Summary

In The Netherlands there are approximately a quarter of a million people who belong to an animal club. Each club for devotees of dog, cat, dove, canary, chicken or rabbit consists of people who are united by a shared passion. These organizations form distinctive micro-worlds which have their own symbols, language, customs, rules, club activities and values. Organized pedigreed-poultry breeding will be the subject of consideration in this book. In a certain sense, this particular micro-world serves as a model for other hobby clubs in which central values are more or less identical.

The Introduction and Research Problem will introduce the poultry world by means of an historical-sociological perspective. This approach raises the following six questions: Who raises fancy chickens? Why are fancy chickens raised? How are the people who raise them organized? How do these people manage the chickens? What are the inter-relationships? What changes have arisen with the passage of time?

In the first chapter, entitled 'De Opmaat', 'The Upbeat', the manner of and motives for raising chickens in the past will be discussed. For this purpose, we must first take a substantial step back in time. Nevertheless, the stress will ultimately be placed on the course of events in the nineteenth century. The following questions will be answered consecutively: What was the consequence of the altered relationship of man with animal? What was the effect of the increased interest in the biological world? What was the influence of the rise of commercial poultry farming? How did people come to be interested in the chicken for its form apart from its practical function and to hold competitions on this basis? Which new ideas were inspired by developments abroad? The answers to these questions explain the establishment of the poultry association in The Netherlands after 1880. Following this discussion, we will briefly turn our attention to some of the oldest poultry associations: Avicultura (The Hague, 1886), Ornithophilia (Utrecht, 1894), and the Poultry Club of Twente (Enschede, 1894). We will sketch the initial years of organized poultry farming in connection with these organizations.

Chapter Two through Chapter Six may be considered as the core of the book. In these chapters, the development of chicken sport between the years 1900 and 2000 will be discussed. These developments will be clarified by means of a description of the course of events within clubs for devotees of certain Dutch breeds of poultry. Each chapter will deal with one or more phases in the development of organized poultry farming. Every period will be limited to one or more meaningful changes in the demographic, economic, social-cultural, technological, ecological or political-managerial domain. The second chapter will describe how, in the years between 1900 and 1920, the affluent citizenry set the tone for poultry sport. Clubs formed organizational bonds in which the
thought and action of this group was profiled. This period is characterized by an increase in professionalism, regulation, and specialization. Furthermore, we see that the national umbrella organization The Board of Management and Supervision attempted to control the essential aspects of exhibition and assessment.

At the time, the dominant principles in poultry sport were aesthetics and utility. The Dutch Poultry Club (NHC) added to these one more important principle: national awareness. In order to carry out this mission, exhibitions were organized, among other activities, and related books and magazines were published. It is clear from the spectacular growth of this association that these actions had an immediate effect.

In Chapter Three (1920-1939), a new group of devotees entered upon the poultry scene. In the first part of the 1920's, new poultry clubs were set up in many middle-sized and smaller areas. Aside from the fact that people enjoyed breeding chickens, it was undoubtedly the question of status which lay at the root of the expansion of chicken sport from 'high' to 'low' levels of society. Facilitated by an increase in free time and a rising prosperity, those on the lower rung of the social ladder imitated the leisure activities of the elite. However, the newcomers had little interest in the 'national' question. Their goal was to combine the pleasurable aspects of poultry sport (the sociality, the excitement of the exhibition) with the practical (egg production). As a consequence, they directed their attention to good egg-producing races of foreign origin.

In the second half of the 30's, native chickens were once more associated with national pride. There was, for the first time, support offered by the government: The National Institute for Poultry Breeding (The Spelderholt), set up for the purpose of maintaining Dutch breeds of poultry.

Raising chickens during the mobilization, the war years, and the period directly following liberation will be discussed in Chapter Four. In spite of circumstances, this episode forms a highpoint for the Dutch Poultry Association, at least if we can measure this by the number of its members. Indeed, membership in this club witnessed a spectacular growth during the years of occupation. We can give three reasons for this. In the first place, it was connected to the injury of national pride. The relationship between 'Our Netherlands' and Dutch poultry had a special significance for an increasing number of chicken devotees. For them, the Dutch chicken became a symbol; it was a cultural treasure to be preserved in a relatively good-natured expression of nationalism. In the second place, for some of the members of the NHC, the 'Blut und Boden', 'blood and earth', feeling was the reason for joining. In this case, a feeling of superiority was the catalyst. In the third place, this growth had something to do with the attitude of many (but not all!) directors of small organizations, who can best be described as 'pliable'. During the years of occupation, it was possible to develop club activities only if one joined a coordinated Management Council. This was scarcely a point of discussion within most organizations. One reason for this was that there was a great need for relaxation; another reason was the contemporary notion that chicken sport and politics belonged to two separate worlds.

The following period covers the years between 1950 and 1980 and will be discussed in Chapter Five. One characteristic difference with the previous episodes is that from the 50's onwards, the distance between the different population groups became smaller and more diffuse. In this chapter, two sub-phases will be distinguished. The first phase was dominated by a struggle for power and control. There was, in particular, a considerable uproar on the national level. The result was that new national organizations were established. In the 50's and 60's, there was a rapid decrease in interest in the NHC and in Dutch poultry breeds. This had to do, among other things, with the image pro-
jected by Dutch poultry breeds and their owners one which was relatively traditional. There was a marked turn-about in the 70’s. This was not because the struggle for power had subsided, but was the result of the development of a broad interest in anything that had to do with ‘nature’. Chicken sport ‘rode on the wave’ of this development. There was another important cause for the revival of clubs devoted to Dutch chickens. The interest in unspoiled rural life and authenticity (‘grandmother’s time’) resulted in a renewed attention to ‘old’ breeds of chickens. This also explains the establishment of the Foundation for Rare Breeds of House Pets (SZH) in 1976, an organization which, similarly, was active in maintaining traditional Dutch chicken breeds.