

City nomads

Moving house as a coping strategy, Amsterdam 1890-1940

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‘Looks more like an urchin than a man’, wrote a welfare officer in 1895 in a report on Cornelis B., a thirty two-year old recipient of poor relief. The relief file on the family B., spanning nearly forty years, provides an almost Dickensian portrayal of life on the Amsterdam fringe. Being small and not particularly strong, B.’s work as a casual porter did not yield sufficient income. He earned between two and three guilders per week, but in slack times much less. His wife Carolina, who was handicapped by deafness, earned an additional guilder per week by ‘charring for Jews’. The family lived with three sons in ‘a very shabby attic’ in the center of the city. For this dwelling, they paid a weekly rent of one guilder. The 1895 report ended wryly by remarking ‘there is nothing left to pawn’. In 1897, the report spoke once again of bitter poverty: ‘the children are weeping of hunger and cold’. Cornelis and Carolina had married in 1892, thereby legitimizing two boys born in 1890 and 1891. The problem of making ends meet would haunt them during their entire married life. Not paying the rent offered a way out, but in 1894 the couple was threatened with eviction for being eighteen weeks in arrears. Cornelis’ alcoholism and frequent penal offences exacerbated their troubles. In 1893, he was convicted for stealing potatoes and served two months in prison. During that period his wife, expecting her third child, was refused charity by the Church because she was ‘too young’. Apparently, the neighbours lend a hand by supplying the family with food. Ever since 1893, the B. couple was supported regularly by the Amsterdam poor relief with 1.25 guilders per week, as well as with peat for heating and with bread. Also, they took in boarders to supplement their income. Finally, when their five children grew up, their wages helped to sustain them, although the children were also regularly detained in prisons or asylums. The family ties were remarkably strong; in 1930, the report mentioned that the elderly couple refused to go to an old people’s home because they wanted to reside with their children ‘who don’t desert the old folks’ (*Municipal Archives Amsterdam*, Archive 5256, file SZ 7695).

A conspicuous facet of the life story of Cornelis B. and his wife Carolina was their tendency to change address frequently. In the population registers of Amsterdam we can trace

* We would like to thank the personnel of HSN for their exertion in completing the data-entry in time.

their itinerary in the heart of the city. Between 1892 and 1930, the couple moved twenty-two times, in roughly the same neighbourhood. More often than not, moving house would bring them to an adjacent street or even to an address in the same street. In fact, they lived on eleven different addresses in the Ridderstraat alone. This behaviour did not elicit any comment in the poor relief records. This leaves us with the question to what extent their frequent moving was related to their life style. Could it have been one of their 'strategies' of coping with permanent poverty and insecurity?

In recent years, the notion of coping or survival strategies has proven to be one of the most inspiring concepts in both family and labour history (Van der Linden, 1994, Schlumbohm and Fontaine, 2002). Many studies have shown how nineteenth- and twentieth-century urban working class families responded, with astonishing flexibility, to rapid changes in the labour market and in living standards. Some families decided to migrate in order to improve their position elsewhere. Household members changed their occupations or diversified their economic activities, for instance, by combining wage work with trade. In response to declining incomes, families took on a frugal lifestyle, and economized on expenditures. Some families took in boarders and lodgers. When the worst came to the worst, families resorted to accepting charity, pawning their belongings, pilfering or even dissolving the household unit. Often, families found assistance in networks outside the households. Among these, networks of kin and neighbours were of great importance. An overview of labour history studies on household strategies can be found in a recent essay by Marcel van der Linden (2002).

Moving house could be a form of budgeting, when a house with a lower rent was found and the costs of moving were minimal. Dutch labour history lends some support to this hypothesis. An inhabitant of Rotterdam related the frequent moving of his parents (eight times during the 1930s) to the surplus on the housing market: 'Some house owners tried to make the dwelling attractive by granting you a week of free rent...others lured you with free paint and wallpaper. Moving about became a popular sport...' (Romer, 1997, 29). According to others, the period of free rent could amount to several months: 'It was the trick to move after that period to the next "free house"' (*Rood Rotterdam*, 30).

Was frequent mobility a characteristic of the urban poor? This question can only be answered in the context of a wider analysis of residential mobility in Amsterdam. In this paper we study residential mobility in Amsterdam, by comparing temporal, spatial and social patterns. Special attention will be given to the frequent movers. To what extent did these 'repeaters' influence overall residential mobility? And to what extent were they indicative of proletarian coping strategies?

Residential mobility: geography and history

Various disciplines provide insight in patterns of residential mobility in the past. Social

geographers and migration historians furnish elements for our hypotheses. Social geographers have spent considerable effort in elaborating models of residential mobility. Obviously, forecasts of housing needs are essential for urban planning. Their models include measures of dissatisfaction with present housing, measures of ‘crowding’, composition and socio-economic background of households, and characteristics of particular urban areas, in terms of housing, transport and other amenities. Their studies have shown that to understand residential mobility of individual families, the stage of the life cycle is of utmost importance. Age, changes in civil status and parenthood have strong influences on the propensity to move. Young, single adults as well as divorcees move more often than married couples. Families in the childbearing stage, requiring more space, move more often than couples with older children (Mulder; Harts and Hingsman, 1986, 291-2; Speare, Goldstein and Frey, 1975, 128-134). Another important variable is home ownership. Tenants tend to move more often than owners, who have strong ties to their areas of residence, both economic and social. Socioeconomic status is of importance as well. In the U.S., low educational and occupational status is related to short-distance mobility, but this may have been caused in part by non-ownership (Speare, Goldstein and Frey, 1975, 137; Schachter, Jensen and Cornwell, 1998). Finally, some scholars include past migratory experience in their models. Speare, Goldstein and Frey acknowledge that ‘much of the mobility reflected in mobility rates is accounted for by repeat movers’ (Speare, Goldstein and Frey, 1975, 130; see also Goldstein, 1964). In their view, repeaters possess of a specific ‘mobility potential’, consisting of a realistic planning ability. In a Dutch survey, frequent moves proved to be associated with higher economic positions. According to the authors, higher incomes made the realisation of housing wishes possible (Harts en Hingsman, 1986, 125, 292). This outcome is corroborated in a study on the Paris region in the second half of the twentieth century, where employees and managers moved more often than blue collar workers (Bonvalet and Lelièvre, 1990)

In older geographical studies, however, repeaters tend to be associated with the urban poor. In his classical study on migration, Rossi identified ‘mobile areas’ within cities. These areas attracted specific types of people, such as ‘[b]readwinners of broken families [who] work in marginal occupations and constantly adjust their housing to the fluctuations of an income frequently interrupted by unemployment. The families with children who do locate themselves in such areas do so primarily out of economic necessity and regard residence there as temporary expedient to be abandoned as soon as opportunity presents itself’ (Rossi, 1955, 181). Already in 1932, the Dutch geographer De Vooijs related rural-urban migration to intraurban mobility. He was struck by the high mobility within one of Utrecht’s poorest quarters in relation to other quarters. Contrary to his expectations, this quarter did not attract immigrants. The frequent urban migrants appear to have been native and poor casual workers and (small) merchants. De Vooijs offered no explanations, but remarked with astonishment that some of these ‘big-city nomads’ move twelve times within two years (De Vooy, 1932, 167).

