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Intentions to move, residential preferences and mobility behaviour: a longitudinal perspective

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Summary

Intentions TO MOVE, RESIDENTIAL preferences AND mobility BEHAVIOUR:

A LONGITUDINAL PERSPECTIVE

With their residential mobility behaviour and housing choices, individuals contribute to aggregate-level processes such as the segregation of low-income households. A major issue of debate is whether such processes are attributable to differences in residential preferences or differences in restrictions and constraints on moving, whereby some individuals are able to move freely while others must settle for a home or residential location that does not match their residential preferences. Therefore, it is important to gain more insight into the factors that facilitate the realisation of positive attitudes towards moving and residential preferences, the circumstances in which individuals move to a home or residential location other than their initial preference, and the extent to which actual residential behaviour (a term covering both mobility behaviour and housing choice) is the result of preferences, on the one hand, and restrictions and constraints, on the other.

For decades, researchers have attempted to understand the individual mobility decision-making process, a process that includes the formation of a positive attitude towards moving (e.g., a desire, thought, intention, or expectation), the search and evaluation of housing alternatives and, finally, the decision to move or stay. Without exception, researchers have demonstrated that many individuals do not move despite their initial positive attitudes towards moving and that some individuals move although they initially had no desire or intention to do so. In other words, there are literal behavioural inconsistencies between the initial attitude and the actual outcome that are both dealing with the same specific behaviour. Although previous research has provided more insight into the factors in the realisation of positive attitudes towards moving, some “black holes” remain in the knowledge of behavioural inconsistencies within the individual mobility decision-making process.

One topic that has been overlooked in previous research is the impact of both anticipated and unanticipated changes in the life course careers on the extent to which individuals behave according to their initial attitudes towards moving. Because anticipated changes may act as triggers for moving (with some more urgent reasons for moving than others), anticipated changes may directly affect the extent to which positive attitudes towards moving are realised.

Conversely, unanticipated changes may change the initial attitude towards moving, which in turn may lead to behavioural inconsistencies in the individual mobility decision-making process. A second lacuna relates to the role of residential preferences in the realisation of positive attitudes towards moving. Although preferences regarding the type of home and residential location are relevant to the housing market opportunities for changing residence, previous research has paid little attention to the role of residential preferences in realising positive attitudes towards moving and the extent to which individuals realise or substitute their initial residential preferences.

This thesis aims to explore how life course characteristics and changes, residential preferences, and contextual circumstances contribute to the discrepancy between stated mobility intentions and actual mobility behaviour in the Netherlands, whereby an intention to move indicates the willingness to change residence. This study's main research question is as follows: *How do anticipated and unanticipated changes in the life course and residential preferences affect the discrepancy between stated mobility intentions and actual mobility behaviour, and what makes intended movers realise or substitute their initial residential preferences?*

To answer the main research question, a longitudinal data set was created by enriching the large-scale, cross-sectional Housing Demand Surveys (HDS) 1998 and 2002 and its successor, the Housing Research Netherlands (HRN) 2006 survey, with individual register data from the longitudinal Social Statistical Database (SSD) of Statistics Netherlands. Whereas the housing surveys provide information on the respondents' residential preferences and intentions to move within two years, the SSD can be used to derive the actual moves, housing choices, and life course changes of the same respondents in the two years following the survey. To answer the main research question, five complementary studies are conducted.

The realisation of intentions to move: longitudinal and cross-sectional analyses of stated intentions and actual behaviour

Chapter 2 relates to the first part of the main research question and addresses the impact of anticipated triggers for moving on the realisation of initial intentions to change residence. This chapter argues that anticipated triggers for moving, indicated by the main reason for moving and residential dissatisfaction, are not only relevant for the formation of intentions to move but also for the extent to which these intentions are subsequently realised. The following research question is addressed: *To what extent do reasons for moving, housing dissatisfaction, and housing preferences hamper or stimulate the actual mobility*

behaviour of those intending to move to another dwelling? To answer this research question, a logistic regression analysis was employed for intended filterers (individuals intending to move from one independent housing situation to another).

