

Dutch Culture: Society and Current Issues

Course syllabus 2026



summerschool
UTRECHT



Universiteit Utrecht

Dutch Culture: Society and Current Issues

This intensive two-week programme offers an overview of the main characteristics and historical backgrounds of present-day Dutch culture and society. Scholars from Utrecht University will provide introductions to a broad variety of topics, ranging from the lay-out of the country and its political system to contentious issues around migration and integration, the environment and climate change, and social and political stratification and polarisation. Lectures, interactive seminar sessions and group assignments are complemented by excursions and on-site discussions, including visits to the capital of Amsterdam, and national park Hoge Veluwe. The goal of this course is to provide a concise overview and first insights in Dutch politics, culture and society, as a solid basis of understanding for anyone interested in these issues or in the Netherlands in general.

Period

3 – 14 August 2026

Credits

4.0 ECTS + Certificate of Attendance

Materials

Emmeline Besamusca & Jaap Verheul (eds.), *Discovering the Dutch: On Culture and Society of the Netherlands* (Amsterdam 2014)

Faculty

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Format

This course is designed for face-to-face students-instructors interaction.

The course adopts different teaching methods: lectures and workshops, fieldtrips, self-study, and collaborative work. This course is interactive, so participants are invited to ask relevant historical questions, collaborate on assignments and participate in discussions about the literature and the

lectures. Student participation is crucial both in terms of individual preparation (e.g. readings) and reflection, engagement in sessions' Q&As, and creating a successful basis for preparing for the written exam.

You will receive more information and a finalised and more detailed schedule on the first day of the course. For information about the Social Program, please have a look at the Utrecht Summer School website!

On-site Education

During the course, you can use several of Utrecht University's computer and printing facilities. You have received your computer login code (SOLIS ID) from the Summer School administration. If this is not the case, send them an e-mail at summerschool@uu.nl or contact them by phone: +31 (0)302534400.

You are recommended to use one of the main computer rooms of the Faculty of Humanities in Kromme Nieuwegracht 80 (KNG 80). The computer rooms are opened from Mondays through Fridays from 08h45 to 17h00. The computer rooms are closed on Saturdays and Sundays.

Another option is to use the computers at the University Library (UB) Innercity (Drift 27). Again, use your login code (SOLIS ID) to log in at any of the library computers. You can also use the computers on the standing desks to search catalogues without having to log in. You cannot work on these computers and there are no printing facilities.

Beware: the University Library (UB) Innercity (Drift 27) will be closed in the weekends.

Location

Lectures and seminar sessions will take place in the building **Drift 25, Room 003**

Utrecht's old city centre features many buildings and structures several dating as far back as the High Middle Ages. It has been the religious centre of the Netherlands since the 8th century. It lost the status of prince-bishopric but remains the main religious centre in the country. Utrecht was the most important city in the Netherlands until the Dutch "Golden Age" in the seventeenth century, when it was surpassed by Amsterdam as the country's cultural centre and most populous city.

Utrecht is host to Utrecht University, the largest university in the Netherlands, as well as several other institutions of higher education. Due to its central position within the country, it is an important transport hub for both rail and road transport. It has the second-highest number of cultural events in the Netherlands, after Amsterdam.

Dutch Culture: Society and Current Issues

Day-to-day academic programme

4-14 August 2026

WEEK 1

Monday, 3 August

Where: Drift 25, Room 003

Readings for today *Discovering the Dutch*, Introduction and chapter 24.

11:00-11:45 | Welcome and Introduction to the course

12:00-13:00 | Lecture #1: Wietse de Jonge (UU): *Introduction to the Netherlands*

Lunchbreak

14:00-17:00 | Group assignment 1: *City tour and visiting a Dutch neighbourhood*

Instructions: see below, pp. 10-11.

Hand-in deadline: **Sunday, 9 August, 23:59h** via e-mail to w.w.dejonge@uu.nl

Tuesday, 4 August

Where: Drift 25, Room 003

Readings for today *Discovering the Dutch*, chapters 2, 4. And chapter 18 of *The Oxford Handbook of Dutch Politics*, “Democratic Legitimacy and Political Support in the Netherlands” (2024).

11:00-13:00 | Lecture #2: Wietse de Jonge: *From Accommodation to Contestation: Dutch Politics since 1945*

Lunchbreak

14:00-16:00 | Film-screening

Wednesday, 5 August

Where: Drift 25, Room 003

Readings for today *Discovering the Dutch*, chapters 12 and 22.

11:00-13:00 | Lecture #3 : Tomas de Smet (UvA): *High stakes in the Low Countries - postwar Dutch protest movements in international context*

Lunch

14:00-16:00 | Seminar #1 : *From The Hague to the Polder: Protest movements and the limits of legal power in the Netherlands and beyond*

Thursday, 6 August

Where: Drift 25, Room 003

Readings for today *Discovering the Dutch*: chapter 19. And the Introduction of

Aftershocks of Extraction Situating the History of Groningen Gas in the Anthropocene, 1-19 (2026).

