

Hosted by

LANDac Summer School

Decolonizing land governance and the politics of conflict and peace

29 June to 10 July 2026



Course Directors:

Dr. Femke van Noorloos

Dr. Ir. Janwillem Liebrand

Dr. Pat Stys

Brent Sandtke

Location:

Janskerkhof 2-3, room 117

The LANDac Conference takes place from 1-2 July 2026 and the Early Career Research Day on 3 July 2026 and they form an integral part of the LANDac Summer School.

For more information about the Conference, please visit the [LANDac website](#).

About Summer School Utrecht

During summer the University of Utrecht, in cooperation with UMC Utrecht, Hogeschool Utrecht and Hogeschool voor de Kunsten Utrecht, offers a variety of courses for students and professionals all over the world through the Summer School. In the last 30 years, the Utrecht Summer School offered a wide selection of around 150 courses in nearly all scholarly disciplines combined with social activities and excursions. This year the LANDac hosts its 13th Summer School, offering a range of lectures on fair land governance and the many competing claims in the context of developments such as urbanisation, energy transition, climate change, conflict and peace. The summer school is structured around the challenge of finding ways to land governance fair and inclusive for human and non-human life. We look forward to an exciting transdisciplinary collaboration that we hope will draw many of you to Utrecht, the Netherlands.

Aim and theme of this year's course

The 2026 LANDac Summer School is focused on decolonizing land governance and the politics of conflict and peace. Since the start of the global land rush in 2010, land governance has increasingly been characterized by conflicts, compounded by crises of climate change, health decline, extractive capitalism, and geopolitical shifts. War and organized violence, and 'old-fashioned' conquests of land by states, is on the rise. Today, people in around 50 countries of the world are experiencing war or organized violence, affecting roughly one-sixth of the world population. Increasing numbers of people are displaced due to conflict, violence or political instability, and cannot return to their land.

In this course, we unravel this trend from a decolonial perspective on conflicts in land governance. Rather than viewing war, organized violence and land conquests as incidents or (temporal) escalations, we understand conflicts as rooted in colonial histories and unfair dynamics of land governance, connected to the interests of states and powerful private actors. Connecting these observations to everyday life, we view conflict as a broader phenomenon that ranges from intra-household and intra-community conflicts, to national and global geopolitical conflicts.

We discuss the multiple and competing claims on land by various actors (e.g. governments, private sector, communities, non-human actors) in relation to diverse types of conflict. Our approach is inspired by decoloniality and plurality of knowledges, which also means critically discussing the politics of knowledge and framing around land and conflict. We provide a space to explore plural interests, lived experiences, perspectives and knowledges around land. We actively involve participants in discussions on how to recognize land right practices and legal approaches whilst at the same time offering methods to develop realistic and fair land governance.

Key questions:

- How can we, as academics, practitioners, CSO's and policy makers, position ourselves in debates on decoloniality, fair transitions and competing claims on land?

- How can we work towards more socially just, and inclusive and sustainable forms of land governance?

Concretely, we discuss for instance:

- How to reconcile vulnerable people's rights to use land and build livelihoods on the one hand, with the depletion of resources on the other?
- How to secure land and housing rights of marginalized groups, especially for women, when many policy efforts seem to achieve the opposite?
- How to answer to the Global North's reduced readiness to combat climate change, uphold the rule of law and promote human rights?
- How to prevent that the (land) 'rights to nature' movement, inspired by decoloniality and more-than-human approaches, is co-opted by nature conservation lobbies?

MSc students, PhD students and professionals / practitioners will acquire up-to-date knowledge on current issues of land governance in relation to conflict and peace; and learn how to place these in broader theoretical contexts and policy debates. Participants learn to critically reflect on 'best practices' in land governance from plural perspectives. Topics are discussed in interactive lectures with ample space for dialogue. The design of the course allows for participants to engage with professionals and fellow students from a variety of backgrounds. Participants collaborate to prepare a land-use plan/strategy that takes into account the complexities and pluralities of seeing and using land.

