Family background and residential choice
Blaauboer, M.

Citation for published version (APA):
CHAPTER 1

Introduction
Where and how a person lives, in what type of environment and dwelling, strongly influences the quality of that person’s life. Different residential locations offer different facilities, services, and housing-market characteristics, and thus different opportunities and constraints (Michelson, 1977; Feijten et al., 2008). Houses differ with respect to their size, quality, and affordability and thus strongly influence their residents’ well-being (Jenkins and Maynard, 1983; Boehm and Schlottmann, 1999; Mulder, 2007). Where and how a person lives is the result of the residential choices made throughout the life course. Residential choice (a term used for behaviour with respect to housing quality and residential location (Mulder, 2007)) includes, among other things, choice of the timing of residential relocations, housing tenure, and residential environment and location. These residential choices are not always freely made (Mulder, 2007). The extent to which residential preferences are met is influenced by the resources available and restrictions encountered. Resources include not only financial resources, but also help and support from social networks and the location-specific capital a person may have. Restrictions can be imposed by housing-market characteristics and macro-level factors (De Jong and Fawcett, 1981). When one moves, and the location and house one chooses, are related to events occurring in and the characteristics of one’s other life course careers. These include the family and occupational careers (Michielin and Mulder, 2008). Moreover, residential choice is also influenced by the preferences and attitudes (Brun and Fagnani, 1994) developed over the life course (Bourdieu, 1984; Bootsma, 1995).

The development of preferences and attitudes starts during childhood. Parents transmit preferences to their children through socialization. Parents also transmit resources to their children. Through this intergenerational transmission of resources and attitudes, one’s family background influences residential choices made later in life (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Bourdieu, 1984; Henretta, 1984). The characteristics of the family background also influence the strength of family ties (Amato, 1988), which in turn influences the extent to which family members influence each other’s decisions later in life. As a result people from different socioeconomic backgrounds and with different childhood experiences develop different preferences, have different resources available, and make different residential choices.

In previous research, differences in residential choices are usually explained from differences in the characteristics of individuals or households, often using a life course perspective (Mulder, 2007). However, although studies of the intergenerational transmission of housing quality (see for instance: Jenkins and Maynard, 1993; Henretta, 1984; Smits, 2008) and residential histories (see for instance: Aero, 2006; Feijten et al., 2008) show the importance of one’s family background, not many studies have examined the influence of family members outside the household on residential choices. This study aims to expand the knowledge on residential choice by examining the influence of a broad range of family background characteristics and childhood experiences, and the influence of the wider family context on residential choices in the Netherlands. The wider family context includes family members
both inside the household, such as the partner and children, and outside the household, such as parents and siblings. The residential choices that are examined are the timing of leaving the parental home, homeownership, the choice of a residential environment type, distances between men and women in couples and their parents, and the geographical dispersion of siblings. The main research question addressed in this study is as follows: How are residential choices influenced by the family context, and to what extent does this influence differ between men and women and between couples and singles?

1.1 Competing life course careers: the family and occupational career
Explanations for differences in residential choices often draw on a life course perspective. Events occurring in other life course careers, mainly the family and the educational and occupational careers, trigger events such as moves and housing adjustments in the residential career (Bootsma, 1998; Michielin and Mulder, 2008). In other words, residential choices are to a large extent influenced by the life course phase one is in, because different phases are associated with different preferences and needs regarding the residential career.

The family and occupational careers can be competing. An individual or household may value the occupational career over the family career or vice versa. The relative importance that is attached to a career influences the preference for certain residential characteristics. The value attached to different life course careers may differ according to the phase of the life course a person is in (Bootsma, 1995). On completing education, the occupational career may be more important than the family career, which may lead to a preference for living in close proximity to job opportunities. When forming one’s own family, the value attached to the family career may become stronger and residential preferences may change from wanting to live close to work to favouring a single-family dwelling in a child-friendly area (Bootsma, 1998).

Several events in the educational and occupational careers influence residential choices. Firstly, enrolment in higher education triggers the transition to leaving the parental home, because higher education is almost always located in a city. For the less-well-educated, finishing education and starting the occupational career often triggers leaving home (Goldscneider and Goldscheider, 1999; Mulder and Hooimeijer, 2002). Since cities also provide more job opportunities, both for highly- and poorly-skilled people (Feijten et al., 2008), the start of the occupational career is often associated with a preference for urban living (Brun and Fagnani, 1994). Changing jobs or searching for a new job can trigger subsequent moves to locations with a suitable job market. Attaching great value to the development of the occupational career is thus likely to lead to residential choices that facilitate this development.