Was frequent residential mobility of the poor basically something of the past, when job

and income insecurity dominated the lives of an important portion of the population? Migration history might provide answers to this question. In the last few years, scholarly interest in ‘micromobility’ is on the increase. Recent studies show how moves between communities interacted with intrafamilial processes as well as with long-distance migration (Kertzer and Hogan 1989; Moch, 1992; Rosental 1999). These studies show that mobility is strongly differentiated by social class. In the Netherlands between 1850 and 1940, the elite, white collar workers and skilled workers would move more often from one municipality to another than the farmers and the unskilled and casual workers (Kok, 2002). However, residential mobility within municipalities remains one of the last blank spaces on the map of migration history. Partly, this can be accounted for by lack of reliable data. Also, these ‘circular’ movements have often been neglected because they seem to have had no impact on developments on the ‘macro’ level.

In late nineteenth-century Germany, high geographic mobility held a negative connotation, at least for the middle and upper classes. Although migration was normal during the phase of rapid industrialization and urbanization, repeated migration was considered an indication of social failure (Crew, 1979, 72). According to contemporary observers, frequent mobility within cities meant that immigrants were unable to integrate or adapt to urban ways of life (Jackson, 1982, 254). In his study of mobility within the city of Duisburg, Jackson found to his surprise that unskilled workers were not more prone to move than skilled workers.

A detailed analysis of residential mobility has been undertaken by Pooley and Turnbull, who studied British migration patterns on the basis of life histories of more than 16.000 individuals (Pooley and Turnbull, 1998). They have shown that short distance mobility was often related to housing needs. People adjusted their home to the size of their family and, increasingly frequent over the course of the twentieth century, move from rented to owned houses (*ibid.*, 230-231). People who owned a house or lived in council housing moved less often than renters from private landlords. The authors conclude that housing motives were rarely an independent reason for moving, except in ‘[a] comfortable stage of the life-course when other constraints had been minimized’ (*ibid.*, 256). Thus, in their view, the increase of moves for housing reasons is associated with greater affluence and greater diversity of the housing market. In their survey, there is no trace of specific ‘proletarian mobility’ in cities, which may partly be attributed to the underrepresentation of unskilled workers and the poor in the general (*ibid.*, 46, 236).

Geographical and historical literature does not substantiate our hypothesis of a specific ‘proletarian’ pattern of residential mobility. At best, it is seen as a marginal and temporary phenomenon (Rossi) or it is simply observed without explanation (De Vooijs). The literature does suggest that any empirical analysis has to take account of specific characteristics of both period and locality, and to make sure to control for life cycle effects. In the remainder of this paper, we will put our hypothesis to the test. We assume that the poorest section of the urban proletariat moved house frequently in order to economize on the household budget or even to

avoid payment of rent. This type of mobility had nothing to do with a change of occupations or the wish to improve living conditions. Therefore, these moves were often in the same area. In doing so, people built on their contacts in a particular neighbourhood. Therefore, instead of revealing a lack of adaptation to city life, this behaviour actually forms the expression of being integrated in urban networks. Thus, it is not surprising that immigrants were not particularly prone to frequent residential mobility.

In the next section we will present our case: Amsterdam in the period 1890-1940. We will describe briefly its economic situation, its housing conditions and its developments on the housing market. Also, we will discuss the three datasets we have combined for this present study and the sources used in constructing them. Then, we will calculate removing rates by socio-economic group, by city quarter and by family cycle to discern general trends in residential mobility. On the basis of these graphs, we probe deeper by comparing destinations of the movers by social group and period. Finally, a multivariate analysis allows us to determine the relative impact of socio-occupational position on the propensity to move, in relation to factors such as the number of children in the household, subtenancy and immigrant status.

Amsterdam 1890-1939: economy, housing and urban mobility

After a period of stagnating and even declining economy in the middle of the nineteenth century, from 1870 onwards the city of Amsterdam enjoyed a substantial economic growth. Although traditionally the sectors trade and transport dominated the urban economy, in the second half of the century the share of industry increased rapidly. The expansion of various industrial sectors, for instance building, diamonds, metal, food, spirits and tobacco created more work than the local workforce could handle. This attracted migrants from all parts of the Netherlands and resulted, from the early seventies onwards, in fast growing numbers of people who needed to be housed. The building initiatives which were undertaken by speculative builders, housing corporations and the town council initially could not keep up with the growing population. Table 1 shows how that shortness of housing increased very gradually between 1905 and 1915. Then, a sharp increase occurred. After 1925, conditions on the housing market improved strongly.

In the nineteenth century, building projects were left almost exclusively to the private sector. The connection with the money market which thus existed made the building industry cyclical and as the margins were low, most of the building firms were constantly on the verge of bankruptcy. This did not add much to the quality of the new houses, while in economically bad times the number of building projects sank to an unacceptable low level. Under these circumstances at the beginning of the twentieth century the local authorities and particularly the housing corporations took over the initiative. Building became more and more subject to legislation. The Housing Act of 1901 among other things restricted private building by all kinds of regulations and enabled national and local authorities to fund projects carried out by

housing corporations. From the second decade on most of the building projects were undertaken either by housing corporations or the city council. In the years following World War I, the housing problem was quickly solved by carrying out hundreds of mainly government-funded (84.5 percent from 1915-1925; Ottens 1975) projects, in some of which whole districts were knocked up at the same time. Table 1 shows this effect quite clearly. Meanwhile, in the old slums numerous dwellings were being condemned and demolished (3,739 between 1904 and 1915; Ottens 1975).