Partners

The course is organized by the [Netherlands Academy for Land Governance \(LANDac\)](#), in collaboration with [RVO LAND-at-Scale](#), and the UU platforms / communities [IOS Fair Transitions](#) and [Critical Pathways](#). LANDac is a network of organizations interested in how land governance may contribute to sustainable and inclusive development. The [LANDac Annual Conference](#) forms part of the Summer School program.

Target group

The course is designed for Master's students, PhD students, academics; as well as for practitioners e.g. from development organizations, CSOs, social movements and governments who are interested in or work in the fields of land governance, development studies, natural resource management, planning, human rights and conflict studies.

Course aim

The course provides participants with thorough knowledge and plural decolonial perspectives of current issues in land governance and competing claims in relation to conflict and peace. Participants also build understanding of practical knowledge and possible solutions.

Assignment

During the Summer School you will be working in small groups on the development of a land use plan in which you integrate different knowledges and recognise multiple claims to land. The guidelines for this assignment are to take into account:

- Informal rights The position of vulnerable groups such as indigenous groups or women.
- The role of investors for urban development/commercial agriculture/energy transition.
- The more-than-human interests considering land.
- Dynamics of conflict and peace – or the potential of peace.

The output can be shaped in a format through which your group can convey your learnings, decisions, and outcome. For example, you can draw maps, present an abstract representation, write a text, act out a play. Be creative! We do ask the groups to make sure their plan is practically implementable and fair. There is time throughout the programme to work on the assignment.

Dates

29 June - 10 July. Please note that the [LANDac Annual Conference 2026](#), 1-2 July, and LANDac Early Career Researcher Day, 3 July, form part of the programme of the Summer School.

Practicalities

3 ECTS

Costs: €695 which includes the course, online course material, daily coffee/tea and lunch on the last day. Participation in the LANDac Annual Conference 2026 is also included in the price.

Communications on daily matters are proposed to be done through a Whatsapp Group. We will organize a group at the start of the course.

We will use Brightspace for announcements, dissemination of course materials such as essential and recommended reading, and general information on the programme and assignment. UU Summer school provides you with login credentials.

You can access WiFi at the University premises. The access code will be available on the day.

Lunch will not be provided except for the first and final day, and we kindly ask you to bring your own. Coffee/tea will be available throughout the day and is free. Participation in the conference (including catering) is included in the Summer School.

For practical matters regarding registration, invoices, invitation letters for visa applications, accommodation and directions to the summer school venue: summerschool@uu.nl, or telephone +31 (0)30 253 4400

For matters regarding the programme: landac2026@gmail.com

Provisional programme

Week 1: Theorizing land governance, conflict and competing claims + LANDac conference

Monday 29/06 - Land Governance and Positionality		
Time	Activity	Description
09:30-10:00	Plenary	Introduction to the Summer School and Explanation of Assignment <i>Dr Ir Janwillem Liebrand & Dr. Femke van Noorloos (Utrecht University)</i>
10:15-12:00	Lecture	Understanding land governance and competing claims through the lens of gender and social justice <i>Dr Ir Janwillem Liebrand (Utrecht University)</i>
12:00-13:00	Lunch	Lunch is provided
13:00-14:15	Lecture	Seeing land: decolonial and more-than-human perspectives <i>Dr Femke van Noorloos (Utrecht University)</i>
14:30-15:45	Lecture	Tangible and intangible aspects of indigenous people's relationships with the land (New Zealand) <i>Dr Francesca Marzatico (University of Otago)</i>
16:00-17:00	Tour	Exploring the roots: Walking tour through Utrecht's historic city centre <i>Dr Guus van Westen</i>

Tuesday 30/06 – Competing land claims, identities and conflict		
Time	Activity	Description
09:30-11:00	Lecture	Indigenous peoples as landscape stewards – tensions related to epistemic justice <i>Dr Marja Spierenburg (Leiden University)</i>
11:15-12:45	Lecture	Perspectives on land (and) conflict <i>Dr Gemma van der Haar (Wageningen University & Research)</i>
12:45-13:30	Lunch	Bring your own lunch
13.30-15:00	Lecture	Group work and talk with lectures <i>(with Francesca Marzatico and Gemma van der Haar)</i>
15:00-17:00	Optional	Discussion with lecturers, group work, free time Allocated time to work on assignment

