Abstract:
Despite evidence that ethnic minorities are under-represented in health participatory spaces across the world, few studies have been done about the factors promoting minority groups’ participation. This thesis aims to fill this gap by investigating why minority users get involved, how they benefit from participation and which barriers impede them from realising their full participatory potential. Employing a qualitative case study approach it investigates two exemplary cases: Cape Verdean migrants’ participation in a mental health advocacy project in Rotterdam, the Netherlands; and minority Northeasterners’ participation in a mental health care service in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Results reveal that the involvement of these user groups is driven by individual and collective motivations. When put together, these motivations demonstrate a strong aspiration by users to promote their social inclusion and the inclusion of others who also experience marginalization. Motivations are not the only factors determining minority users’ involvement, however. Users’ direct recruitment and capacity-building as well as the existence of empowering participatory spaces are also essential enablers of participation. This thesis also shows that participation generates numerous benefits for users themselves, including broader social networks, empowerment, an increased sense of citizenship, enhanced health literacy and improved access to mental health care. Finally, it also identifies several barriers that impede ethnic minorities from reaching up to higher levels of participation, namely users’ unawareness of opportunities for participation, users’ self-exclusion from participatory processes and exclusionary dynamics within mental health participatory spaces that hinder their involvement. These hindrances diminish the potential of these spaces to foster the development of diversity-sensitive health care.