The longitudinal analysis reveals that the vast majority (approximately two-thirds) of those intending to move within two years did not change residence at all. Furthermore, some individuals moved although they initially did not intend to do so. Some of these movers may have developed an intention to move following the interview and subsequently succeeded in realising this intention, but the unexpected moves of others might have been triggered by less voluntary reasons for moving, such as a housing eviction. In absolute terms, these “unexpected movers” make up a sizeable group; a substantial share of actual movers during a certain period had no intention to change residence at the beginning of the period. Because of these “unexpected movers”, the cross-sectional approach, which is an alternative method for investigating the relationship between residential mobility intention and behaviour, generates an overly positive picture of the success rate to realise an intention to move. In the cross-sectional approach, the number of recent movers is compared with the number of individuals who were actively searching for a home in the same period but who did not move. Because “non-realizations” are counterbalanced by “unexpected moves” in the comparison, cross-sectional approaches lead to a smaller intention–behaviour discrepancy and hence, to a less accurate portrayal of the extent to which mobility intentions are realised than the longitudinal approach.

As hypothesised, triggers for moving directly affect the realisation of intentions to move. In line with the thought that anticipated household changes, such as union dissolution and union formation, are associated with a high perceived necessity of moving, intended filterers who intend to move for demographic reasons are more likely to change residence than those intending to move because of housing reasons. Furthermore, dissatisfaction with one’s current home provides an extra stimulus to realise an intention to move within a short period.

Residential preferences regarding the home and location also affect the extent to which intentions to move are realised. In line with the thought that homeowners usually do not move out of homeownership unless there is an urgent need to do so, homeowners who prefer to move to a rental home have a particularly high probability of realising their intention to move. Conversely, renters who prefer to move within the rental housing sector have the lowest probability of moving. This finding may reflect the barriers to moving within the social rental housing sector, which comprises three-quarters of the rental

housing sector in the Netherlands. Individuals who prefer to move to a rental dwelling in the social sector are often confronted with waiting lists and allocation rules limiting the type of homes and locations to which they can move. Thus, the individual mobility decision-making process cannot be separated from the context in which residential choices are made; the context determines individuals' housing market opportunities to move to a home suiting their residential preferences. Therefore, it is no surprise that intended filterers who prefer a home in the Randstad, a densely populated region with relatively high housing market pressure, are less likely to change residence than those preferring a home in the national periphery. Another noteworthy finding is that the urgency of the intention to move increases the likelihood that intended filterers will change residence within two years.

Intentions to move and actual moving behaviour in the Netherlands

Elaborating on Chapter 2, Chapter 3 addresses the following research question: *To what extent do anticipated triggers for moving, the strength of the intention to move, resources and restrictions, and the preferred search location play a role in the realisation of an intention to move?*

The logistic regression analysis of actual mobility behaviour demonstrates that the realisation of intentions to move is affected not only by current background characteristics, as documented in previous research, but also by the expectation or preference for accomplishing something in a particular life course career after the intended move. Mobility intentions that are accompanied by an anticipated or preferred change in the housing or household situation are more likely to be realised. Singles who expect to form a multi-person household after an intended move are more likely to move than are stable singles, which corresponds to the idea that intended moves prompted by a household change are more necessary than intended moves of households that are expected to remain the same. Furthermore, the probability of actually moving is particularly high for those who prefer to move from owner-occupied to rental housing.

Chapter 3 demonstrates that the extent to which individuals realise their intention to move depends on the strength of the intention to move. Individuals with a strong intention to move are almost four times as likely to move as individuals with a less strong intention to move. Although homeownership is often believed to form a barrier to moving, homeowners (irrespective of housing tenure preferences) are more likely to realise a strong intention to move than renters who prefer to move within the rental sector of the housing market. As expected, intended movers whose search location is in the Randstad have a lower probability of moving than those who search for a home in the national periph-

ery. Finally, the impact of hampering and facilitating factors on actual mobility behaviour may differ between all individuals with an intention to move and individuals with a strong intention to move. For individuals with a strong intention to move, triggers for moving that stem from anticipated changes in the household career do not significantly affect the probability of moving. Similarly, whereas a high income is important for the realisation of strong intentions to move, a high education or employment proved more important for the realisation of intentions to move in general, irrespective of the strength of the intention to move.

Life events and the gap between intention to move and actual mobility

In Chapter 4, the focus shifts to the role of unanticipated life course changes in the discrepancy between stated attitudes towards moving and actual mobility behaviour. The chapter addresses how unanticipated life course changes, which are life events that were not taken into account in the “mental calculus” of the initial attitude towards moving, may lead to behavioural inconsistencies in the individual mobility decision-making process.