Table 1: Population, houses and average number of people per house, 1899-1940

	Population	Houses	Average number of people per house
1899	510,853	116,903	4.37
1905	557,614	128,164	4.35
1910	573,983	129,746	4.42
1915	616,586	139,143	4.43
1920	683,166	143,823	4.75
1925	718,046	172,830	4.15
1930	759,286	200,867	3.78
1935	781,645	219,014	3.57
1940	803,073	225,755	3.56

Source: Statistische maandberichten Gemeente Amsterdam, 1899-1940

The new districts were well-planned and arose outside the old city gates, which had marked the town borders for centuries. Most of the new districts, like the ‘Indian’- and the ‘Transvaal’- district (with the streets named after islands and areas in the Dutch colonies) in the east part of town and the ‘statesmen’-district in the west-part, were built to house the newly acquired population of workers, which had flooded the city during the upswing of the economy in the past decades. Meanwhile, a second generation descending from the first wave of migrants who had arrived in the 1870s had come into existence. The new houses were relatively luxurious compared to the old basement apartments and working class houses in the centre of the city, which often consisted of just one room, with no running water or toilet. In the new districts a living room, a kitchen and at least one bedroom was the standard.

The old and new areas differ strongly in their concentration of ‘slum dwellings’. The housing statistic of 1899 distinguished between 51 districts and counted the number of rooms

per dwelling, as well as the number of inhabitants per dwelling (*Uitkomsten der Woningstatistiek*, 1899). In the old Jewish quarter, the highest concentration of single-room dwellings was found in the Batavierstraat and adjacent streets. Here, no less than 29.4% of all houses were single-room apartments with an average of 4.6 persons per dwelling. A similar concentration can be found in the proletarian district called 'De Jordaan'. For instance in the Laurierstraat and the Rozenstraat and their side-streets the percentage of single-room dwellings was 25, with on average of 3.2 persons per dwelling. In stark contrast with these districts were the new districts to the east and west of the centre. For instance, among the 41,587 houses in the eastern quarter, only 1% was a single-room dwelling, in which on average 2.3 persons lived.

The drawback on this otherwise favourable situation in the new areas was that the rents were higher. Moreover, the regulations of housing corporations were more severe than the rules which were applied by most slum landlords in the city centre. Arrears of rent would not be accepted for more than a few weeks. Such a restriction could cause serious problems for a working class family, especially those who depended on casual labour. As in 1891 an Amsterdam bricklayer put it to a committee of inquiry: 'There are a lot of Amsterdam workers who are without a job every now and then. They prefer a landlord who does not make it too hard for them' (Enquete Staatscommissie 1890). Under these circumstances not every working class family happily moved from the centre to one of the new districts. Eildert Postma, a navvy who was interviewed by the same committee, lived with his wife and four children in a small room in the city centre, and paid 1.25 guilders per week for it. Asked why he did not move to one of the new districts, he told the committee he was satisfied with his present housing. 'I live a few steps from my work and in the new districts you have to pay at least 1.75 guilders.' (Enquete Staatcommissie 1890, 408).

The Dutch historian Theo van Tijn argues that before Word War I, only the working class elite could have been interested in moving to the new neighbourhoods. For the poorer part of the workers, moving outside of the centre was not a solution (Van Tijn 1977). Nevertheless, by 1925 62.9 percent of the Amsterdam population lived in the new parts of town, while only twenty-five percent remained in the old city centre (Gemeentelijke Woningdienst 1927). To a considerable extent, the growth of the new quarters can be attributed to the inflow of migrants from outside Amsterdam. In the period 1876-1885 30% of all newcomers went directly to the 'new city', which by then housed only 9% of the population. As in Utrecht, the poorest quarter (Jordaan) was relatively unpopular among immigrants (Suurenbroek, 2000, 63).

Although working class families from the city centre apparently were reluctant to move to other parts of the city, they held nothing against moving at all. According to the *Gemeentelijke Woningdienst* ('Municipal Housing Service') between 1910 and 1914 Amsterdam families stayed in their house for an average period of 20.3 months. In 1915-1924 that changed to 33 months, due to the growing housing shortness in World War I. In order to publish these figures the *Woningdienst* took a sample of two thousand families from the

municipal register and calculated how many months they stayed in their houses (Nota van den Directeur van den Gemeentelijke Woningdienst, 1925). Although the municipal inquiry made no distinction between social strata, the remark was being made that the well-to-do moved much less than the inhabitants of houses with low rents: 'In the real working-class neighbourhoods, and even more so in the neighbourhoods where the lowest paid workers live (...) constantly moving around is a common practice' (Gemeentelijke Woningdienst 1927).

Although urban proletarian mobility has not drawn much research yet, some historians and social scientists pointed in the same direction. David Englander concluded that 'people in this class must move within a very limited range' (Englander 1983). Dutch researcher Ineke Teijnant argues for the period around 1900 that moving quickly from house to house while not paying the rent was a strategy applied by some of the poorest proletarians. Collecting the rent was not always easy for the landlord and a lawsuit which could lead to an eviction was rather expensive. And if such a procedure threatened to take place anyway, the tenant took his shabby possessions and moved out quietly before the bailiffs were sent in (Teijnant 1993).

The fact that most people stayed in the neighbourhood when they moved, is being confirmed by an inquiry the *Woningdienst* made in 1936. They followed 1,814 moving families, from which 1,068 (59 percent) stayed in the same district. Apart from being attached strongly to their neighbourhood, people were limited in their choice by their financial position, according to the *Woningdienst* (Gemeentelijke Woningdienst 1936).

The dataset

Our analysis is based on the trajectories of a sample of Amsterdam families from the period 1890-1940. Their addresses and the timing of their moves were recorded in the Amsterdam population registers. In Appendix 1, we give a detailed description of this source. The sample was constructed from three different already existing data sets:

1) Data of (mainly) dockworkers used by Ad Knotter for his study on the life cycle of labour families in the first half of the 20th century (Knotter 1999). It consists of three groups of workers (each n=125) born between 1850 and 1899 and chosen from: a) dock workers with a permanent labour contract, b) dock workers who worked on a casual basis and c) casual workers who were out of work in 1916 because of the war and for that reason financially supported (by a special regulation). The first two groups were selected from the records of a pension fund dating from 1920. Of course the last group also worked in the harbour now and then and the casual dock workers from the second group were not restricted to working in the harbour alone. The sample was stratified in such a way that for each group 25 persons were selected from each ten yearly birth cohort out of the period between 1850 and 1900 (total n=375). From this sample 234 cases (62 %) were traced back in the archives of the Amsterdam poor relief but only in 188 cases the authorities made a decision to support (50.1%).

2) Data of poor law recipients used by Henk Wals for his study on the survival strategies of

families of which the head of the household worked in the building industry (Wals 2001). The dataset itself contains not only workers in the building industry (n=207) but includes also persons with other occupational backgrounds, totalling the sample to n=345. Unifying characteristic is that all persons were at some point in time dependent on poor law in Amsterdam during the period 1900-1925. The ‘building-part’ of the sample concentrates on three periods in which the building industry faced large scale unemployment: 1907-1909, 1915-1917 and 1922-1924. This was done in such a way that at least 100 requests for relief from builders were taken into the sample for each of these periods. The 207 builders made 359 requests for poor relief during 1900-1925 of which 302 (84.1%) were done in the mentioned periods. Only married persons were included in the sample.

