

History behind our Master Global Urban Health

The postgraduate Master GUH programme at the University of Freiburg was created by the visionary medical doctor coming from the WHO and the University of Liverpool, Prof. Axel Kroeger, who came to Freiburg in summer 2010.

Prof. Michael Wirsching, at the time Director of Psychosomatic Medicine and Coordinator of International Affairs at the University Freiburg, facilitated the establishment of this post graduate course.

The rationale behind the programme was to respond to the rise of high risks due to the increasing urbanisation. All over the world, diseases such as communicable and chronic infections, air pollution and challenges associated with climate change, mental health problems, migration and violence become increasingly important.

Prof. Axel Kroeger saw how a green municipality like Freiburg could be a hub to train future global health leaders using the strengths the city provides: a green environment, availability and high expertise of mental health and infectious diseases professionals, a large institute for environmental health, the physical activity of the population, the acceptance of many refugees and the proximity to many international organisations including the UN and international NGOs among many more assets. *"No matter which approach you take to address health risks: Freiburg has it all".*

Since September 2016, the course has been implemented under the scientific advice of Prof. Kroeger and coordinated by Dr. Sonia Diaz-Monsalve. Sonia is a Public Health expert from Colombia who also worked in Geneva at The Global Fund and the WHO. Initially, the programme belonged to the Faculty of Humanities, in those years under the leadership Prof. Sabine Dabringhaus, and since 2020 the programme is attached to the Faculty of Medicine.

The Centre for Planetary Health (previously called Centre for Medicine and Society) organises this unique and interdisciplinary one-year postgraduate course. The methodology used is mainly participatory. Students usually learn the theoretical aspects in the morning and apply the new knowledge in practice in the afternoon.

The Global Urban Health study programme is an exceptional course also due to its interdisciplinary focus on how to improve the health situation specifically in cities, with low and middle income countries (LMICs) as a priority. It is important for national governments to look at the health challenges globally, because mosquitoes or viruses do not know national or regional borders. This has been clearly illustrated by the recent COVID-19 pandemic. With globalisation, the same applies to chronic diseases in poor and rich countries. Since fast food, cigarettes and mobiles phones are now everywhere, accompanied by heart attacks, cancer and diabetes.

Soon, the Master will celebrate 10 years of its creation. More than 5,000 prospective students from a wide range of professions and countries have applied for the 20-25 study places offered annually, the majority from LIMCs. 150 new Global Health ambassadors from more than 40 disciplines and around 60 countries all over the world have been trained in our Master programme. The intercultural and interdisciplinary diversity is a unique and wonderful experience not only for the Master students but also for the lecturers and the Master staff. Complementing each other and solving the global health and health services challenges is the only way to grow personally and professionally.

We are grateful for the creator of this course, Prof. Axel Kroeger and the main implementer, Dr. Sonia Diaz-Monsalve and their great engagement and passion to make the postgraduate programme a successful example of contributing to a more equitable and just world.