Important events in the family career that trigger moves are union formation (either cohabitation or marriage) and childbirth. Single people and people in couples make different residential
choices because they are in a different phase of the family career. They are therefore likely to attach a different value to this career in comparison with the occupational career (Michelson, 1977; Brun and Fagnani, 1994; Faessen, 2002). Moreover, singles and couples differ in the amount of resources they have available to realize their residential preferences (Faessen, 2002). The birth of a (first) child is an important event in an individual’s life and is likely to influence the value attached to the family career (Bootsma, 1995). Family formation is therefore an important trigger for housing adjustments.

The influence of the possibly competing family and occupational careers on residential choices invites research that deals with these competing careers by considering differences between various household types (couples or singles, with or without children) and differences in people’s socioeconomic status (level of education, labour-market participation). In this study I have investigated the differences between singles and couples and their resources in the process of leaving the parental home and in their chances of being a homeowner. I have also examined the influence of household type and socioeconomic status on the residential environment choice, the distance between couples and both sets of parents, and the geographical dispersion of siblings.

1.2 Family background: resources, shared preferences, and family ties
Characteristics of the family of origin in which an individual grows up, such as the parents’ resources, attitudes, and household situation, and childhood experiences such as residential experiences, influence residential choices later in life. There are several underlying mechanisms: the intergenerational transmission of resources; the development of preferences through socialization during childhood; and the influence of childhood experiences on family ties. Parents transmit their resources and attitudes to their children (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Bourdieu, 1984), and to a large extent siblings share their childhood experiences (Voorpostel et al., 2007). As a result adult children may share the residential preferences of their parents and their siblings and make similar residential choices later in life.

Parents transmit resources to their children through intergenerational transmission. These parental resources influence the opportunities people have to realize their residential preferences. Parents who have more resources available can, for instance, help their children obtain a mortgage (Jenkins and Maynard, 1993; Pickvance and Pickvance, 1995). Moreover, the intergenerational transmission of resources also results in children having more resources of their own. Parents of high socioeconomic status (such as a high income and/or level of education) can thus help their children realize their preferences (Henretta, 1984), while parents with fewer resources, such as single-parent families, have fewer opportunities to support their children financially (Fischer, 2004).
Preferences and attitudes that influence behaviour later in life are developed during childhood through socialization (Bourdieu, 1984). Parents transmit their attitudes towards family, education, and housing quality to their children. As a result they develop similar preferences and later in life may make residential choices similar to their parents’ (Bourdieu, 1984; Henretta, 1984). During childhood, people also develop a sense of belonging or attachment to their place of residence (Bourdieu, 1984; Aero, 2006) and they build up location-specific capital in the form of social networks and knowledge of the housing or job market (DaVanzo, 1981; Fischer and Malmberg, 2001). As a result, people may develop a preference for a certain location or type of residential environment. They may decide to stay close to where they grew up or to return to their childhood place of residence after having moved away for their education or choose a place of residence later in life that resembles that where they grew up.

Family background characteristics and childhood experiences also influence the strength of family ties later in life. Events such as a parental divorce or families consisting of stepparents and half siblings are known to speed up the process of leaving the parental home (Mitchell, 2004); this situation can influence attitudes towards family later in life and can lead to weaker family ties (Amato, 1988; Fischer, 2004). Individuals who grew up in such non-standard families may have weaker ties to their family members and to the location in which they grew up, and may not have a strong preference for living in close proximity to other family members.

The effect of family background characteristics and childhood experiences has often been examined for the timing of leaving the parental home and housing tenure, but not frequently for other residential choices such as location. In this study, the influence of family background characteristics on the timing of leaving home, homeownership, the residential environment type, distance to parents, and the geographical dispersion of siblings is examined. Moreover, I consider the influence of childhood residential experiences on later residential environment choice and the dispersion of siblings.

1.3 Linked lives: family members outside the household

The influence of family members such as parents and siblings on an individual’s preferences and behaviour does not end when he or she leaves the parental home. People living in the same household for a large part of their lives share many life experiences and may develop similar preferences. This situation is also referred to as the linked lives of family members: the lives of parents and their children and mutual siblings are linked because of these shared experiences (Elder, 1994). Even in today’s individualistic Western societies such as the Netherlands, these linkages appear to remain strong and of great value to individuals. The extended family still plays an important role in people’s lives and family solidarity seems far from diminishing (Bengtson, 2001). Siblings and parents and their adult children may
therefore take each other’s residential choices into account when making their own. I have distinguished between three underlying mechanisms: the strength of family ties, care and support needs, and continued socialization.

Firstly, the strength of an individual’s family ties influences the extent to which the preferences and choices of family members outside the household have an effect on behaviour and choices made later in life. Strong family ties are likely to be associated with a preference for living in close proximity to other family members. Secondly, because the exchange of support is strongly associated with living in close proximity (Rogerson et al., 1997; Mulder and Cooke, 2009), the care and support needs and receipt of support from family members outside the household are likely to influence individuals’ residential location choice (Michielin et al., 2008). Events that increase the need for support, childbirth or divorce for instance, can trigger moves closer to other family members (Michielin and Mulder, 2008). Thirdly, choices that parents and siblings make later in life can serve as an example for individuals. We can refer to this influence as continued socialization. Through this, people experience the consequences of choices made by other family members and can evaluate them. Family members can therefore decide to make a residential choice because other family members have made similar choices with a positive effect, such as a long distance move or buying their own home.