Wednesday 01/07 – LANDac conference		
Time	Activity	Description
09:30-12:30	Key notes	See conference programme
12:30-13:30	Lunch	Conference lunch
13:30-17:00	Sessions	Choose from parallel sessions (see detailed conference programme)
17:00-18:30	Drinks	LANDac conference

Thursday 02/07 – LANDac conference (programme TBC)		
Time	Activity	Description
09:00–12:15	Sessions	Choose from parallel sessions (see detailed conference programme)
12:15-13:15	Lunch	Conference lunch
13:15-14:45	Sessions	Choose from parallel sessions (see detailed conference programme)
15:00-17:00	Plenary	Plenary and closing LANDac conference

Friday 03/07 – LANDac Early Career Researcher Day		
Time	Activity	Description
09:00-09:15	Opening	Opening word
09:15-11:00	Lecture	Methodologies of land research in conflict <i>Jon Unruh (McGill University, Canada)</i>
11:00-11:30	Coffee/ tea	Break
11:30-13:00	Lecture	Conflict Analysis <i>François Lenfant (Utrecht University)</i>
13:00-14:00	Lunch	Break
14:00-15:00	Workshop	Ethics of field research <i>An Ansoms (University of Louvain)</i>
15:00-15:30	Coffee/tea	Break
15:30-17:00	Workshop	Participatory theatre <i>An Ansoms (University of Louvain)</i>

Week 2: Thinking about the future of land in times of conflict and peace

Monday 06/07 – Land (grabbing), Food Security and Donor Interventions		
Time	Activity	Description
09:30-11:00	Lecture	Donor dilemmas: Exploring land governance from a funder's view <i>Anicha Diemkoudre & Sem Olijkan (RVO LAND-at-scale)</i>
11:15-12:30	Lecture	Land Grabbing and Food Security <i>Dr. Harrison Awuh (Utrecht University)</i>
12:30-13:30	Lunch	Bring your own lunch
13:30-15:00	Discussion	Group work and talk with lecturers <i>Anicha Diemkoudre, Sem Olijkan and Dr. Harrison Awuh</i>
15:00-17:00	Optional	Allocated time to work on assignment, free time

Tuesday 07/07 – Legal Perspectives to Land and Food		
Time	Activity	Description
09:30-11:00	Lecture	Human rights approach to land and food <i>Dr Julie Fraser (Utrecht University)</i>
11:15-12:30	Lecture	The recognition of land rights in international law and social justice concerns <i>Dr Roman Teshome (Utrecht University)</i>
12:30-13:30	Lunch	Bring your own lunch
13:30 -15:00	Discussion	Group work and talk with lecturers <i>Dr. Julie Fraser and Dr. Roman Teshome (Utrecht University)</i>
15:00-17:00	Optional	Allocated time to work on assignment, free time

Wednesday 08/07 – Engineering transitions and (...)		
Time	Activity	Description
09:30-12:30	Optional	Allocated time to work on assignment / free time
12:30-13:30	Lunch	Bring your own lunch
13:30-14:00	Lecture	Fair Urban Transitions and the Role of Land <i>Dr Femke van Noorloos (Utrecht University)</i>
14:00-15:30	Lecture	Indonesia’s new capital city INK and food security <i>Dr. Rijanta, Dr. Erlis Saputra & Agung Jauhari (Universitas Gadjah Mada)</i>
15:30-17:00	Optional	Allocated time to work on assignment / free time

Thursday 09/07 – Land Frontiers and Energy Transitions		
Time	Activity	Description
09:30-11:00	Lecture	Engineering transitions? Land, water, technology and intersections with masculinity and race <i>Dr. Ir. Janwillem Liebrand (Utrecht University)</i>
11:15-12:30	Lecture	Climate-conflict debates in development <i>Dr. Judith Verweijen (Utrecht University)</i> Conflict in Mali and Niger, and land <i>Dr. Pat Stys (Utrecht University)</i>
12:30-13:30	Lunch	Bring your own lunch
13:30-15:00	Discussion	Group work and talk with lecturers <i>Dr. Ir. Janwillem Liebrand, Dr. Pat Stys (Utrecht University)</i>
15:00-17:00	Optional	Allocated time to work on assignment / free time