11:00-13:00 | Lecture 4: Amber Striekwold (UU): *Politics of the Dutch Livestock*

Industry

Lunch

14:00-16:00 | Seminar #2: *Whose Ground Is It Anyway?: Gas, Earthquakes and the Politics of Environmental Decision-Making in Groningen*

Friday, 7 August

Excursion to the Hoge Veluwe

One day in the Hoge Veluwe, the largest national park in the Netherlands and home to heathlands, sand dunes, and dense forests. We will visit the Kröller-Müller Museum, one of the world's finest modern art collections, including multiple Van Gogh paintings. In the afternoon, we will join a guided tour on the history of the natural landscape and the natural park itself. A bus transfer to the park will be provided. The excursion will include the guided tour, free entry to the Kröller-Müller Museum, and the use of the park's free bicycles, giving you the freedom to cycle through the landscape at your own pace and discover the natural beauty of the Hoge Veluwe between visits.

WEEK 2

No lectures or seminars during the weekend, but please do not forget to hand in the written assignment 1 via e-mail, **Sunday, 9 August, 23:59h** at the latest.

Monday, 10 August

Where: Drift 25, Room 003

Readings for today *Discovering the Dutch*, chapters 10 and 26. In addition, we will read excerpts from novels by (post)colonial Dutch authors as well as some poetry; Hella Haase, Babs Gons and Raoul de Jong. Suggested reading: van Amelsvoort & Guillaume, "Playing empire at home: Het Beursspel and Dutch popular colonial geopolitics in the 1940s" (*Political Geography*, 2025) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2025.103404>

11:00-13:00 | Lecture #5: Jesse van Amelsvoort (UvA): *Friendship and Other Demons: The Postcolonial Present in the Netherlands and the White Gaze*

Lunch

14:00-16:00 | Seminar #3: *Ruling by Force, Returning by Right: Dutch imperial rule and the politics of restitution*

Tuesday, 11 August

Excursion to Amsterdam

One day in Amsterdam, the cultural heart of the Netherlands and a historic center of global trade. We will visit the Wereldmuseum, a leading institution dedicated to exploring the complexities of colonial history and its legacies today. The excursion will include a guided tour of the Wereldmuseum, focusing on the politics of collecting and display. After the tour, you are free to explore the city center and the historic canals on your own.

Wednesday, 12 August

Where: Drift 25, Room 003

Readings for today *Discovering the Dutch*, chapter 11

11:00-13:00 | Lecture #6: Catharine Aratakis (UU): *WWII in the Netherlands*

Lunch

14:00-17:00 | Self-study: prepare for final test

Thursday, 13 August

09:00-12:00 | Self-study: prepare for final test

13:00-15:00 | Final Test (at **Janskerkhof 15A, room 003**)

Friday, 14 August

10:00-11:00 | **Excursion:** Climbing the Utrecht Dom Tower
Lunch

14:30-16:00 | Presentation of Certificates (at **Janskerkhof 15A, room 003**)

16:00- 18:00 | Drinks (at **Café Hofman, Janskerkhof 17A**)

Assignments

Assignment 1: Visit a Dutch neighbourhood

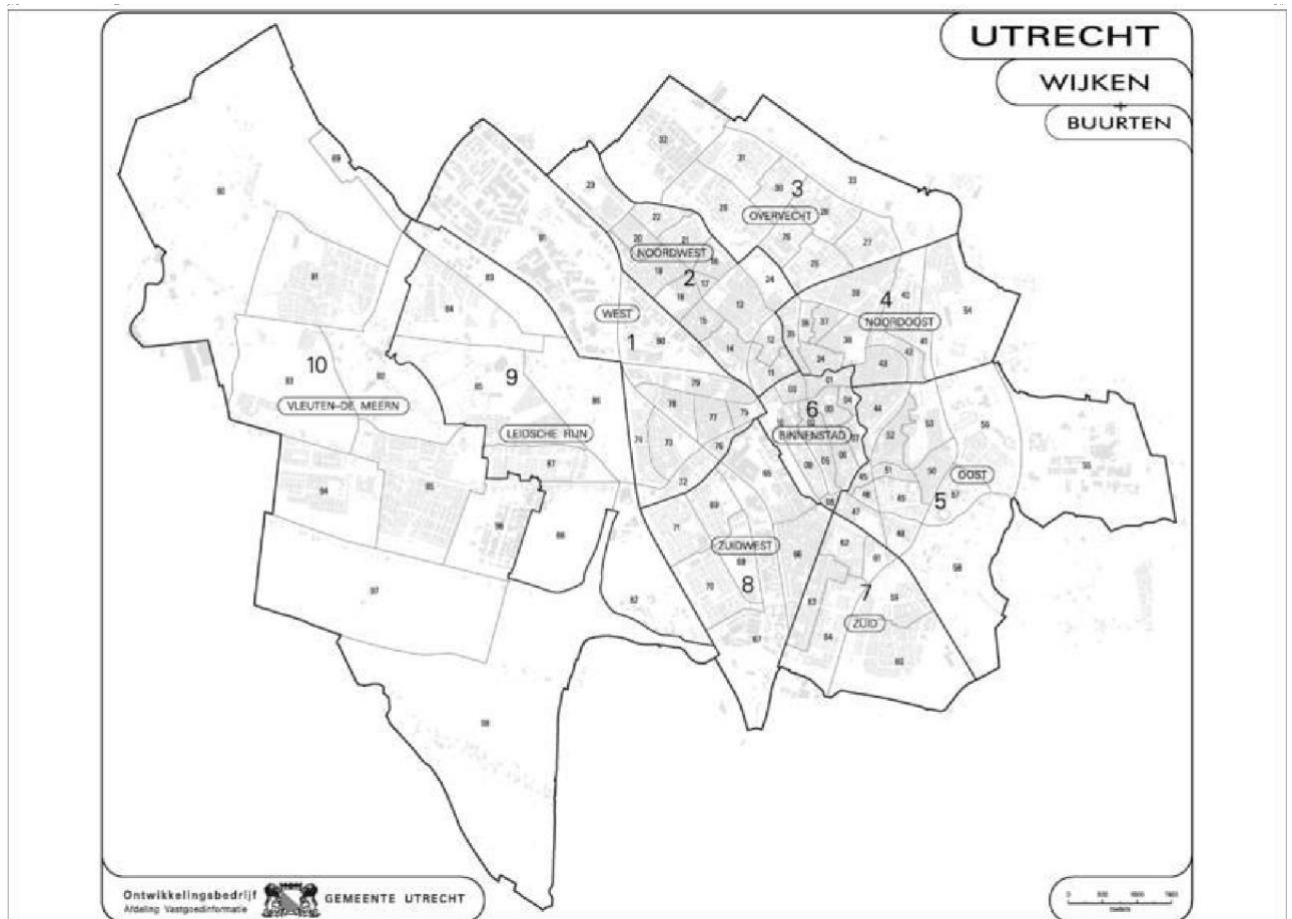
Date of visit: Monday, 3 August (afternoon)

