Family background and residential choice
Blaauboer, M.

Citation for published version (APA):
Blaauboer, M. (2010). Family background and residential choice Oisterwijk: Uitgeverij BOXPress

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Summary
This study is about the influence of family on residential choices in the Netherlands. Residential choices reflect behaviour with respect to housing quality and residential location. Since different housing types and locations offer different opportunities and constraints, residential choices strongly influence individuals’ well-being and the quality of their lives. Residential choices are influenced by the resources one has available and the restrictions one encounters. Events occurring in life course domains such as the occupational and family careers influence preferences and needs with respect to housing. Most previous studies have explained residential choices from differences in the characteristics of individuals or households and by using a life course perspective. However, through socialization, preferences and needs are already to a large extent developed during childhood. Via intergenerational transmission, parents transmit resources to their children, thus influencing their opportunities to realize their preferences later in life. The influence of the family in today’s individualistic Western societies such as the Netherlands is still strong and family solidarity seems far from diminishing.

In this study, the focus is on the influence of the wider family context on several residential choices. The wider family context includes family members both within the household, such as the partner and children, and outside the household, such as parents and siblings. Moreover, both the influence of one’s family background and childhood experiences, and the influence of family members later in life are taken into account. The residential choices that are addressed are the timing of leaving the parental home, homeownership, the choice for a residential environment type, distances between men and women in couples and their parents, and the geographical dispersion of siblings. The main research question is: 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?

The family career, reflected by one’s household situation, has a large influence on residential preferences and needs. Families with children prefer different locations and types of dwelling than young single people. The family career may be competing with the occupational career. People may value one career over the other, resulting in specific residential choices. In this study the influence of these competing life course careers are taken into account by considering differences between people with different household situation, specifically differences between couples and singles, and differences in the socio-economic status of people.

The family background influences residential choices later in life because it influences one’s resources, preferences and family ties. Through intergenerational transmission, parents transmit resources and attitudes to their children. Parents can help their children directly by giving financial support or by stimulating and facilitating their educational and occupational careers. Preferences and attitudes are developed through socialization. Children develop similar preferences as their parents and may make similar residential choices later in life. Childhood experiences also influence the attachment to the place where one grows up and
ties to family members. This influences decisions to move away and preferences for living close to family members. In this study, the influence of family background characteristics and childhood experiences on residential choices is examined.

The influence of parents and siblings on an individual’s preferences and residential choices does not end when he or she leaves the parental home. Because family members lead linked lives, they share experiences and develop similar preferences. Siblings, and parents and adult children may therefore take each other’s residential choices into account when making their own. People with stronger family ties may have a stronger preference for living in close proximity with family members. The exchange of care and support is also facilitated by living close by. Through continued socialization, people experience the consequences of residential choices made by other family members. They may take an example of their family members’ location and housing choices. The association between people’s residential location and that of their family members, and distances between family members are investigated in this study.

Men and women differ markedly in the extent to which the family career, family background, childhood experiences and family members outside the household influence residential choices. Gender inequalities cause a difference in bargaining power within couples; daughters are likely to be influenced stronger by their family background and childhood experiences that sons are; and in general women attach more value to their family and have stronger family ties than men. I therefore paid attention to gender differences in the residential choices and gender differences in the impact of the family context.

**Leaving the parental home**

In Chapter 2, the extent to which characteristics of the family of origin influence the timing of the transition to leaving the parental home is examined. Moreover, it is investigated to what extent these effects differ between men and women and between leaving home to live alone and leaving home to live with a partner. Leaving home is one of the first transitions to adulthood and has important consequences for both the parents and the child. The decision to leave the parental home is influenced strongly by characteristics of the parental home. Resources of parents influence opportunities and constraints and the atmosphere at home influences the wish of young adults to leave or stay.

The results show that the availability of parental resources creates a feathered nest in which young adults prefer to stay at younger ages. Greater parental resources facilitate home-leaving at older ages. A pleasant atmosphere at home also leads to a longer stay at home. Young adults with parents who frequently quarrel, or are divorced or remarried, leave home at earlier ages than young adults who grow up with both nuclear parents or whose parents get along well. Both parental resources and a pleasant atmosphere at home seem to lead to a situation
in which young adults feel comfortable and prefer to stay until their wish for independency or union formation becomes stronger. A negative atmosphere or a lack of resources on the other hand, might push them out of their parental home into early cohabitation or living on their own.

Leaving home to live alone and leaving home for union formation are two distinct processes. Most notably are the differences in age patterns and the effect of enrolment in and the level of education. Young adults who leave home to live alone do so at earlier ages than young people who leave home to live with a partner. Enrolment in (higher) education is clearly associated with leaving home to live alone, while having obtained a diploma increases the likelihood of leaving home for union formation.

The influence of the family or origin clearly differs between men and women. Women are to a larger extent influenced by their parents’ resources than men are, which may indicate that parents are more willing to provide financial support to their daughters than to their sons or that women more easily accept help from their parents than men do. Gender differences are also found in the effect of the family atmosphere and structure. Women who leave home to live without a partner have an increased risk to do so when living with a stepfather, while men do not, and women who leave home to live with a partner leave home earlier when they come from a single parent family than men do.

