

# 'DON'T LET IT GET TO YOU'

From student to president (boss of everything) or rector magnificus (education boss): that's perfectly possible in Wageningen. *Resource* spoke to President of the Executive Board Sjoukje Heimovaara and Rector Magnificus Arthur Mol about their student days and asked whether they have any tips. Text Willem Andréé

**H**eimovaara and Mol both studied in Wageningen. But they both agree things were different then. Mol: 'Wageningen was quite boring. There were hardly any pubs. All the activity was in the student societies and the flats and student houses.' In 1978, he left Brabant to study Environmental Protection at the university, specializing in water purification. He also took courses in social sciences, philosophy and law. 'I joined Unitas straight away and was an active student outside my degree course. I was on the degree programme committee and in "critical" groups such as the Imperialism Collective, kind of like Otherwise now. I set up the Environment and Third World Working Group to get more attention paid to global sustainability in the degree programme. Inci-

dentally, I also organized the AID, but that was a lot less professional than now. I wasn't so interested in the food side to start with, but that developed spontaneously.'

Mol moved rooms seven times, not because of housing shortages but because he always wanted something different. 'I started with a landlady, then I moved to the Asserpark flats, then a house opposite Unitas and then to Veerstraat. The landlord was an unemployed man in his fifties. If he'd quarrelled with his wife, he slept in our flat on the sofa in the kitchen.' Mol was not a big

drinker but he enjoyed the social side of student life and the freedom.

'I usually skipped the morning lectures, did the practicals in the afternoon and then studied until ten in the evening. Then I went to the café with friends. I would never do that now. But I felt a real responsibility to study hard and I passed all my exams first time. It's a shame to waste your time on resits.'

## Free

Sjoukje Heimovaara mainly grew up in Zwolle and went to Wageningen to study Plant Breeding and Molecular Biology in 1983. 'It was a



Sjoukje Heimovaara's ID document for what was still the Agricultural College then.

fantastic time — I felt free. There wasn't a campus like now. Molecular biology was on De Dreijen at the top of Wageningense Berg and plant breeding was on the other side of town. I loved — and still love — the flexibility you have in Wageningen. It's unique in not having faculties and letting you put together your own programme. I made use of that: after the first year, I did all kinds of courses. The molecular approach to plant breeding was quite new back then. There was this idea that this would let us change the world, that we would be able to speed up plant breeding with molecular techniques and put an end to hunger. I was not that driven a student but I was already interested in the wider world. In fact, I have become increasingly idealistic as I've grown older. But I was basically a normal student, going to parties with friends. I joined Ceres and lived in De Erwt. I spent a year rowing at Argo; I still know their song off by heart, ha ha.' ■



Arthur Mol (right) in Portugal, at the Cooperativa Che Guevarra. 'We went there in 1980 to support the land reforms after the Carnation Revolution (1975). We did that by working as volunteers on the land, weeding and so on, together with Portuguese agricultural labourers who had been given the land after the Carnation Revolution.'