Groningen 1870-1914. Sociale verandering en economische ontwikkeling in een regionaal centrum
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This book is intended to be an urban history of Groningen around 1900. According to the theory of urban history the city is seen as a multifunctional central place, a point of concentration of economic, social, cultural and political activities. Within a reduced area there is an accumulation of production of goods and services, people, cultural innovation and of the creation of power. In this sense urbanization means the concentration of central functions in central places.

This theory is evaluated in chapter 1. This chapter also includes a description of the development of Groningen’s central position since the Middle Ages. Due to its situation in the peripheral parts of the German Empire, the city attained an almost independent status and extended its power over the surrounding countryside: the "Ommelanden". During the Dutch revolt the city was incorporated in the Dutch Republic and informally lost a great part of its independence. This process was reinforced by the French occupation and the founding of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Groningen became a rather peripheral Dutch city. But in the course of the nineteenth century Groningen gained more importance in the Dutch economy and attained a high rank in the city system.

In the next chapters some of these functions and activities mentioned above are analysed for the period between 1870 and 1914. This is done by a reconstruction of the social structure, the migration movement and an analysis of some aspects of the social infrastructure (housing, public health), the economic structure and parts of the economic infrastructure (traffic, public utilities).

First of all the social structure is reconstructed (chapter 2). This is done by a sample taken from the register, combined with additional data concerning housing and income. The result is a three level stratification, each with two subdivisions:

1. upper class a. the elite; b. high bourgeoisie.
2. middle class a. merchants, teachers, small manufacturers b. shopkeepers, civil servants.
3. lower class a. artisans, small shopkeepers b. labourers, servants.

The income distribution proved to be the best variable to distinguish between social classes. There was a firm correlation between that variable and those concerning housing.

Special attention is given to the elite (income > hfl. 4000). This elite was mainly born in the city itself or in the province of Groningen. About 40% of the elite was unemployed. They mainly lived on rents. Around 1900 there was a little rise in the participation of factory- and business-owners and bankers among the elite. This was also the case in the superelite (income > hfl. 8000), which consisted of 65 people in 1870 and 116 in 1910. Within this group there was also an increasing participation of professors of the university of Groningen. Among others the superelite consisted of a rather large number of noblemen. The noblemen mixed with the newly rich in occupations and social life, but they did not marry them.

The local elite dominated the municipality. There were twelve families who had a continual appearance in the municipal corporation. Rich immigrants were hardly ever allowed in the city-council; particularly foreign businessmen were excluded.

Social mobility was at a high level in the seventies. About 16% of the heads of the households reached a higher stratum. After 1900 22.5% got higher up. There was hardly any mobility in the nineties due to the agrarian depression. This

* translated by Marjolein Bakker en Harro van Delden.
brought stagnation in the local economy which depended largely on the agrarian sector.

Changes in the social structure in some way were caused by migration. Between 1870 and 1910 there was almost as much emigration as there was immigration. In chapter 3 these phenomena are analysed with the help of theories as formulated by Ravenstein, Thomas, Lee, Stouffer and others. From these theories I derived 19 hypotheses which were clustered according to 1. distance, direction and duration of stay; 2. groups and individual circumstances; 3. push/pull circumstances, intervening obstacles or opportunities. These hypotheses are tested separately as well as combined.

As a result the validity of some theories was confirmed: most migration took short distance, migration proceeded step by step (spatial stepwise as well as hierarchical stepwise in the direction of big cities). Most migrants were young and single. Men moved longer distances than women and families.

From the Groningen point of view, I had to refute the theory that people from the countryside migrated more than the inhabitants of the cities. Most of the Groningen immigrants came from cities.

During the period 1870-1910 the long-distance migration increased as well as the hierarchical stepwise migration. The city of Groningen was the link between a Northern regional migration-system and a national one.

Two phenomena turned out to be extremely important:

a) Migration was highly influenced by the business-cycle. During the agrarian depression - after 1880 - immigration stagnated. More immigrants came from the neighbouring municipalities.

b) It is impossible to simply make a division between immigration and emigration. Almost half of the immigrants did not stay long. They emigrated within five years, most of them after one year. Moreover, much of the immigration was remigration: people returned to the city they had left before. A large part of the emigration also was remigration: for instance a return to the provincial municipality where one was born. Sometimes people combined these two movements: they came from Amsterdam to Groningen and then left for Appingedam. In an earlier stage they had left Appingedam to go to Groningen and then emigrated to Amsterdam.

The population of Groningen grew rather fast due to births and immigration in relation with the increase of central functions. As a result of this, more houses were needed, particularly by the lower social classes. But there was no room for them. The fortresses kept the area, which could be built on, unchanged for ages. Fortunately the local government was allowed to demolish the ramparts in 1874.

So townplanning was possible for the first time. This is analysed in chapter 4. In the first place the local elite planned for themselves. An expert from The Hague was engaged. He designed broad boulevards to be fringed by the large houses of the upper ten. Nothing was planned for the lowest classes, who had to live out of sight of the elite in what became working class quarters. There were hardly any building regulations for these areas and there was a lot of speculation going on by landowners who built working class houses on their land.

Little was done by the house building associations to improve housing for the lower strata. There were three of them in the nineteenth century, mainly governed by the local elite who also provided the money needed. They sometimes had philanthropical motives, but they also wanted to make their money pay. So they did not wait genuine labourers in the houses because of their little solvency. Only one corporation - Werkkamsteun - offered houses to people with really low incomes since the labour organisation participated in the board of this association.

By the Woningwet (Housing Law) of 1901/2 the local government was urged by the National Government to make a more comprehensive townplanning. A plan was made by J.H. Mulock Houwer which was partly realized. The Woningwet even made it easier to
start a house building association. The money was provided for in advance by the Government. So two new corporations were founded, but they only built a small part of the total amount of houses that were needed.