Employing logistic regression analyses of person-years, this chapter shows that the formation or dissolution of a co-residential union, the birth of a child, or a change or loss of a job may trigger an individual to move despite of their initial intention to stay in their current home. This finding supports the hypothesis that unanticipated life events may create an unexpected trigger for moving and subsequent move within a short time period among individuals who did not intend to move prior to the occurrence of the event. The majority of moves following union dissolution are attributable to individuals who initially did not intend to change residence. Furthermore, union dissolution, union formation, and childbirth lead to a higher likelihood of moving among individuals who intended to move for reasons other than household or job changes prior to the occurrence of the event. This finding suggests that unanticipated life course events may increase the urgency of previously reported intentions to move, resulting in an extra stimulus to move within a short period. The hypothesis that certain unanticipated life events may also result in the postponement or cancellation of the intention to move was not confirmed. Although becoming a widow(er) and the loss of a job may negatively affect the financial resources that individuals can spend, or are willing to spend, on a new home, no significant effects were found of becoming widowed or becoming unemployed on the probability of moving among those intending to move.

There are two other noteworthy findings. First, the impact of life events and personal characteristics, such as migrant status, on subsequent mobility

behaviour may differ among individuals at various stages of the mobility decision-making process. For instance, the effect of becoming unemployed on the probability of moving is significantly different for individuals with and without an initial intention to move. Second, a high income facilitates the realisation of intentions to move as well as “unforeseen” moves. Apparently, individuals with a higher income have more opportunities to move shortly after the formation of an intention to move.

Longitudinal analysis of the formation and realisation of preferences to move into homeownership in the Netherlands

From Chapter 5 on, this thesis focuses on the second part of the main research question, the realisation of residential preferences. Chapter 5 focuses on the formation of preferences to move into homeownership and the actual residential behaviour of aspiring homeowners, thereby distinguishing between moving to own, moving to rent, and remaining in the current home. The research question is as follows: *To what extent do individual characteristics and contextual circumstances influence the formation and realisation of preferences to move into homeownership, and in which of these two stages do the various determinants have the largest impact?*

Descriptive analyses show that a minority of intended movers who have not yet entered homeownership prefer to move into homeownership. Only 31 per cent of these aspiring homeowners subsequently realise their preference to move into homeownership within two years. Another 13 per cent moved to a rental home, and the vast majority did not move at all. The results of a multinomial logistic regression of actual residential behaviour suggest that aspiring homeowners who are in a less favourable socioeconomic position particularly struggle to realise their preference to move into homeownership. Aspiring homeowners without a job or with a low income are less likely to move into homeownership and are more likely to move to a rental home than those with a high income or a full-time job.

Chapter 5 also reveals that individuals tend to adjust their housing tenure preferences to their socioeconomic resources and the housing market circumstances. A high income, higher education, a full-time job, and low costs of owning relative to renting in the preferred housing market region make intended movers more likely to prefer to move into homeownership. The finding that intended movers tend to adjust their tenure preferences to their financial means and the regional housing market circumstances may explain why these factors have a more modest impact on the realisation of preferences to move into homeownership than initially expected.

Once an outsider, always an outsider? The accessibility of the Dutch rural housing market among locals and non-locals

Chapter 6 addresses the following research question: *Do intended local movers realise their rural location preference (i.e., their preference to move to a rural area within their current municipality) less often than intended non-local movers, and to what extent do income and the local housing market pressure influence the realisation or substitution of rural location preferences?* Despite the concern, as expressed in the rural gentrification literature, that rural residents may have difficulties moving within their rural localities due to the demand for rural housing by relatively wealthy non-locals, this study suggests that, at least in the Netherlands, rural residents do not have greater problems securing rural housing than non-locals.

Findings from a multilevel multinomial logistic regression analysis of the realisation of rural location preferences show that rural residents are far more likely to move to rural areas in their preferred municipalities (i.e., their current municipality) than intended non-local movers originating from urban areas or other rural areas. Intended non-local movers are more likely to move to a location other than their initial preference: urbanites are more likely to move to (or within) an urban area and non-urbanites to a rural area in a municipality other than their initial preference. These findings suggest that the rural location preferences of intended non-local movers are less rigid than those of intended local movers. The results also stress the relevance of current residential ties and place attachment above financial resources in the extent to which individuals realise or adjust their rural location preferences.