The role that family members outside the household play in people’s residential choices later in life has received relatively little research attention so far (Mulder, 2007), although recently there has been an increase in studies on distances between parents and their adult children (Malmberg and Pettersson, 2007; Michielin et al., 2008; Smits, 2010). The research on distances shows a clear association between parental and child characteristics and the distance between them (Rogerson et al., 1997). This finding raises the question what the relationship is between other family members’ location choices and to what extent family members outside the household play a role in residential choices in addition to the known effect of life course characteristics. I therefore consider the association between people’s residential environment choice and that of their parents and siblings, I have taken account of the distance between couples and both sets of parents, and have examined to what extent similarities and differences among siblings affect their geographical dispersion.

1.4 Gender differences: male dominance versus female family ties
Gender differences play an important role in society. Gender is socially constructed: norms and expectations shape the preferences, opportunities, and constraints of men and women. As a result they show different behaviour and make different choices (Saugeres, 2009). The residential choices of men and women differ for several reasons. First of all, there can be gender inequalities within couples; secondly, men and women may be affected differently by their family background; and lastly, men and women may differ in the strength of their family
ties and in their family attitudes.

Within couples, gender inequalities can arise at several points in time. Because the male partner is in general a few years older, he is likely to be more advanced in his occupational and residential careers and on union formation the woman is more likely to move to his place rather than vice versa (Mulder and Wagner, 1993). The male partner therefore has a stronger bargaining position and is thus likely to have a larger say in a couple’s residential choices (Bielby and Bielby, 2002; Cooke, 2008). Because his location preferences are likely to be considered of more importance than hers, a woman is more likely to be a trailing spouse or tied migrant than a man is: households tend to move or stay for the benefit of his occupational career even if that might harm her career (Boyle et al., 2001). This situation may result in inequality in the extent to which the residential preferences of the male and female partner are met.

Both women in couples and single women are known to be affected more strongly by family background characteristics than men are. Experiences such as a parental divorce have a stronger effect on the behaviour and attitudes of women than of men (Aquilino, 1991; Canada-Vicinay, 2005). Moreover, parents seem to provide their daughters with more resources than their sons (Mitchell, 2004). As a result men and women from similar family backgrounds differ in their residential opportunities and choices. The different values they attach to family also influence their residential choices. Women are often the kin keepers in a family (Rossi and Rossi, 1990). Not only do they provide more care within their own household, but they also exchange more support and have more contact with family members outside the household (Spitze and Logan, 1990). Because women attach more value to family and have stronger family ties, they may be more likely than men to take their family members’ residential-location choices into account when choosing their own.

The different mechanisms (family background, resources, and family ties) that cause gender differences in residential choices invite separate analyses of both genders and for research in which the influence of these mechanisms is combined. The differences between gender effects in couples and gender effects for singles are also of interest. For both single men and women and men and women in couples, I have examined the differences between them in their home-leaving process and in their likelihood of being a homeowner. For men and women in couples, I have examined the extent to which the characteristics of both partners influence the likelihood of living in an owner-occupied dwelling and the distance from both sets of parents.

1.5 Research questions
The main research question of this study is addressed through five part questions that are each answered in a separate chapter. All the chapters have been published in or submitted
as an article to an international peer-reviewed scientific journal. Each part question deals with a different characteristic of an individual’s or household’s residential choice.

In Chapter 2 the focus is on the first transition to an independent household: leaving the parental home. This major life-course transition influences one’s future residential career to a large extent (Goldscheider and Goldscheider, 1999; Rusconi, 2004). I have specifically studied the gender differences in the effects that family background characteristics have on the transition of leaving the parental home and distinguish between leaving home to live alone and leaving home to live with a partner. The research question I address is: To what extent do characteristics of the family of origin influence the timing of the transition of leaving the parental home for the first time to live without a partner or to live with a partner, and to what extent do these effects differ between men and women?

In Chapter 3 I report my investigation of the effect of family background characteristics on the likelihood of being a homeowner. It has been shown that housing tenure is strongly related to housing quality. Owner-occupied dwellings are often of better quality than rented dwellings and being a homeowner also leads to a financial advantage. The difference in the likelihood of being a homeowner between different groups in society is therefore an indicator for possible social inequality (Henretta, 1984; Boehm and Schlottmann, 1999; Conley, 2001; Helderman, 2007). In this chapter we examine the effects of family background characteristics and individual resources on the homeownership of men and women in couples and single men and women. The research question that is addressed is: To what extent do resources, household context and family background characteristics influence homeownership and to what extent does this influence differ between men and women in couples and between single men and women?