3) The Amsterdam part of the Historical Sample of the Netherlands (HSN) from the period of birth 1903-1922. The HSN strives to compile life history data as complete as possible for a representative portion of the 19th and 20th century population of the Netherlands. The sample necessary for this purpose is based on the birth registers from the period 1812-1922 (n=77,000). Data entry of nearly all birth certificates is already completed and data entry is continuing with marriage certificates and population registers (Mandemakers 2000). At present the family cards of the parents of the Amsterdam cases born between 1903 and 1922 have already been put into the HSN-database. Sample size of the HSN for this period is 0.25% of all native-born persons. This amounts to a size of n=692 for Amsterdam.

The samples have been matched on age and civil status. For the matching procedure, see Appendix 2. In table 2, we present the composition of our final sample, by period of birth and original dataset.

Table 2. Composition of the sample (males born in the period 1860-1900 and living in Amsterdam some time during the period 1890-1940).

Period of birth	Research group				HSN reference group	
	Dockers		Poor law recipients			
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1860-1869	49	19.8	45	18.2	77	12.7
1870-1879	66	26.6	78	31.6	213	35.3
1880-1889	74	29.8	79	32.0	228	37.7
1890-1899	59	23.8	45	18.2	86	14.2
Total	248	100	247	100	604	100

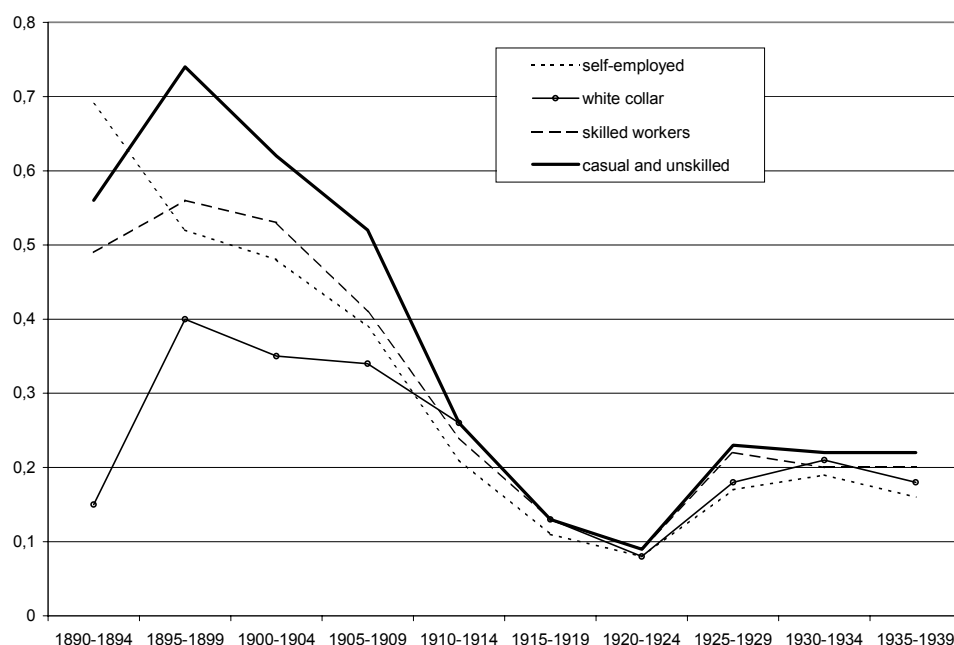
Trends and cycles

In this section, we will present a number of figures with residential mobility rates. These rates

are calculated as follows. Every day that a household has been observed during a particular period, say the five-year period 1910-1914, has been added to the denominator. Every move of that household within Amsterdam in that period has been added to the numerator. This means that a migration *out* of Amsterdam is not included in the numerator, but the period of residence in Amsterdam has been added to the denominator. Subsequently, we divide the denominator by 365.25 and obtain the yearly average number of moves for this period. In the same way, we have calculated residential mobility rates per five-year period after the wedding date (figure 3).

In figure 1, we compare the most important groups in the Amsterdam occupational structure (see Appendix 3). We expect the workers with the most insecure position in society, the casually employed and the unskilled labourers, to have had the highest residential mobility rates. Figure 1 confirms our expectations to some extent. Indeed, in the late nineteenth century, the casual and unskilled labourers moved very often – considering the fact that all were married. Their yearly average in 1895-1899 was 0.74 moves, which means that they stayed about sixteen months at each address. It is interesting to note that the ‘white collar workers’ (clerks, teachers, but also policemen and supervisors) had the lowest removal rates, even less than the self-employed. The rates started to decline already after 1900, and dropped particularly steeply after 1910. What is even more remarkable, is the fact that social differentiation in mobility disappeared almost completely in the period between 1910 and 1925. After 1925, residential mobility became more frequent, but never regained its pre-1910 level. Similarly, social differentiation became more visible, but remained quite modest compared with the period 1890-1910. It is clear that the housing shortage of the First World War and the first years afterwards made it much more difficult to relocate. Also, we may surmise that in periods when cheap houses were in low supply, moving home was not a viable ‘coping strategy’ for the labouring classes.

Figure 1. Average yearly number of moves, per occupational group



An occupational title may hide all kinds of differences between the persons in question. Some workers may have been relatively well-off, for instance, when their wife managed a small shop or when their children contributed to the household. Ideally, we would like to know the total income and fixed expenditures of every household at every period. Obviously, for most of our sample persons, these data are not available. Fortunately, we know that a sizeable part of the workers in this sample applied for poor relief at least once in their lives. This holds true for all workers in the ‘poor relief’ sample and for 62% of the workers in the harbour sample (Knotter, 1999, 208, see also the section on the datasets). Not all applications were granted (20% of the dockers’ requests were rejected), but they may serve as an indication of economic distress. In figure 2, we compare those skilled and unskilled workers who had applied for relief to the skilled and unskilled workers we have taken from the reference group, who form a random sample from all heads of working-class families. The figure shows that workers who included poor relief in their coping strategies tended to move relatively frequent as well.