In connection with the building and planning activities, removal started in various directions. The elite partly left the town centre and settled down in the boulevards in the South of the city and in an exclusive quarter in the West. The houses they had left were transformed into shops and offices. The lower civil servants and some skilled labourers rented the houses from the building associations. The houses these people vacated, were the only ones most immigrant families could afford to live in. As a result, in 1914 there were separate quarters for the different classes in society while in the old fortified town they had all lived together.

Public health was not of much concern to the elite. Most of the measures they took were intended to isolate bearers of infectious diseases, who were mainly members of the lowest class. As is described in chapter 5, a regional public health counsel, which existed from 1865 until 1902 did not result in much. Yet the president was L. Ali Cohen, a famous hygienist.

The Counsel’s secretary was S. Sr. Coronel who was even more famous. After all a few measures were taken with a positive effect on the health situation. The most important one was the founding of the water company, which was financed by private enterprise. Only when this enterprise proved to be profitable, the local authorities tried to take it over.

The Gezondheidswet (Public Health Law) of 1901 altered the situation. Forced again by the Government, the municipality had to regulate much more. They had to establish a local public health commission for advisory tasks. The medical relief was ameliorated and more houses got condemned. But the authorities tried to reduce the cost of it as much as they could.

Most of the money spent on public health went to the new Academic Hospital, which opened in 1903. Around 1850 people did not have much confidence in hospitals. They preferred nursing at home. A hospital was seen as an institution for the poor to die in. After 1900 this opinion changed completely. My analysis of the patients’ professions of the Academic Hospital showed, that at that time also members of the elite went to the hospital; even doctors did. Many people got cured and relatively few died there.

An analysis is also made of the causes of death. There was a decline in deaths by epidemic diseases and by infections of the respiratory- and digestive organs. As only a few epidemic diseases really disappeared something must have happened to the constitution of the people. Most diseases occurred as much as before but people did not die of them anymore.

So my conclusion must be that the resistance improved thanks to increasing prosperity. The rise in the standard of living resulted in better living conditions, public as well as private.

The build-up of the social structure and the course of migration indicate, what the economic structure must have looked like. Chapter 6 is dedicated to this matter.

About 50% of the working population was employed in the services sector. Popular professions were warehouse- and storehouseman, shopassistant and servant. Many immigrants were working in these professions. During the agrarian depression the cheap immigrant labour force partly superseded the heads of the families, in a number of professions. Since the percentage of the self-employed among them also dropped considerably, the heads of the families had a hard time during the agrarian depression.
The course of the depression and its duration has been deduced from a number of indicators: bankruptcies, annual reports of the Chamber of Commerce and surveys of migration to foreign countries. In industry the number of wage-earners increased as well. However no shift took place in the dispersing of employment over the small craft-enterprises on the one hand, and the factories and the large craft-enterprises on the other. The ratio remained 1:3. After 1890 the increase in the number of factories came to a standstill. Still old ones disappeared to make room for new ones, so the number of employees per factory increased.

Yet no real large business came into existence in Groningen. In 1910 there were only 13 enterprises with more than 50 employees and only 3 had more than a 100 employees. These were the municipal gas factory, the ready-made clothing factory from Reinier Müller and the Fongers’ cycleworks. The large enterprises were mainly concentrated on a few branches of industry that acquired a superregional importance and in which the social mobility proved to be the largest. These enterprises were:

a) the printing offices, with J.B. Wolters as the main exponent;
b) the ready-made clothing industry, where the workshop-system was introduced;
c) the cycle-manufacturing;
d) some parts of the food- and stimulant-industry, such as tobacco processing, coffee-roasting factories, meats-fabrication and the manufacturing and refining of sugar.

A sugar- and molasses factory was the only factory of the Scholten-firm that stood in the city of Groningen. Their headoffice was situated there as well. Willem Albert and his son Jan Evert Scholten were by far the most prominent industrialists in the city and the region. They had more than 10 factories in the Groningen Veenkolonien (peat-colonies) and abroad. Most of them were used for the manufacturing of potato-flour, but straw-board, sugar and dairy products were produced as well. The Scholten family was involved in virtually every initiative in the economic or social-cultural field.

Most of the prominent employers, like Scholten, came from outside of town; frequently even from abroad. This fact made it hard for them to raise funds. The Groningen well-to-do rather invested their money in land or State-bonds and railway-shares. Around 1870 banking had hardly developed, but would later meet with a spectacular growth. However, for working capital the employers were mainly committed to their relatives and personal fortune.

Since most enterprises were comparatively small, the steam engine played a minor role in the Groningen industry compared to the gas- and the electric engine. The manufacturing of gas and electricity was provided for by the municipality itself and not, as in so many other cities, left to private enterprise. In this way the considerable profits flowed into the municipal treasury.

The corn trade had a prominent position in the services sector. More in the size of the buildings - granaries, corn-exchange - than in the number of employees. The retail trade kept pace with the growth of the city. The first department stores came to the city centre, mainly those which dealt in clothes and fancy articles.

The regional centre position of Groningen and the connection with a national city network was completely reflected in the run of the railway tracks, which were constructed around 1870. The digging of the Eemskanaal to Delfzijl was an attempt to increase the role of Groningen as a seaport, but it still was Delfzijl that took the credit. However, a number of important steamship lines with the Randstad, Bremen and Hamburg were realised.

Large factories and large scale industry in itself were the exception rather than the rule in Groningen before 1914. During the whole period most employment was to be found in the services sector and in the craft industry. If an industrial revolution took place in the Netherlands in this period then at any rate it was not situated in Groningen.