Friday 10/07 – Presentation and closure		
Time	Activity	Description
09:30-13:00	Plenary	Presentation of portfolios
13:00-15:00	Lunch	Farewell lunch Catering by LANDac

Bibliographies



Femke van Noorloos

Femke is engaged in co-creating research, teaching and impact around urban housing, new cities and megaprojects, focusing on large-scale urban projects such as new cities in relation to land and housing; as well as innovations and policies in incremental housing and citizen-led urban development. She has worked across Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Europe, co-creating knowledge across the global North / South divide. She is also interested in dimensions of migration/mobility, tourism, and intersectional gendered inequalities within these urban dynamics.



Janwillem Liebrand

Janwillem's research and education focusses on the practices and politics of water use and management, land claims and food security, and the role of engineering, and science and technology expertise in promoting development interventions. His expertise is based on research work in South Asia and Southern Africa. He obtained a PhD at Wageningen University and author of the book "Whiteness in engineering: Tracing technology, masculinity and race in Nepal's development". He works at the International Development Studies (IDS) group at Utrecht university, and is a board member of IOS Fair Transition.



Pat Stys

As a postdoctoral researcher at Utrecht University, I am currently working on the Revisiting the Climate-Conflict Nexus (CLIMCON) project. Generally, my work examines governance, displacement, and conflict dynamics in the Great Lakes Region and the Sahel. I examine how authority is configured across state institutions, non-state actors, and local communities in contexts shaped by protracted violence and environmental change. Drawing on long-term fieldwork in eastern DR Congo, Rwanda, Mali, and Niger, I have combined participatory research with social network analysis and mixed methods to understand how people navigate insecurity, access resources, and negotiate power and belonging under shifting conditions.



Brent Sandtke

Brent Sandtke is a lecturer in the Bachelor's program in Social Geography and Planning and a research assistant for the Following Frontiers of the Forest City and Changing Lanes Together projects. His research interests and experience lie in the qualitative social sciences, with an emphasis on Social Impact Assessment (SIA), vulnerable groups, innovation, inclusive and sustainable development, and gender equality. Brent holds a BA in Modern Societal History (2021) from Erasmus University Rotterdam and an MSc in International Development Studies (2023) from Utrecht University.



Francesca Marzatico

I teach land tenure and land administration at the National School of Surveying at the University of Otago, New Zealand. I have joined the academia in 2021 after more than 20 years working in post conflict and transitional countries on human rights, land and natural resources governance. My research at the interface between Indigenous and western land governance focuses on traditional governance, Indigenous people rights to land and natural resources, women's land rights.



Guus van Westen

Guus van Westen recently retired as a lecturer and researcher in Development Studies at Utrecht University. He has worked on themes ranging from housing and local economic development to land governance and food security. He has been with LANDac since its start and also served as its co-chair. A long-time resident of Utrecht, he is also interested in the city's past and architectural heritage, and for that reason serves as our tour guide.



Marja Spierenburg

Marja Spierenburg is Professor in the Anthropology of Sustainable Development and Livelihoods at Leiden University (the Netherlands), and Research Fellow at Stellenbosch University South Africa. Her research focuses on the role of the private sector in nature conservation and land reforms in Southern and East Africa, and the impacts on local communities' access to land and livelihood strategies. She has also published on the inclusion of local and indigenous knowledge in biodiversity and sustainability assessments.



Gemma van der Haar

Gemma van der Haar works at the chair group Sociology of Development and Change/Disaster Studies at Wageningen University. She is a development sociologist interested in social practice in conflict and post-conflict settings. She is also co-chair of LANDac.