Chapter 4 addresses another characteristic of an individual’s residential choice, namely the location choice. More specifically, I have explained the type of residential environment in which one lives by examining the impact of residential childhood experiences and family members outside the household. I have distinguished between urban, suburban, and rural residential environments. The different types of residential environment provide different facilities, opportunities, and constraints and thus to a large extent influence the quality of life (Michelson, 1977; Feijten et al., 2008). I investigated the following: To what extent do (residential) childhood experiences and the residential choices of parents and siblings outside the household play a role in residential environment choices of individuals, in addition to the known effect of life course characteristics, and what is the relative importance of childhood experiences and the location of parents and siblings compared to that of life course characteristics?
The study described in Chapter 5 is of distances between men and women in couples and both sets of parents. Studies of the distances between family members are important because of the strong association with the exchange of care and support (Rogerson et al., 1997; Malmberg and Pettersson, 2007). Often the focus is on the distance between parents and their adult children, but in the case of couples the support and needs of two sets of parents can influence their location choice. The following question is answered: Do couples live in closer proximity to the parents of the male partner or of the female partner, and to what extent can the distance to both sets of parents be explained by gender differences related to the socioeconomic considerations and resources of both partners in the couple or by gender differences related to support and family ties?

In Chapter 6 the focus is also on the distances between family members, but here I examine the geographical dispersion of siblings. Throughout the whole of an individual’s life course siblings form an important source of support (Voorpostel et al., 2007) and this is facilitated by proximity (Litwak and Kulis, 1987). I have investigated the residential locations of siblings and explained the dispersion between siblings by characteristics of the sibling network and by family background characteristics. The research question addressed is: To what extent can the geographical dispersion of siblings be explained by life course needs and sibling ties reflected by current socio-demographic characteristics of the sibling network and residential and socio-demographic characteristics of the family of origin?

In Chapter 7 the conclusions based on the findings in the previous chapters are discussed and the main research question answered. In this concluding chapter I also reflect on the study as a whole and discuss ideas for future research.

1.6 Research approach and context
The methodological approach used to answer all the part questions is quantitative. The first four questions draw on data from a large-scale survey that is representative for the Netherlands: the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS; Dykstra et al., 2005). The fifth question is answered using the Swedish register database ASTRID. The methods used are event history analyses (Chapter 2), logistic regression analyses (Chapter 3 and 4), and linear regression analyses (Chapter 5 and 6).

The NKPS has been developed to examine family and kinship relationships in the Netherlands from a dynamic multi-actor perspective. In 2002-2004, a representative address sample of the Dutch population between the ages of 18 and 79 and not living in institutions was interviewed using Computer Aided Personal Interviewing. The respondents also completed an additional self-completion questionnaire. Questions were asked about a broad range of demographic, geographic, socioeconomic, health, and housing characteristics and about attitudes, such as family solidarity and attitudes towards family and work life. The respondents also
provided information on the characteristics of their partner, parents, siblings, and children. Information about the family background was obtained through retrospective questions. In addition to the primary respondents, family members within and outside the respondent’s household, including a partner, parent, sibling, and child(ren), were also interviewed. As a result family relations could be studied from a multi-actor perspective. The overall response rate of the NKSP was 45 percent, which is comparable to other large-sale data collections in the Netherlands (Dykstra et al., 2005). In 2008, the second wave of the NKPS also became available. In this study I used the main sample of primary respondents of the first wave of the NKPS, which consists of 8161 respondents.

The data for Chapter 6 come from the Swedish longitudinal micro-database ASTRID. This database consists of register and census data from Statistics Sweden and is hosted by the Department of Social and Economic Geography, Umeå University. The register data includes individual information on the socioeconomic, demographic, and geographic characteristics of all Swedish residents. Information about the residential location has a spatial resolution of 100 metres. Links between family members outside the household are available for those born in Sweden. The register data are available from 1985 and are updated annually. The register data are supplemented by the Swedish census data collected every five years from 1960 to 1990. With the information from the census data, it was also possible to examine people’s family background for recent generations.

This study has been conducted within the research program ‘The Family Context and Residential Choice’ in which the residential choices of individuals and households are related to the wider family context. The main research question of this program is as follows: How is residential choice influenced by people’s wider family context and family attitudes, and how does this influence differ between men and women, between people with different levels of education, socioeconomic status, age, household situations and health, between ethnic categories, and between different socio-spatial contexts? The research program is funded by NWO VICI grant no. 453-04-001. The research team consisted of Clara H. Mulder (principal investigator), Aslan Zorlu, Francesca Michielin, Annika Smits, and Marjolein Blaauboer.

References


