

UPF presents its Planetary Wellbeing initiative to the world in a scientific article

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In 2018, Pompeu Fabra University launched its Planetary Wellbeing initiative, a long-term institutional strategy spurred by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and based on the Planetary Health project promoted by the Rockefeller Foundation and The Lancet.

Fifteen academics and [public officials](#), led by the three directors of the

initiative, Josep Maria Antó, scientific director of ISGlobal; Josep Lluís Martí, UPF vice-rector for innovation projects, and Jaume Casals, UPF rector, are the authors of an academic article published in the journal *Sustainability*, in which they present the Planetary Wellbeing initiative.

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The article involves the participation of several proponents of the initiative from different departments of the University, as well as [research institutions](#) in France, the United Kingdom and the United States, including two prestigious international researchers: Howard Frumkin, one of the world's leading experts in Planetary Health, and Marc Fleurbaey, one of the most renowned international economists in the field of wellbeing and climate change.

We live in a time of pressing planetary challenges, many of which threaten catastrophic change to the natural environment and require massive and novel coordinated scientific and societal efforts on an unprecedented scale. In this context, UPF understands that Universities and other academic institutions have the opportunity and responsibility to assume a leading role in an era when the destiny of the planet is precisely in the hands of human beings.

Josep Lluís Martí, UPF vice-rector for innovation projects and co-author, explains that the article is the first 'concept paper' drafted in the framework of the University's Planetary Wellbeing initiative: "This paper seeks to explain what we might understand by Planetary Wellbeing, why it was decided to extend the original term of Planetary Health to the field of wellbeing, and why universities and research centers should undertake a commitment to the UN's SDG in its three

main areas of activity: teaching, research and knowledge transfer."

The article describes how UPF is responding to these challenges, and thus it provides an example of how higher education institutions might meet their responsibility in confronting those challenges through conceptualization of the underlying sustainable aim of the transformation required in the existing institution.

But the article goes further as it is an invitation for others to join in to work towards this shared goal. According to Josep Lluís Martí, publishing in *Sustainability*, one of the top international scientific journals in this field, "represents a presentation to the world of the Planetary Wellbeing initiative and an ambitious commitment by UPF to invite other universities and research centers to collaborate in this strategic agenda for the future."

How does the University understand the concept of Planetary Wellbeing and what implications does it have?

The Planetary Wellbeing initiative defines this concept as "the highest attainable standard of wellbeing for human and non-human beings and their social and natural systems." Developing the potential of these new concepts involves substantial theoretical and empirical effort in many different fields, all of them interrelated by the crosscutting challenges of global complexity, interdisciplinarity, and urgency. "Close collaboration of science, humanities, and culture is more desperately needed now than ever before in the history of humankind," the authors assert.

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Josep Lluís Martí is of the opinion that "the concept of planetary [wellbeing](#), as we understand it at UPF, provides a particularly fruitful framework in which to develop this threefold commitment to the SDG in the areas of research, teaching and knowledge transfer, and its own research agenda aimed at finding solutions for the major urgent, complex planet-wide challenges that humanity faces today, such as climate change, the pandemic and sustainability."

The article examines how the Planetary Wellbeing initiative applies the three challenges that need to be addressed in order to succeed: conceptual, knowledge and implementation and governance. The conceptual challenges refer to the rules, that is, to set a regulative ideal for all humanity and for the planet; the knowledge ones, to the opportunity for new research to stimulate connections between different scientific disciplines on issues relevant to the future of the planet; and those of implementation and governance, to the various actions needed to address, for example, climate change, and will be decisive for the future of humanity.

What actions has UPF got underway?

The article reviews the various transformative educational initiatives implemented and planned by the University, which in 2019 made a "Declaration of Climate Emergency" as part of its institutional sustainability strategy, which has contributed to an initial assessment of its carbon footprint and establishing several specific ambitious goals to reduce this footprint.

An annual plenary meeting, an annual call for internal research seed funding, the organization of several annual conferences and international research meetings, the design of new courses and specific, interdisciplinary programs on Planetary Wellbeing, such as a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), a master's degree (jointly with the UOC

and ISGlobal), and a minor; the awarding of a prize for the best master's degree thesis and for the best doctoral thesis on Planetary Wellbeing, and the organization of public talks and dialogs, are some of the actions that UPF has initiated.

Universities have a central role not only in developing much needed research on the complex issues concerning Planetary Wellbeing but also in teaching and promoting the view that a new kind of science and approach to such issues is needed," the authors conclude.

More information: Josep M. Antó et al, The Planetary Wellbeing Initiative: Pursuing the Sustainable Development Goals in Higher Education, *Sustainability* (2021). [DOI: 10.3390/su13063372](https://doi.org/10.3390/su13063372)

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