Figure 2. Yearly numbers of moves of workers who applied for poor relief, compared to workers from the control group

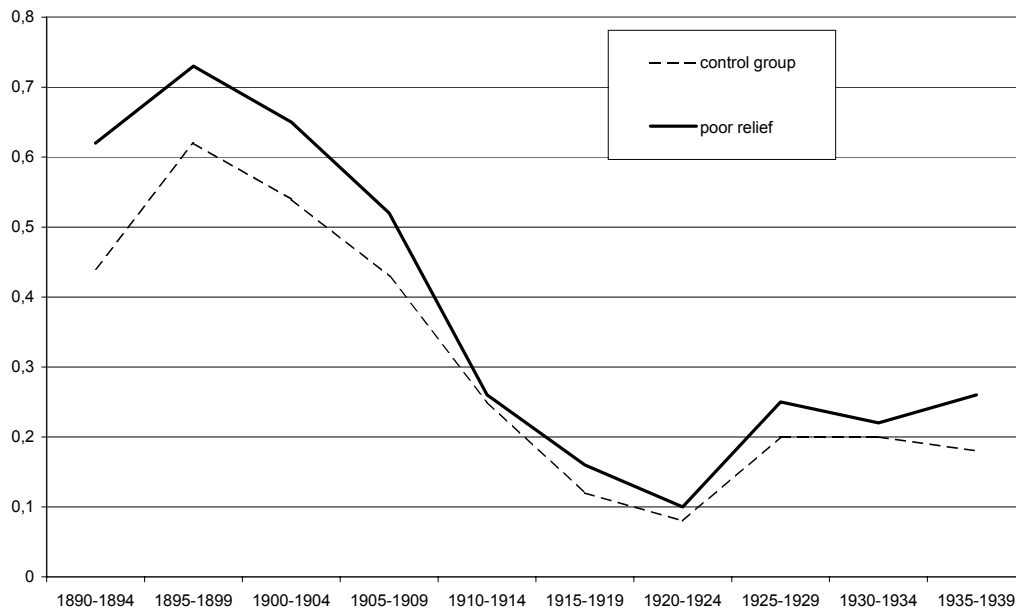
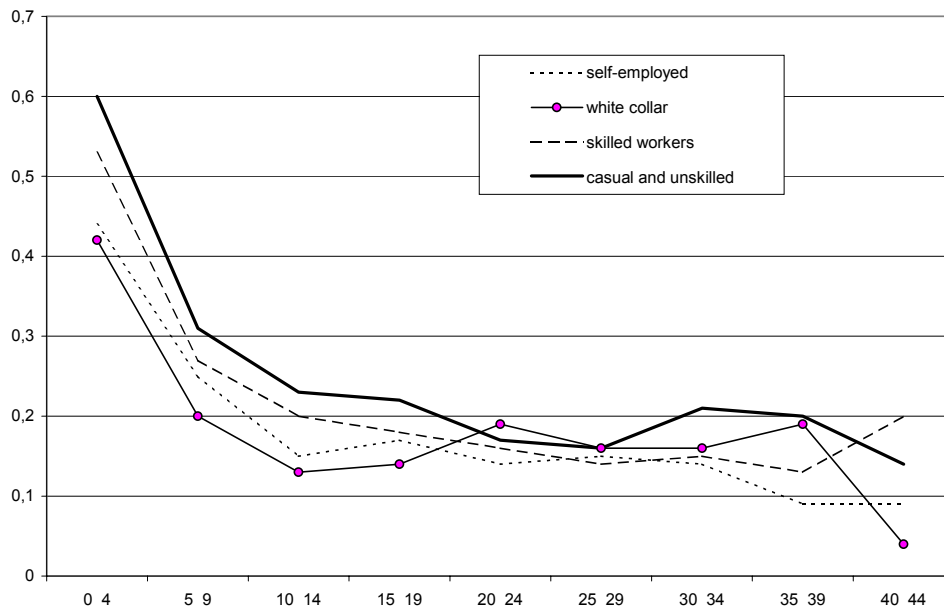


Figure 3. Average yearly number of moves, per occupational group, by number of years after the marriage

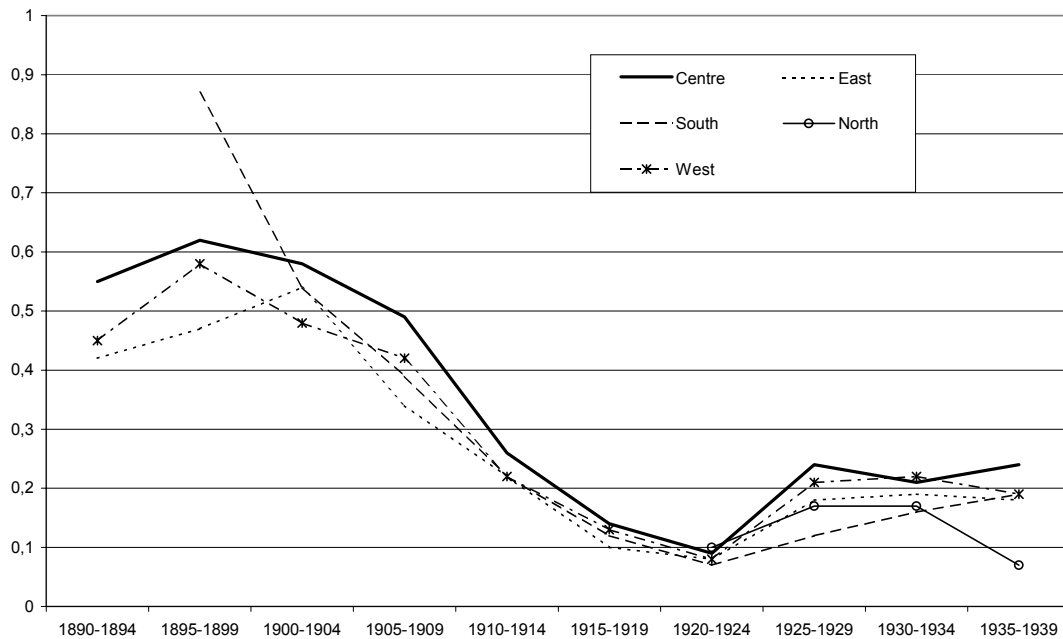


As we have described in a previous section, the sampling of families ended in 1925. Also, the families were matched by birth year of the heads (1860-1899, see Appendix 2). In other words, newly founded families were more predominant in the earlier period than in the later. Thus, part of the decline we found in the Figures 1 and 2 could in principle be attributed to a family cycle effect. How import was the family cycle in influencing mobility rates? Figure 3 shows how the rates develop over the family cycle, for each occupational group. In the first five years after the marriage, removals are most frequent. Many newlyweds moved to a residence of their own shortly after the wedding, but apparently they remained mobile in the following years as well. Between 10 and 30 years after the marriage, mobility rates were fairly stable. Afterwards, a slight increase is visible in some groups. This may indicate the phenomenon that some elderly heads, often widowers, became boarders in other households (Stavenuiter, 1993, 87). The social differentiation is broadly similar to the one we found in Figure 1. Interestingly, the white collar workers increased their moves after 10-14 years after the marriage. Is this a reflection of the 'modern' pattern in which the upper middle class is most able to fulfill aspirations for better housing across the life course? In any case, residential mobility can hardly be attributed to the move from a rented to an owned house, as has been observed in England. There were very few owners in Amsterdam. For instance in 1920, only 3.3% of the private dwellings were occupied by owners (*Uitkomsten der woningtelling*, 1919).