Furthermore, Chapter 6 shows that the local housing market pressure directly affects actual residential behaviour. Preferring to move to a rural area with a highly pressured housing market, which is often a rural area within the urban sphere of influence, decreases the likelihood of realising a rural location preference and increases the likelihood of moving to an urban area. Surprisingly, rural residents do not seem to adjust their location preferences to the perceived local housing market opportunities in advance. The proportion of rural residents preferring to move to a rural area within their current municipalities does not differ between rural areas with a highly pressured housing market and rural areas with a lower pressured housing market. Rural residents are presumably emotionally attached and have local ties to their rural localities, which may make them less likely to prefer to move beyond the boundaries of their current locality, even if the local housing market pressure is high.

Conclusion and discussion

By following individuals longitudinally regarding their actual residential behaviour conditional on their stated mobility intentions and residential preferences, this thesis has provided a better understanding of the factors that hinder and facilitate the realisation (or substitution) of intentions to move and residential preferences. The actual mobility behaviour of intended movers depends not only on life course characteristics but also on the anticipated and unanticipated changes therein. Changes may act as triggers for moving, and some changes are more urgent reasons for moving than others. Depending on their associated need for moving, both anticipated and unanticipated changes may provide an extra stimulus to change residence. Furthermore, preferences regarding the home and residential location and the willingness to accept a home that does not meet initial residential preferences affect the likelihood of realising an intention to move.

This longitudinal study provides a new perspective on previous findings. Although homeownership is generally perceived as a barrier to moving, homeowners do not have more difficulties than renters in realising their intentions to move. Furthermore, despite the concerns that rural residents are squeezed out of their rural localities due to rural housing demand by relatively wealthy non-locals, it is demonstrated that rural residents are more likely to move to a rural area within the preferred municipality (i.e., their own) if they prefer to do so than intended non-local movers are. The longitudinal approach reveals that behind the mobility patterns at the aggregate level, diffuse residential mobility decisions made at the individual level may hide. The results of this thesis suggest that stated and revealed preferences alone are unable to tell the full story of the complex individual mobility decision-making processes underlying potential moves.

Although the large discrepancy between stated preferences and revealed preferences may raise questions about the predictive value of stated mobility intentions for actual mobility behaviour, individuals with an intention to move relocate considerably more often than individuals who initially intended to remain in their current homes. Intentions to move, particularly strong intentions to move, are therefore important predictors of actual mobility behaviour. However, when using stated preferences as an indicator for housing preferences and future migration flows or housing demand, housing researchers should bear in mind that stated preferences only offer a glimpse into the actual residential choices of individuals. Furthermore, stated preferences may reflect not only what people desire to accomplish in their housing career but also what individuals

perceive to be possible given their financial means and the housing market circumstances.

The analyses presented in this thesis are based on a longitudinal data set in which large-scale, cross-sectional housing surveys are enriched with longitudinal register data. This innovative longitudinal data set has some important advantages over the (often small-scale) panel surveys generally used to investigate the intention–behaviour gap. Whereas panel surveys often face difficulties in tracking the same respondents over time because of respondent dropouts caused by moves, deaths or refusals to continue, the longitudinal data set used for this thesis is free from panel attrition and attrition bias. The combination of survey and register data allowed for easy tracking of all respondents over time and for creation of a data set large enough to perform in-depth analyses with great statistical power.

Some drawbacks of this study should be addressed. First, if an intended mover does not move within two years, it is impossible to determine whether this is truly a “non-realisation”. Whereas some intended movers may still be searching for new homes, others may no longer intend to move or may have postponed their intention to move. Intentions may fade, and the data do not indicate whether or how quickly this happens. Second, it is difficult to explain why individuals do not behave according to their initial mobility intentions based on life course-related factors, residential preferences, and contextual circumstances. This difficulty might be related to the fact that some of these factors are also taken into account in the formation of mobility intentions and residential preferences. Alternatively, other factors may interfere in the outcome of the individual mobility decision-making process. For example, many people intending to move may not have passed the critical threshold level at which the benefits of moving surpass the costs of moving, compelling them to begin searching for a new residence. The findings of Chapter 6 show that the inclusion of socio-psychological factors, such as attachment to the home, residential environment, or locality, might provide a better understanding of why intended movers realise and substitute their mobility intentions and residential preferences. Future research is needed to further unravel the interwoven factors, including motivational, life course-related, contextual, and socio-psychological factors, that may lead to behavioural inconsistencies in the individual mobility decision-making process. In particular, in-depth qualitative research will be a valuable tool for better understanding the dilemmas, considerations, barriers, and deeper socio-psychological processes that may interfere with the realisation of mobility intentions and residential preferences.