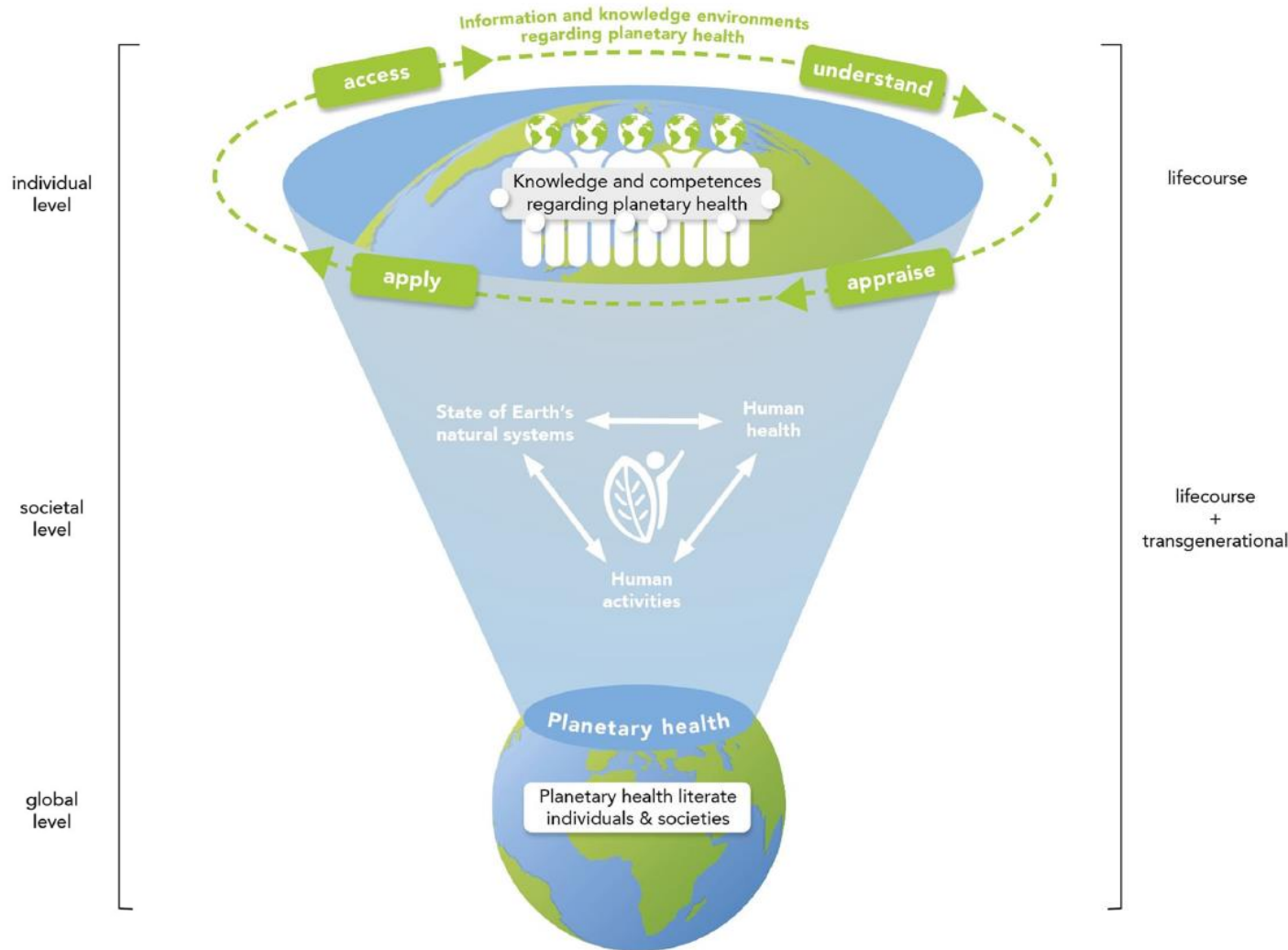
“[...] the degree to which an individual understands the complex relationship between climate change and human health; a climate health-literate individual can recognize direct and indirect linkages between climate change and health, communicate risks, assess data, comprehend uncertainty, and make informed and responsible personal decisions or advocate for broader policies that protect health.” (16)

Environmental health literacy

“Environmental health literacy integrates concepts from both environmental literacy and health literacy to develop the wide range of skills and competencies that people need in order to seek out, comprehend, evaluate, and use environmental health information to make informed choices, reduce health risks, improve quality of life and protect the environment.” (17)

→ a comprehensive and integrative planetary health approach that includes all aspects relevant for planetary health is still lacking

Planetary health literacy



...“the knowledge and competencies of accessing, understanding, appraising, and applying information in order to make judgements and take decisions regarding planetary health, across societies and for health-promoting, sustainable and transformative actions.”