Many lower class families were reluctant to leave the overcrowded inner-city districts for the more spacious, but also more expensive dwellings in the new quarters. The centre, in particular alongside the canals, was the home of many well-to-do inhabitants. However, there were also a number of districts with a strong concentration of slum dwellings (Jordaan, Jodenbuurt and Eilanden). We have divided the city into five quarters. In the new district South, initially a pure workers' quarter, we have too few sample families before 1895. Similarly, our calculations for the new quarter North begins in 1920. Although the centre was socially mixed, we expect its' concentration of casual workers living in slums to be associated with generally high residential mobility. Figure 4 affirms this assumption; the mobility rates were highest in the centre, and relatively low in the eastern quarter.

The outcomes in this section have made it clear that socio-economic factors, life cycle and neighbourhood characteristics all combine to produce particular residential patterns. In our multivariate analysis we have to take account of all these factors. Also, there is a stark contrast in mobility rates between the period before 1910 and the period afterwards. Did mobility patterns in these periods differ in other respects as well? First of all, we would like to know where the movers actually went to.

Figure 4. Average yearly number of moves by city quarter



Destinations

The destinations of movers can be divided in three types: a move to an address in the same street, a move to another street in the same quarter and a move to another quarter. When residential mobility was an important coping strategy of the poor, we expect that differences between these mobility types are visible across Amsterdam's social and geographical landscape. In table 3, we compare the types by occupational group. In both periods, the casual and unskilled labourers were the most prone to remain in the same quarter and also to move within the same street. On the other hand, the white collar workers had the lowest tendency to move within the same street. In the period after 1910, moving to another quarter increased strongly, except among the self-employed. Moving within the same street declined, another indication that in this period with a shortage of cheap houses, moving house lost its attractiveness as a survival strategy.

Table 3. Type of move, by period and occupational group, in percentages of all intraurban moves

	Casual and unskilled labour	Skilled workers	White collar workers	Self-employed
<i>1890-1909</i>				
same street	23.5	20.9	14.5	17.7
same quarter, other street	59.4	55.1	62.4	55.6
other quarter	17.1	24.1	23.1	26.7
N	1345	1168	117	419
<i>1910-1939</i>				
same street	17.6	15.4	11.2	15.7
same quarter, other street	58.0	52.3	57.5	55.1
other quarter	24.4	32.2	31.3	29.2
N	1174	1159	179	394

In table 4, we have made the same calculation for the city quarters. In 1890-1909, almost 85% of moves in the centre had a destination in the centre as well. Of these removals, more than a quarter were within the same street. Obviously, these moves cannot be associated with job change or the wish to improve housing conditions. From 1910 onwards, moves away from the city increased strongly. The development of new housing areas went hand in hand with slum demolishing in the old districts.

Table 4. Type of move, by period and city quarter, in percentages of all intraurban moves

	Centre	East	West	South
<i>1890-1909</i>				
same street	22.8	16.5	18.2	20.6
same quarter, other street	61.9	45.4	53.8	44.1
other quarter	15.3	38.0	28.0	35.3
N	1976	284	554	272
<i>1910-1939</i>				
same street	17.8	16.2	13.4	15.2
same quarter, other street	57.2	55.5	57.2	49.5
other quarter	25.0	28.4	29.5	35.3
N	1429	402	726	303

Who were the repeaters?

Just how important was repeated mobility and can we determine who these repeaters were? Repeating made up a significant part of total intraurban mobility. We have counted a total of 6493 moves made by 1030 households. A frequency distribution shows that the top 15% of most frequent movers were responsible for 40% of all moves, and the top 10% for 31% of all moves. Thus, general trends are disproportionately influenced by the small group of ‘city nomads’.

What caused people to move so many times in a short period? Did the determinants of repeated mobility change after 1910, perhaps leading to a difference in overall mobility? In answering these questions, we have performed a simple linear regression on the number of removals made in the period between five and fifteen years after the wedding. The start of the observation is chosen to allow for differences in the number of children present in the household to be taken into account. Obviously, the sample households had to be observed during this particular ten-year period.

In our model, we incorporate the occupation of the head of the household, as well as the city quarter in which the family resided at the beginning of the observation. A number of additional variables could be included. First of all, we include an interaction effect with poor

relief records. In this way, we created an additional variable of casual labourers who applied for poor relief. Second, we compare native with migrant heads. Frequent housing required a network of information, thus we assume that migrant heads were less mobile, all other things being equal. Finally, a number of addresses indicate that the household heads were subtenants in other households. We expect that subtenancy was more or less an emergency measure, to be ended as soon as possible.

By comparing persons in the same stage of the family cycle (in terms of years after the marriage), we hold this effect constant. However, the age of the household head could exert an independent influences. We expect younger heads to move more often than older heads, because of a weaker economic situation, caused by less savings before marriage and a less developed occupational career. The number of children living in the household can also cause strong differences in mobility behaviour. The literature suggest that people adjust their housing when family size increases. Generally, it is assumed that more space is required. However, a 1903 report on Amsterdam housing suggests a quite different kind of adaptation: ‘A woman from the working-class said to me: “I have to look for a smaller house, because my family gets too big. In former days, when I was alone with my husband or when we only had one or two little ones, I could pay that high rent, but now that we have so many, it becomes difficult”’. (Ter Meulen, 1903, 38). Perhaps, when moving house was a coping strategy, the number of children was not that important. However, finding a dwelling for a large family could become a serious problem in times of housing shortage.

The first model in table 5 confirms our impression from the figures that socio-economic factors were predominant in the earlier period. Casual labourers tended to move more often than the reference group, whereas applying for poor relief – indicating extreme poverty – had an additional effect on mobility. Living in the eastern quarter, the area with the largest concentration of municipal and corporate housing and the lowest concentration of single-room dwellings, reduced the propensity to move significantly. In this period, the age of the head proved to be a very important factor: households with older heads were much less inclined to move. In the second period, when it was more difficult to find a cheap house, the variables that explain residential mobility had shifted. Now, socio-occupational differences had lost their bearing. Clearly, people who still managed to find a new home were subtenants or couples without children. For large families, the coping strategy of moving house was cut off. Their situation was reminiscent of that the London poor described by Jones. The housing crisis of the 1880's made it virtually impossible for large families to find a decent residence (Jones, 1971, 217-219).

