

## Profile of the Health & Society Group at Wageningen University

The Health & Society Group is one of the 21 chair groups of the Social Sciences department at Wageningen University & Research. The mission of the Health & Society Group is to offer high quality Bachelor and Master education and to conduct internationally visible social sciences research that contributes to improving health and the quality of life. The Group is well positioned within the unique scientific environment at Wageningen University, which combines social and natural sciences disciplines in the study of food, environment and health. The Group consists of 8 scientific staff members (3 associate professors, 2 assistant professors and 3 lecturers), 3 support staff and 11 PhD candidates.

### Research

The focus of the Group is the study of public health, health promotion and health protection, in resource poor and resource rich contexts, , and the role of actors and social institutions in advancing health and wellbeing. The Chair Group uses a dynamic approach to health, and provides high quality research to support scientists, health institutions and policy makers with good quality and useful insights, knowledge and information. Through education and research, the Group aims to contribute to reducing health inequalities.

The Group works from the perspective that people create, and are created by, their social, natural and built environment, and hereby influence their own and other people's health and well-being. Health is considered as a process that enables people to lead a socially, and economically productive life, and incorporates physical, social, mental and spiritual dimensions. Health issues arise from the interaction between individuals, groups or communities and factors within their socio-ecological and material context. Experiences during childhood, ageing, living and working throughout life (life-course) have cumulative and interactive effects on health and well-being. Most ongoing research projects relate to current societal phenomena in relation to health, such as health inequalities, aging populations, urbanization, globalization of travel and trade, climate change and changing policies of governments at national and international level.

The research of the Group builds on a variety of social sciences disciplines. The group applies a mixed methods approach, i.e. a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods.

The current research programme of the Health & Society Group is organised in three themes:

- Understanding health practices: The mechanisms underlying health development through people – environment (social, natural, built) interaction, and the influence thereof on sustainable health development;
- Supportive environments: Settings where people live their everyday life - such as families, schools, workplaces, communities, cities, and health care settings - which offer protection from factors that threaten good health. Special attention is paid to social-spatial and environmental (in)justice and (in)equalities;

- Facilitation of health development processes: The design, implementation and evaluation of health promoting strategies. This includes developing frameworks for coordinated (multi-inter- and trans-disciplinary) action, citizen participation and citizen science.

In the coming years, the Health & Society Group together with the Consumption and Healthy Lifestyle Group will build a shared vision and advance the portfolio of collaborative activities in education and research in the field of public health. They will take the lead in strengthening the position of Wageningen University & Research in health-related research, and actively connect related WUR researchers to the domain.

### **Education**

The Health & Society Group contributes to the Bachelor programme 'Gezondheid en Maatschappij (Health and Society)', and the Master programmes 'Communication, Health and Life Sciences', 'Landscape Architecture and Planning', and 'Leisure, Tourism and Environment'. The education programme of the Group entails courses on health & society, health & environment, health psychology and global health, amongst others. The Group annually supervises around 24 Bachelor thesis students and 30 Master thesis students. The Health & Society Group is coordinator of the European Training Consortium in Public Health and Health Promotion (ETC-PHHP). The Group regularly organises summer schools and other activities for PhD candidates and professionals, also in close collaboration with other groups within and outside Wageningen University, including the WU Centre of Space, Place and Society, and the Wageningen School of Social Sciences.

### **Collaboration**

The Health & Society Group actively collaborates with the chair group Consumption and Healthy Lifestyles (CHL) and other groups of the Social, Plant, Environmental, and Nutrition Sciences (e. g. Human Nutrition and Health). The Chair Group is further embedded within the Centre for Space, Place and Society, which brings together researchers from different social sciences disciplines. The Centre focuses on issues of socio-spatial and environmental justice and researches the dynamics of spatial and social rootedness, connections, and circulations, with special attention to questions of inequality, exclusion, difference and plurality. Four chair groups participate in the Centre: Cultural Geography, Health & Society, Rural Sociology, and Sociology of Development and Change.

Outside Wageningen, the Group collaborates closely with universities in the Netherlands (Nijmegen, Utrecht, Amsterdam (2x), Tilburg, Groningen) and national health institutions (e.g. ministry of Public Health; National Institute for Public Health and the Environment-RIVM; Knowledge Centre for Sport-KCS). The Group cooperates with a variety of European universities among others in Montpellier, Bergen, Trondheim, Alicante, Girona, Perugia, Cagliari, Wales, Zurich, Trolhattan and Lisbon. Outside Europe, the Group maintains close ties with the universities in New Zealand (Auckland) Australia (New South Wales), the Institute of Medical Research and Medicinal Plant Studies (IMPM) in Cameroon, IPB University in Indonesia, and the University of Kigali in Rwanda.

### **Service to the academic community and to society**

Members of the Group participate in scientific advisory boards of the Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (ZonMw) and the Health Council of the Netherlands. Staff members are regularly invited for guest lectures at universities all over Europe. Furthermore, the Group has an extensive collaborative network of professional organisations such as the centres for youth care, municipal health services in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Arnhem, Nijmegen, Eindhoven, Deventer and Wageningen, and the hospital in Ede (Ziekenhuis Gelderse Vallei).

The Health & Society Group is an active member of the International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE), the Global Working Group on Salutogenesis, the European network for the promotion of Health Enhancing Physical Activity (HEPA) and the European Public Health Association (EUPHA). Staff members are regularly invited to review grant applications and to submit articles for international scientific journals in the field of public health.