**Homeownership**

Housing tenure is an important feature of one’s residential dwelling. Owner-occupied houses are generally of better quality than rented dwellings and homeownership is often seen as an indicator for social status and a high standard of living. The influence of resources, household context, and the family background on homeownership, and the extent to which these effects differ between men and women in couples and single men and women, is investigated in Chapter 3. One of the most important factors influencing homeownership is the availability of financial resources, but also one’s earning potential, for instance a high level of education, household situation, and family background are important determinants. These factors influence opportunities and constraints, but also preferences and needs. Because men and women differ in their socio-economic resources, in their family ties, and in the extent to which they are influenced by their family background, they are also likely to differ in their chances to be a homeowner.

The results show that in general women are less likely to be homeowners than men are. With respect to the household situation, we see that couples with children are significantly more likely to live in an owner-occupied dwelling than couples without children and single people. When we compare men and women who live with a partner, a striking difference in the effect of level of education is found. The man’s level of education is far more important in a couple’s
likelihood of living in an owner-occupied dwelling than the woman’s level of education. When buying a home, the earning potential of the man is probably valued higher than the income potential of the woman. Gender differences in the effect of the family background are also found. Women’s likelihood of being a homeowner is negatively influenced by having experienced a parental divorce during childhood and positively by a higher socio-economic status of the father. Significant differences are also found between single men and women. Although for both sexes the income plays an important role, for men their earning potential, indicated by their level of education, is far more important than for women.

The determinants of homeownership thus clearly differ between men and women. The household situation and current income seem to be better predictors of homeownership for women, while earning potential seems to be more important for men. Single women might be waiting for a partner or for their income to be sufficiently high before they buy a home, while single men may see buying a house as a financial investment.

Residential environment choices
Urban, suburban and rural residential environments differ in their facilities, services, amenities and housing market characteristics. The choice for a certain residential environment type thus influences the opportunities and constraints people face, and is associated with different preferences and needs. The choice for a residential environment has often been explained from a life course perspective. The characteristics of the family and occupational life course careers are known to have a strong influence on residential environment choices. However, in Chapter 4 it is shown that the life course perspective only tells part of the story and that residential childhood experiences might be even more important in determining one’s residential environment. The residential environment choices of family members outside the household and family background characteristics also prove to play a role.

Regarding the life course careers, the results show that people with different household situations and different levels of education live in different residential environments. This can be explained from differences in resources, preferences and needs. The effect of the residential environment type in which one lived during childhood is found to be even larger than that of the life course characteristics. Residential childhood experiences influence current residential choice through the development of location specific capital and socialization. Location specific capital can lead to residential inertia (people stay in the region in which they grew up) or return migration. Socialization influences the development of preferences for a certain environment type. The results show that having lived in a certain residential environment type during childhood strongly increases the likelihood of living in a similar environment later in life, even when ruling out residential inertia or return migration.
The residential location choices of parent and siblings outside the household also play an important role. People might take their family members’ location into account when choosing their own because of strong family ties, and people may have developed similar preferences as their parents and siblings. The results show that people who have a sibling living in a certain residential environment type are far more likely to live in that environment type themselves. This result is also found when only looked at people who moved away from their childhood place of residence. This study shows that a broader life course perspective, in which the interdependency between family members, their linked lives and shared life course experiences are taken into account, offers a very fruitful approach for examining residential environment choices.

Distances between couples and the man’s and woman’s parents
Proximity between parents and their adult children is strongly associated with intergenerational contact and the exchange of support. In the light of an ageing society in which family ties are diminishing, it is thus important to investigate what the determinants of intergenerational distances are. In Chapter 5 the distance between the residential location of couples and that of the man’s parents and the woman’s parents is explained from characteristics of both partners in the couple and both partners’ parents. Gender differences play an important role in the location decisions of couples. From the perspective of the migration histories of couples, it is argued that the male partner often has more bargaining power than the female partner, which derives from gender role beliefs and differences in the socio-economic status of both partners. This could lead to location choices of couples that benefit his preferences rather than hers. From the perspective of support needs of couples and parents, it is argued that women often have stronger family ties and provide more support than men do, which is associated with a preference of the woman for living in close proximity with family members.

The results show that couples on average live closer to the man’s parents than to the woman’s parents, which could be caused by a better bargaining position of the male partner in the couple’s location choice. Moreover, the socio-economic position of the man has a larger effect on the distance to both sets of parent than the socio-economic position of the woman. Couples thus seem to choose their location based on what would benefit the socio-economic position of the man rather than on the possible preference of the woman to live in close proximity with her parents. However, the results also provide evidence for the importance of female family ties in the location choices of couples. An interesting and notable finding is that when a couple has young children, they live closer to the woman’s parents than when they do not have children, while this effect is not found for the distance to the man’s parents. This could indicate that couples rely more on the support of the woman’s parents when it comes to childcare, or have more contact with them, than of the man’s parents. Also, with an increasing age, the distance to the parents of the man increases more than the distance to the parents of the woman. These results give reason to believe that the effect of the male
dominance in a couple is more pronounced in the beginning of the relationship while later on in the relationship the importance of the female family ties may gain importance.