Table 5 Linear regression on number of moves per 10-year period (standardized Beta coefficients)

	5-15 years after marriage 1890-1909,	5-15 years after marriage 1910-1939
Self-employed (ref)		
Elite	0.017	0.006
Skilled workers	0.034	0.039
Casual and unskilled labourers	.157*	-0.023
Casual*poor relief application	.127*	0.008
Centre (ref.)		
West	-0.023	-0.971
East	-.122**	-.128**
South	-0.038	-.101*
North		-0.005
Address unknown	0.064	-0.077
Native head (ref.)		
Immigrant head	0.045	-0.042
Not living in (ref.)		
Living in	-0.094	.111**
Age of head	-.186***	-0.015
More than two children (ref.)		
No children	0.062	.253****
One or two children	0.069	.100*
adj r ²	0.079	0.05
Model significance	0	0.005
N	314	351

* significant at 0.1, ** significant at 0.05, ***significant at 0.01, ****significant at 0.001 This model only includes persons who were observed for the full ten-year period. Persons from the elite and white collar workers were combined in the group 'elite'. Also, shopkeepers, traders and farmers were combined in the group 'self-employed'. Persons without occupation were removed.

Conclusion

Our hypothesis that the poorest section of the urban working class moved house more frequent than other sections of the population seems to be confirmed by the analysis of our three samples. Casual and unskilled labourers moved considerably more than skilled workers, white collar workers and the self-employed. At least until the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, when all the trends converge during World War I and the following three or four years. In the 1920s a slight recovery of the difference can be seen. In the 1895-1899 period our sample of casual workers lived an average of 1.3 years in their houses, while white collar employees stayed for an average of 2.5 years. How can we explain this phenomenon? Clearly a high rate of residential mobility initially made up a suitable coping strategy for the lower sections of the Amsterdam working class. In the Dutch big cities rent took up more than twenty-two percent of the household budget in the 1890s (Van der Veen 1987). In Amsterdam during the early 1920s a local inquiry indicated a percentage of fifteen to eighteen percent (Gemeentelijke Woningdienst 1925). At the same time in twenty-five percent of the 13,865 surveyed houses the inhabitants spent *more* than twenty percent of their income on rent. Economizing the household budget by adapting the housing requirements to the financial possibilities of the moment seems a logical strategy in these cases. Take the example of the earlier mentioned Eildert Postma. As a navvy he would probably have not made more than seven or eight guilders a week in the 1890s, *if* he had work. He paid 1.25 guilders on rent, while the rest of his families budget very likely was being spent on food and clothing. In such circumstances fifty cents more on rent could make a big difference.

Economizing was one thing, not being able to pay the rent another. Arrears caused people to move out of their houses, either forced to do so by their landlords or just before the bailiff was send in, thus avoiding paying the back rent. The Amsterdam Association of Landlords kept a blacklist of defaulters, many of whom had the abbreviation 'NZ' behind their names, short for 'Noorderzon', indicating they absconded from their last addresses (Teijnant 1993). From 1914 on this coping strategy came under pressure by the increasing housing shortness on the one hand, while on the other it became less necessary. To deal with an expected economic crises because of the war, the national and local authorities set up a supplementary system of unemployment compensation, which led to a substantial improvement in the living conditions of the urban poor. From 1914 onwards the unemployed who were not insured through a union or otherwise, could rely on the municipal council for a modest benefit. To ensure that the allowance was not spent on unnecessary luxurious commodities or the consumption of alcohol, in much cases the allowance was payed out in rent subsidy coupons. This obviously made an impact on the moving rates. The unemployment compensation system lasted until 1922, when the government decided that the costs had risen too high. This, and the fact that by this time in the old slums a demolishing

program was being carried out, explains for the convergence of the trends from 1914 onwards a great deal. The divergence at the beginning of the 1920s probably can be attributed to the discontinuation of the unemployment compensation arrangements in 1922 and the downturn of the economy which had come into full swing by that time.

The decline of the average yearly number of moves in general between 1899 and 1920 corresponds with the upswing of the Kondratieff and the growing of the housing shortness. The number of moves correlates negatively with the availability of affordable rented houses and most indicators of the economy, we tend to think.

Table 4 shows the fact that if somebody moved, he or she most likely stayed in the same city quarter and in numerous cases even in the same street. This effect is by far the strongest in the city centre and in the early period. In such cases we can assume a house move was not brought about by an improvement of the living standard or a change of job, but simply by the aim to match the level of the rent with the earnings of the moment, while preserving the network which had been built up in the neighbourhood. Table 3 indicates that casual and unskilled labourers are less prone to move to other districts than other workers and the self-employed. All this points to the occurrence of a specific 'proletarian mobility', a coping strategy of the urban poor, applied when the harsh conditions of life forced them to do so.

Interesting is the relatively low propensity of immigrants to house moving. De Vooijs' observation of Utrecht in the 1930s is fully confirmed by the Amsterdam data. Further investigation is needed to provide a suitable explanation for this behaviour. Perhaps frequent urban mobility required a certain kind of network which immigrants lacked, or perhaps they relied on other coping strategies.

Clearly the stage of the life cycle is important. As other researchers already indicated, in the early stages the propensity to move is strongest. Within four years after marriage people tend to move twice as much as between five and nine years after their marriage. After ten years the average number of yearly moves slows down even more and remains fairly stable for the rest of their lives.

We started this paper with the life story of Cornelis B. and his wife Carolina. Moving twenty-two times between 1892 and 1930 at first glance seemed an extraordinary thing to do. It was. An average number of 1.27 moves per year outscores the highest peaks of our graphs easily. Although their moves took place within a very limited range, they were exceptionally mobile. Cornelis and Carolina would excellently qualify as 'city nomads'. But in their own milieu their behaviour very likely was not looked upon as odd. Frequent house moving belonged to the wide range of strategies the poorer section of the Amsterdam working class employed to cope with everyday problems as unemployment and budget strains.

Appendix 1. The population registers

Data about addresses and removals in the period 1890-1940 were found in the population register of Amsterdam. The Netherlands is one of the few countries in the world that has kept a continuous population register from as early as the mid-nineteenth century. Its functions were, among others, to serve as a basis for the franchise and to facilitate the systems of poor relief and conscription.