Instructions: Following the guided tour, visit one of the selected three city districts in Utrecht (see below). Each district has a distinct atmosphere, or, better yet, *various* atmospheres. Take notes of things that strike you, thoughts and impressions. Ideally, you will chat with locals too. Try to find out what they think of their neighbourhood. All three locations are within a 15-minute walk or a short tram/bus ride from the city centre of Utrecht, providing a diverse spectrum of urban typologies for analysis.

The five districts are:

1. **Oudwijk.** An older area with medieval roots, expanded in the 19th century. Once mixed, it has gentrified and is now a desirable, relatively well-off urban neighborhood. Start at the Spoorwegmuseum.
2. **Tuinwijk & Grift park.** Built in 1921, Tuinwijk embodies the “garden city” ideal: orderly family life in a green environment between city and countryside. Start at Willem van Noortplein, and don’t forget to pay attention to the *Amsterdam school* architecture.
3. **Lombok.** Lombok originally developed as a multicultural working-class neighborhood, with buildings dating from the early 20th century. It is characterized by narrow streets and small but atmospheric workers’ houses. Notable landmarks include the new mosque at the beginning of Kanaalstraat and the sawmill De Ster. Start your exploration at Moskeeplein.

For an overview of all districts (in Dutch: *wijken*) in Utrecht, see <https://www.utrecht.nl/wonenen-leven/wijken/>



- The visit can be done alone or in small groups (max. 3).
- To get a better feel for the neighbourhood, visit stores, markets and/or cafés.

Write a **500–600 word essay** that identifies **one structural factor** (for example; transportation hierarchy, historical preservation, or gentrification) evident in the neighborhood to explain its character. You do not need prior expertise; simply observe how this factor shapes the area. Crucially, include a critical reflection on the guided tour: how did the tour’s narrative frame your initial expectations and how did your own exploration challenge or affirm that frame?

Alternative Format: The Photo Essay

If you wish to express your analysis visually, you may submit a Photo Essay instead of a traditional text-based essay. In this format, select 5–7 photographs that serve as visual evidence for your arguments. Each image must be accompanied by a substantial caption (approximately 80–100 words). Collectively, these captions must fulfill the same intellectual requirements as the written essay: they must identify a structural factor and reflect on the guided tour

Hand in the essay via e-mail to: w.w.dejonge@uu.nl

Deadline: Sunday, 9 August, 23:59h

Assessment

There will be two assessments that test the acquisition of knowledge and your ability to reflect individually and in group.

Assignment: 20 %

Final Exam: 80 %

You need an average grade of at least 5,5 to pass the course.

Credits: 4 ECTS

Attendance and Grading criteria

Note that full attendance is expected in all lectures, seminar sessions, and excursions.

Your grades will be numerical grades according to the Dutch grading system. Dutch grades range from 0 (very bad) to 10 (excellent). At Utrecht University, a 5,5 is the lowest passing grade, though note that this might be different at other (Dutch) institutions. Also note that grade inflation has not affected the Dutch grading system as much as it has some American institutions. Grades of 9 and higher are rarely given, the most common grades are between 6 and 8.

Note that conversion of grades that you have received in the Netherlands to grades at your home institution is the responsibility of your home institution, not Utrecht University.