The geographical dispersion of sibling networks
In Chapter 6 the geographical dispersion of siblings in Sweden is studied. Since sibling relationships are possible the longest relationships an individual experiences during the life course, siblings are an important source for help and support. The geographical dispersion of sibling networks in Sweden is investigated by analyzing the extent to which this dispersion is influenced by life course needs and sibling ties. It is argued that life course needs and sibling ties are influenced by socio-demographic characteristics, similarities or differences between siblings, and family background characteristics. These characteristics influence the relocation behaviour of individual siblings and thus the geographical dispersion of the sibling network. Some socio-demographic and family background characteristics enhance moving, while others hamper moving away. Similarities between siblings in socio-demographic respect are likely to result in similarities in life course needs and closer sibling ties, while differences between siblings can be associated with different life course needs and with weaker sibling ties because they do not have much in common.

The results show an important effect of the life course needs on the geographical dispersion of siblings. Socio-demographic characteristics that increase the propensity of moving, such as a higher level of education or higher age, lead to a greater geographical dispersion of siblings. Variation among the siblings in their socio-demographic characteristics and thus life course needs is also associated with a greater geographic dispersion, although it could also be that diverse sibling networks have weaker family ties. When looking at the family background of the siblings, we see that stronger sibling ties decrease the geographical dispersion among them. It seems that the family ties among siblings may be stronger when their parents did not live together during childhood or separated after childhood. In those cases the siblings are found to live more clustered than siblings who grew up with both the father and the mother present. Family ties also seem to play a role in that siblings of whom at least one parent is a non-Western immigrant are more clustered than siblings with two Western parents.

Life course needs thus exert a large influence on the location choices of siblings and the geographical dispersion among them. This is especially the case when it comes to the current socio-demographic characteristics of the siblings. However, the results also show that sibling ties play a role in the geographical dispersion of siblings. These ties seem to develop during childhood and are influenced by changes in the parental home and the cultural background.
Reflection
This study has contributed to our knowledge on residential choices in the Netherlands by examining the influence of the wider family context. This study is an interdisciplinary study. Residential choices, typically a geographical study domain, are explained from a range of sociological, demographic and geographic theories. The research questions addressed in the different chapters are answered using large-scale data sets and quantitative research methods.

Studying residential choices, and specifically investigating the differences in residential choices of particular subgroups, provides insight in the extent to which people differ in their residential choices and in the possible constraints they face in realizing their residential preferences. Differences between subgroups can be a sign of differences in preferences and needs, but also of inequality with respect to housing and location choices. From this study it can be concluded that singles and couples differ with respect to their home leaving process and in their likelihood of being a homeowner. More general, the household situation clearly influences residential preferences and needs. Important differences between men and women are also found. Women leave home at earlier age, are less likely to be homeowners and live on average further away from their parents when they have a partner than men do. Moreover, women are to a larger extent influenced by their family background than men are, and within couples the socio-economic status of the male partner has a stronger effect on the residential location choice than that of the female partner.

Studying the extent to which the wider family context influences residential choices contributes to insight in the strength of family ties in people’s lives nowadays and in the extent to which family members may exchange care and support. It has been argued that changes such as the increase of divorce, the postponement of marriage and childbirth, the lower fertility rates and, as a result, the decline of family size, may have led to diminishing family ties. However, this study shows that, despite individualization and urbanization, family ties and the family background are still important. It is shown that family background characteristics strongly influence the residential choices, and thus the quality of people’s lives. The influence of family members such as parents and siblings does not end when one forms an own household. Later in life, people are shown to take their family members’ residential choices into account when making their own. Especially siblings seem to share preferences for residential environment types, and their geographical dispersion is influenced by their shared childhood experiences.

In this study the concepts of preference and attitude played an important role. The existence of values and attitudes are used as mechanisms or explanations behind the found associations between the residential choices and characteristics of the wider family context. However, direct measurements for attitudes towards family or work were not included in the analyses. Results from analyses in earlier phases of this research project only showed negligible
effects of measurements of family ties or work orientation. The small effects that were found disappeared once socio-demographic characteristics, such as level of education or age, were included in the model. It could be that the association between attitudes and behaviour is not as strong as is sometimes assumed in research on attitudes. People may have different attitudes but still show the same behaviour. Another difficulty with measuring preferences lies in the operationalization. It is often difficult to specify and determine what the relevant values or attitudes are that should be measured.

Further research could investigate the role of family members outside the household such as parents and siblings on decisions and preferences of people throughout the life course. Do changes in the marital or household situation of parents after childhood affect family ties, preferences and resources of their adult children? Do siblings indeed serve as an example for each other later in life? It would also be interesting to study the motives behind the differences in residential choices of men and women in more depth. Is it indeed the case that women base their residential choices on family motives while men choose from an economic perspective? Regarding research on values, it would be worthwhile to examine and disentangle the influence of underlying mechanisms such as socialization and the development of shared preferences on behaviour of people later in life. Are preferences merely developed during childhood? And is this a result of shared attitudes or merely of similarities in socio-demographic respect?