Jon Unruh

Jon Unruh is Professor at the Department of Geography, McGill University, Canada. He focuses on war-affected land and property rights. He has conducted research, policy and practice work in Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Sudan, Liberia, Somalia, Mozambique, East Timor, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Zambia, Ethiopia, Uganda, Cambodia, Angola, Cameroon, Turkey, Slovenia, Jordan, Colombia, Peru, Tanzania, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, and generally with the UN, World Bank, USAID, DFID, and other bilateral donors and NGOs.



François Lenfant

He is a lecturer at the University of Utrecht, within the Conflict Studies group, as part of the History Department, and project associate/principal consultant for International Alert. His areas of expertise are the 'resource curse', conflict sensitivity, sustainable development, and the economic dimensions of peace processes. His PhD thesis explored business interaction with peace and conflict in Central Africa, in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.



An Ansoms

An Ansoms, PhD in Applied Economics, is a Professor in development studies at the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL), Belgium. Her research focuses upon natural resource conflicts and challenges for rural development in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. She is the main coordinator of the Land Rush Project.



Anicha Diemkoudre

Anicha Diemkoudre works at the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) and is programme advisor of the LAND At Scale (LAS) programme. Her role is to support land governance projects and partners to improve land rights, governance, and conflict resolution. The role focuses on coordination, learning, and ensuring sustainable impact.



Sem Olijkan

Sem Olijkan works at the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) and is advisor of the LAND-at-scale (LAS) programme. LAS is a land governance support programme aimed at low and middle-income countries. It focuses on sustainable and just land governance for everyone. This will result in improved use of land and natural resources for food, housing and production. It also helps reduce conflicts and competing claims over land. LAS runs to 2033.



Harrison Awuh

Harrison Esam Awuh is a political ecologist and human geographer. He is an assistant professor in food health inequalities and climate change at Utrecht University. Prior, he served as a senior researcher at Aeres University of Applied Sciences and Flevo Campus (the Netherlands). Harrison has conducted research and published on sustainability in the nature conservation sector and micro-franchising in Africa. He also worked on a collaborative research project on sustainability in the frugal innovation sector.



Julie Fraser

Julie Fraser is a Human Rights lawyer and scholar with the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM) and the Montaigne Centre at Utrecht University. She teaches in the bachelor and master programmes, including public international law, international criminal law, Transitional Justice, and human rights law. Julie's present research interests include human rights and the environment, as well as relationships between Islamic and international law. Julie is a board member of 'Fair Transitions', a platform of UU's Institutions for Open Societies that works toward safe, inclusive and climate-resilient landscapes.



Roman Teshome

Roman Teshome is an Assistant Professor with the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM) and the Montaigne Centre at Utrecht University. Roman's research interest extends to various areas of international human rights law, particularly human rights and development, socio-economic rights, and internal displacement.



Rijanta

Rijanta is Professor Rural Development Geography at the Faculty of Geography of Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He holds a PhD in Geography from Universitas Gadjah Mada and Utrecht University in the Netherlands based on his research on rural diversification in Yogyakarta Special Province. He has been active in collaborating with various actors from governments, communities and other researchers in Indonesia.



Erlis Saputra

Erlis Saputra is a lecturer and researcher at the Rural Development Geography group at the Faculty of Geography of the Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He holds a PhD degree of Utrecht University and is currently involved in the Following the Frontiers of the Forest City project, which studies the construction of Nusantara, the new capital city of Indonesia.



Agung Jauhari

Agung Jauhari is a Full-time PhD Candidate in the International Development Studies Department of Human Geography and Spatial Planning, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University. Agung studied at the Faculty of Geography, University of Gadjah Mada, for a bachelor's degree, majoring in Regional Development graduated in 2013. In 2016, he graduated from the same faculty for the Master of Science in Geography.



Judith Verweijen

Judith works at the International Development Studies group at Utrecht University. Her research is situated at the intersection of political geography, political ecology and conflict studies. It focuses on the interplay between resource conflicts, environmental and climate change and armed mobilization in areas of protracted violence, and how representations of this interplay feed into policy discourses and practices. Her main empirical focus is on eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, specifically the Kivu provinces, where she has conducted intermittent fieldwork since 2010.