

## Editorial

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This year's NGP Yearbook is slightly different than normally. The theme for this year's NGP Yearbook of the Geographical Society of Northern Finland is "Geographical reflections from the North". With this theme, we wanted to receive writings from the younger generation of geographers. We encourage young researchers to reflect critically on their research topics and/or their research carriers. We didn't want to prompt or restrict them too much. However, as in every serious call for papers, we formulated some questions at which they could start: Why have I chosen this particular research topic? How did I end up with that topic? What is the contribution of my research to geography? How is it related to the research traditions of the big G? Does it have something to offer to society – and to my own career? What is the new (,) northern (and) geography in my research?

Most of these are the kinds of questions, to which every PhD student should be prepared to answer in graduate schools, in examinations,

in performance appraisals engaged with their supervisor, by the copying machine (when the professor of competing research field is standing behind you waiting for his turn), and finally in the public defence of their doctoral thesis. "Be Prepared!" is the motto of the Scouts – the same applies also to the young academics who are continuously evaluated by "the System". Thus, the System itself doesn't offer too much opportunities and time for that kind of self-reflection. Instead of giving time to our colleagues (even we are unable to increase its amount), our purpose was to offer an opportunity for some kind of reflection on one's own research.

The following eight writings will answer – to some extent – to the questions mentioned above. Some of them are more personal whereas some are more scientific. Some are more political than others. Some are more local whereas some are more global. In the end, all of them contemplate the scientific questions which every geographer has consid-

ered along their careers. Even Mr. *Humboldt*.

It is very obvious that there cannot be one specific line of “Northern Reflection” in contemporary geography. At the same time, there cannot be one “right” way to do geography. One way emphasises more international and “pure” scientific aspects; another aspect deals with local or regional questions and applications. In a certain phase in one’s carrier, the scientific way of thinking is more accurate. Later, perhaps, the researcher becomes more aware of local questions and challenges. Both ways belong into being academic and intellectual actors in society. This is not a heretic opinion, but it may affect “scratch” some fundamentalists in the modern university. When we academics stop thinking widely, we stop being academics and turn into being “social” or “natural” (or whatever) engineers.

In this NGP Yearbook, eight brave and open-minded young collages make eight interesting journeys to their research:

The first author, *Helka Moilanen* contemplates the questions that have been haunting her along the way of her newly started PhD process. Today’s mass production of doctors

doesn’t leave much room for deeper discussion about the fundamental questions of scientific research. Short fellowships, invariably changing fashions of science and the entrepreneurial demands of effectiveness made to universities mean that researchers have to make profits ever faster. In this case, it would be easier to adhere to the received scientific jargon than to start thinking critically. However, *what exactly I am studying and for what reason* are questions which every self-respectful researcher should pose.

*Katri Suorsa* offers revealing insight to the pitfalls and challenges of doing (geographical) research. Alongside the epochal research results, writing the thesis is also a process of finding your own identity as a researcher and – in this case study – as a geographer. The academic realm with its unquestionable theories and jealous schools entails a parcel of prickly ontological and epistemological questions which should be answered within the thesis. However, when all is said and done (literally in “the Thesis process”), research offers always just small gems of ideas. The world won’t turn upside down with one finished thesis.

From the viewpoint of PhD students, it is comforting to notice that there are some happy ends in the thesis process. Once you have completed your thesis, you can position yourself and your research theme somewhere in the field of geography. *Katariina Ala-Rämi* looks back at her path from the beginning of her research career until the doctoral dissertation. As it comes out, geography flows smoothly between the disciplines, which is one of its biggest strengths. However, it has some difficulties also – at least for the rookies searching their researcher’s identity.

*Kaj Zimmerbauer* criticises in his article often very exclusive scientific debates. The current research agenda for regional competitiveness, and more generally regional development, tend to ignore rural regions as insignificant for the development of regions. Partially for that reason, the current research agenda of regional competitiveness has remarkably strong urban bias. The author pays attention also to the fact that some of the key concepts of regional development are used rather carelessly in the field of geographical research. One reason for these phenomena may be the chronic lack of time for

deeper theoretical contemplation.

*Joni Vainikka* and *Harri Antikainen* present in their articles the possibilities of GIS-based datum and methods for geographical research. There has been a discussion whether GIS is “just a tool” or whether it deserves its place as science. The authors do not try to offer any single answer to this endless controversy. However, their articles show that GIS offers very interesting perspectives to geographical research problems. *Vainikka* extends his reflection from the North to the global-city scale. The “newbie” geographers should follow his example and grasp more bravely more global themes. New methods and data sources mean that you don’t have to locate in the “throne room” to explore worldwide issues. In his article, *Antikainen* notes that academic geographers should take a more active role in developing GIS-based methods and tools. He has chosen a research subject which “has not been studied in academic geography in any significant extent”. These kind of new moves are more than welcomed to often quite conservative and consensus-based academic realm.

*Kaarina Tervo* was among the first Finnish researchers assessing climate change from the standpoint of tourism geography. In her article, she discusses the position of the researcher and the aims set to the study. She notes that climate change – related to tourism research – is very sensitive for different kind of ethical questions. For example, in reporting of research results, “potential for destabilising the balance between competitive tourism regions with certain results is great, especially if one region is given competitive advantage at the expense of other regions”. For a novice researcher, there aren’t too many opportunities to think – and especially write – about the ethical and methodological issues of her/his research themes. However, knowing your values, norms and aims behind the study is an essential principle behind the “objectivity” of research.

In the last article of this yearbook, *Aila Ryhänen* moves down to the geographical level of which everyone has something to say about. Everybody is “bodily familiar” with the concept of home. However, in the field of spatial planning, home is still rarely mentioned. One reason for that may lie in the highly political content of the concept: is it hard to produce any

“objective” information about the place of which everyone is an expert? However, according to Ryhänen, the concept of home would open “a new kind of rationality in planning, an emotiospatial rationality”.

All these articles are written by the young PhD researchers or young Doctors of Philosophy who work at the Department of Geography at the University of Oulu. So, in the end, these articles also represent great deal the contemporary research made in that particular department. This is not the whole truth, but shows the inspiration of young people and regional geographers and planning geographers as well.

We as editors hope that this overview of the reflections from the North can open wider opportunities to other young researchers in both Oulu and elsewhere. It could be also worth thinking if these kinds of “reflections” should be carried out once in every five-or-so year. But, well, that is the task of the future editors and the future generation of young researchers.