Knowledge regarding planetary health and core competencies for planetary health literacy

Access/obtain information regarding planetary health

Ability to access information on the interconnectedness of human health, the state of the natural systems, and human activities for planetary health.

Apply/use information relevant to planetary health

Ability to make informed decisions regarding human activities or human health in the context of the state of the natural systems.



Understand information regarding planetary health

Ability to understand information on the interconnectedness between human health, human activities, and the state of the natural systems.

Appraise/judge information regarding planetary health

Ability to interpret and evaluate information on the diverse relationships between human activities, human health, and the state of the natural systems.

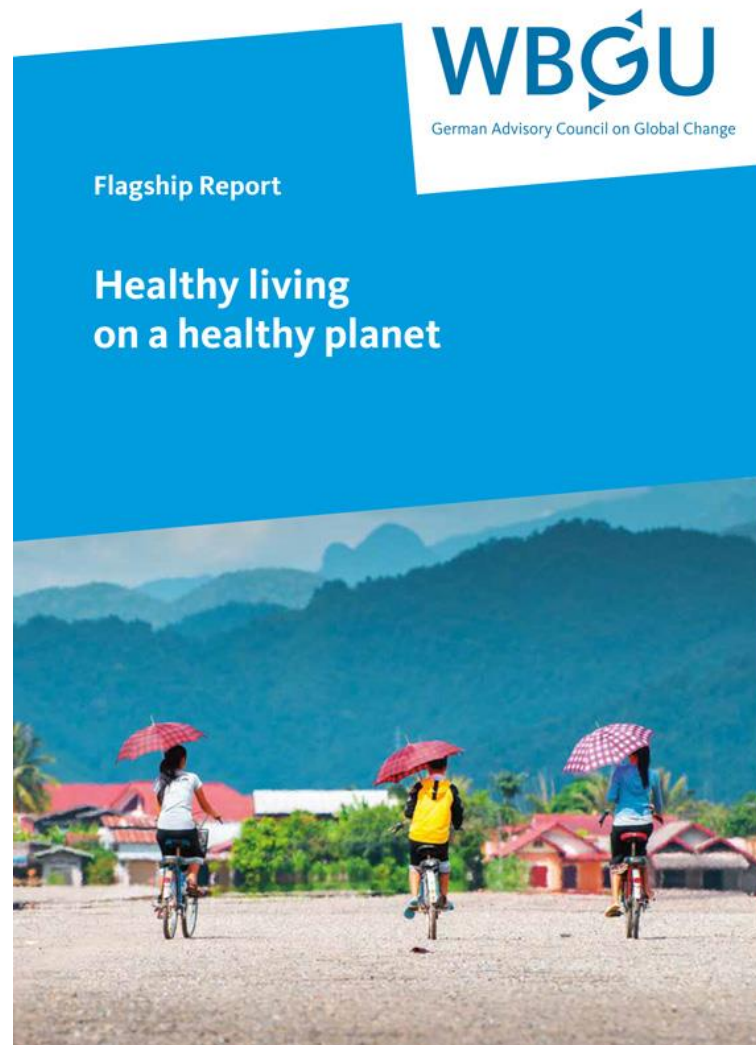
Zoom out

Planetary health literacy as goal of education for planetary health

Planetary health literate individuals and societies are enabled to sustain and promote their own health, population health, and the planet's health. They are able to adopt a more holistic understanding of their health embedded in natural systems they are living in. Based on their knowledge and attitude, they take decisions that reflect and foster the interconnectedness of human health and well-being with the state of the natural systems and related areas of nature-society interactions.



Planetary health literacy applied



THE LANCET Planetary Health

[This journal](#) [Journals](#) [Publish](#) [Clinical](#) [Global health](#) [Multimedia](#) [Events](#) [About](#)

VIEWPOINT · [Volume 8, Issue 9](#), E706-E713, September 2024 · [Open Access](#)

Planetary health learning objectives: foundational knowledge for global health education in an era of climate change

[Prof Kathryn H Jacobsen, PhD](#) ^a [✉](#) · [Prof Caryl E Waggett, PhD](#) ^b · [Pamela Berenbaum, MSc](#) ^c · [Brett R Bayles, PhD](#) ^d · [Gail L Carlson, PhD](#) ^e · [René English, MBChB PhD](#) ^f · et al. [Show more](#)

Future research needs

- To determine a set of indicators to quantify planetary health literacy
- To investigate the association between different levels of planetary health literacy and health outcomes as well as other sustainable behaviours
- To understand the implications of different ways of knowing, power dynamics, justice and equity on planetary health literacy
- ...

Discussion

Planetary health literacy may play a crucial role for human health, population health, and the planet's health – across current and future generations.