In the early registers, each household was entered on a double page, with the head of the household first; he was followed by his wife, where the head was a married male, children, other relatives, and other members of the household. Date and place of birth, relation to the head of the household, sex, marital status, occupation, and religion were recorded for each individual. All changes occurring in the household were recorded in the register. New household members arriving after the registration had started, were added to the list of individuals already recorded, and those moving out by death or migration were deleted with reference to place and date of migration or date of death. In fact, the population register combines census listings with civil registration in an already linked format for the entire population. Families and individuals could, in principle, thus be followed on a day-by-day basis for a long period.

In most municipalities, registers cover a time span of ten years between the censuses. Population registers remained in use until the early years of the 20th century, after which a new form of continuous registration was introduced, consisting of single sheets, so-called family cards. The registration unit was no longer the household but the family. In Amsterdam this system started as early as 1890. The card system did not only improve the whole administrative process, it did also change the way people were found in the system: not by address but by family name. This ended the practice that with each removal of a household the registration of the household also removed to another page or book. At the family cards it was only necessary to change the address and luckily in Amsterdam it was from the beginning practise to date each removal (for a further introduction to the old Dutch population registers, see Gordon 1989).

So, the outstanding feature of the population register is that it presents an individual in constantly changing stages in the life course. The following example gives a typical sequence:

- 1) as a son or daughter of the head of the household,
- 2) living independently or living with another household (for instance as a servant)
- 3) as a head of one's own household (or as a wife)
- 4) living as an elderly father or mother with the household of a child

The population register has a dynamical character. Frequent movers may have up to fifty entries in the registers during their life, esp. if they lived before the card system was introduced and/or moved a lot between municipalities (each municipality kept its own system). In short, the research in the population registers provides us with data on migration,

religion, occupation, moves and family structure for the complete life cycle. Other kinds of sources can be linked to the database as well; enumerating them here would lead us too far afield, but it is clear that e.g. tax records are easily accessible because of the availability of names and addresses.

Appendix 2 Matching of the original datasets

Although the HSN-sample itself is completely at random, the way the sample is used here is not. Selection of the family card was originally done from the perspective of the child as the unit of research (stage 1 in the life course, see the section on the dataset), where for the other samples the perspective of the head of the family was used (stage 3 in the typical life course). In the HSN-sample the person of research had to change from the child to the head of the family, in most cases the father of the child. In comparison with the other data files this gives males with a relatively numerous offspring more chance to enter the sample. It also excludes males who never got married or never had a child. However, this is partly overcome by the fact that in the poor relief sample unmarried males were not included and in the dockers' sample unmarried men were removed. Despite this imperfection, we consider the HSN-data set representative enough to be used as a reference group for both other cohorts which consist only of workers. In making the samples more comparable it was also necessary to exclude those cases in which the HSN person of research was born in a female-headed family (mother or grandmother). Sometimes a newborn HSN-child was brought into the family of a grandfather. In these cases not the father but the grandfather became the unit of research in the reference group.

The family cards of the HSN-sample were already entered and free to use. This was not the case for the other two samples of which the original data collection did not make or did only partly make use of the population registers. Because of limited resources and because of the necessity to make the three groups more comparable the data entry of the family cards was confined to a number of 250 for each group. The selection was done on the basis of two criteria: a) sampled persons should have been ever-married and b) the age structure of the heads of the family household should be made more comparable to each other. The first criterion lowered the number of dockers from $n=375$ to $n=353$ and in the poor relief group $n=345$) already only ever-married persons were sampled. The birth periods of the dockers ranged between 1850 and 1899, the birth periods of the poor relief group ($n=345$) ranged from 1834 till 1903. The birth period of the fathers of the HSN reference group ranged from 1840 till 1905 ($n=625$). Because of the fact that the reference group was very limited in size for the period till 1860 (only 2.2 % compared to the dockers and builders of respectively 17.9 % and 18.4 %) the decision was made to select only persons who were born between 1860 and 1899.

The restriction to the birth period 1860-1899 limited the dockers to $n=293$ and the poor law recipients to $n=279$. The years of birth of the dockers proved to be rather spread over the entire period while those of the poor and especially the reference group were more

concentrated in the later periods. Aiming at research groups with as much as possible equal absolute numbers in each birth cohort, the groups were cut back *at random* for those periods in which they appear to be over represented. This was especially the case with the dockers which number was halved for the birth period 1860-1864 and reduced with a third for the period 1895-1899. The group with the poor recipients was cut back *at random* with 29 cases over the whole period 1870-1889.

Table 1 gives the frequency distributions of the period of birth of the three groups after all mentioned selections were made. As a result the research groups counts respectively n=248 for the dockers and n=247 for the poor law recipients (in 5 cases out of 500 no family card could be found). We conclude that especially the age distribution of the poor relief group is rather comparable to those of the HSN-reference group. Because the absolute numbers of the HSN-reference group are higher than those of each research group and in the thinnest classes almost equal to the combination of both it is no problem to make comparisons.

Appendix 2. Occupational classification

The occupational titles were recorded in the population registers. If they were not legible, the title on the birth certificate of the child (the actual HSN sample person) was used. The classification by socio-economic group is based on the individual's position in contemporary labour relations, distinguishing by ownership of the means of production, level of skill and regularity of employment (Giele and Van Oenen (1974,1976). We used the following five main categories:

Elite

employers in industry, professionals, high civil servants; higher military.

Self-employed

shopkeepers, small entrepreneurs and merchants; self-employed artisans.

White collar middle class

lower level professionals and lower civil servants; foremen and supervisors of various kinds.

Skilled manual workers

craftsmen and skilled labourers in small business and industry; service employees.

Casual and unskilled labourers

casual labourers; unskilled labourers in crafts and industries; agricultural labourers, peddlars.

Archival sources

Municipal Archives Amsterdam.

Archive 5256, file SZ 7695.

AA 177. Gemeentelijke woningdienst Amsterdam. Waarheen zijn de bewoners der op 1 juli 1936 onbewoond gevonden woningen met lage huren verhuisd?

AA 459. Alphabetische lijst van straten, grachten, kaden, pleinen, enz. der gemeente Amsterdam met aanwijzing van de buurten en postdistricten, waarin zij zijn gelegen (1951).

H 76. Nota van den Directeur van den Gemeentelijken Woningdienst, naar aanleiding van de beschouwingen van den Hoofdinspecteur voor de Volksgezondheid (Volkshuisvesting), inzake het verslag der Gezinstelling te Amsterdam.

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Gemeentelijke woningdienst. De verhouding tusschen het inkomen van de bewoners en de door hen betaalde huur voor de met voorschotten ingevolge de woningwet door de vereenigingen en door de gemeente gebouwde woningen (Amsterdam 1925)

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