Summary

Urbanisation and migration in the East Groningen peat area 1800-1940

The main question in this thesis is how urbanisation took place in the East Groningen peat area, an area of economic specialisation. The hypothesis at stake is the idea of a mutual influence of economic specialisation and the adoption of central functions in a settlement. Earlier some research has been done in other industrial specialisation areas, for example by Buursink. A specific industrial branch developed in a specific settlement due to comparative advantages. This industrial development was supported through new infrastructure. So new markets opened up for this specific industry. As a consequence of industrialisation, employment grew, which lead to an in-flow of migrants to this specific settlement. As a result of the in-flow of people, central functions emerged, at first to satisfy the needs in the specific settlement, later on this local function turned into a regional one, so the old regional capital was threatened by this new settlement. In the East-Groningen peat area developments took a different path. The regional capital, the city of Groningen, was never threatened by the process of urbanisation in the peat area. Furthermore, the pattern of central places developed before industrialisation took place. That is why this book covers the period before industrialisation as well as the two phases of industrialisation.

Before the peat area became part of the urban network system, some central places emerged, due to specific economic developments in the area. These developments did not connect the economy in the area to the (inter)national markets, but did increase prosperity and the purchasing power and made it possible for some settlements to develop certain central functions. Agriculture was restored after the depression of the 1820’s and flourished in the 1850’s. The same counts for the agriculture in the nearby area of “Oldambt”. So, more acres of levelled peat soils (dalgronden) were turned into soils suitable for agriculture. Apart from agriculture, sea-shipping developed from the turf-shipping and flourished in the first half of the nineteenth century. Around 1850 the captains were among individuals...
earning most in the centre of the shipping branch: Veendam. Although this kind of sea-shipping had only loose ties to the peat area itself, it had strong backward linkage effects into the area, especially to ship manufacturing. Like the shipping branch, the shipbuilding flourished in the 1850s. The ship-builders were among the individuals with the highest income in Hoogezand-Sappemeer. As a result of the boom in agriculture, shipping and the shipbuilding industry, three centres with central functions were rising in this period: Hoogezand-Sappemeer, Veendam and Winschoten. Especially Winschoten developed as a service centre, because of the residence of a couple of administrative bodies, for example two law-courts. These bodies benefited the central function. Winschoten had the most extensive markets in the entire area and had a strong position in the school system. This positive development was due to the economic hey-days in the surrounding villages. One of these surrounding villages was Oude Pekela, a centre of shipping and shipbuilding. The local situation made Oude Pekela a competitor for Winschoten. Nevertheless, the service function on the level of administrative bodies and other central institutions was better developed in Winschoten than in Oude Pekela. Furthermore, Winschoten had the advantage of being an urban centre in morphological sense. It was not a settlement along a canal without a real nucleus as Oude Pekela was. In the early nineteenth century this nucleus character was supported by the way the city extended during these years. Veendam was the centre of shipping and the rising income in this sector caused central functions to grow in this town. The central function was supported by a couple of schools for higher education and by a number of markets. Although Veendam had the disadvantage of being a settlement in the shape of ribbon development, there were some points in the ribbon from where a nucleus was growing. The main point was where some canals and the land road met. This node became the nucleus of Veendam. The central function of Hoogezand-Sappemeer was less developed than the one in Winschoten or in Veendam and was limited to the overrepresentation of the consumers-serving handicrafts. Hoogezand-Sappemeer had the shape of a ribbon development without points to tie a development of a centre in morphological sense to. The emphasis of service was in the eastern part of the ribbon (Sappemeer).

During the years between 1800 and 1855 each of these three centres made the step from a predominantly agrarian society to a more multifaceted society with urban properties. This did not result in the total disappearance of agriculture in these settlements, but the process of urbanisation began and agriculture became less and less important. During the 1850s the peat area turned its emigration surplus into a moderate immigration surplus, especially in these three centres. The booming shipping, shipbuilding and even more the development of central functions made these centres a magnet for migrants from inside and outside the area. Nevertheless the migration was regional centred around the regional capital Groningen. Migration to and from
Veendam and Winschoten without migrating to the city of Groningen first (stepwise migration), hardly existed. Only in the very early years of the nineteenth century Winschoten played a role in the (North-) German migration circuit. The direct connection to the national urban network was yet to come.

In the south-east of the area peat digging and colonisation were still going on as had been the case in the north during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Even more than the central functions in Veendam, Winschoten and Hoogezeand-Sappemeer, this peat digging attracted people from elsewhere. The cultivation and colonisation along the Stadskanaal went on during the entire nineteenth century. However, peat digging and colonisation was moved more and more to the very south-east of the peat area and to the adjacent province of Drenthe. The economy in the earlier inhabited part of Stadskanaal changed like it did in the north, where industrialisation began.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the sea-shipping and the manufacturing of wooden ships came to an end. At the same time industrialisation began. The main branch of industry was the production of potato flour. This industry was arising especially in the municipality of Veendam. In this town the people, that initiated the industry, had the highest level of income. Originally they came from agriculture or they had an economic background elsewhere, like shipping or other services. Aside from potato flour another so called agro-industry emerged: straw-board industry. Both potato flour and straw-board industry recruited employees from the local and regional labour market. Potato flour factories provided work for only a couple of months. It was a season-tied industry. The potato flour industry made agriculture specialise in potato culture. This implicated that employment on the farms was reduced to the short period of harvesting. This process of reducing labour on the farms became more intense during the agricultural depression in the 1880’s, when rationalisation and mechanisation pulled through. Working in the factories became an alternative way of making a living for agricultural labourers from the region, partly as a completion in the potato flour industry, partly as a total alternative in the straw-board industry. The working class was introduced more and more into “urban” labour, in order to earn a better income. The workers however, continued to be connected to agricultural labour. The number of full-time jobs in the industry did not rise so much that recruitment from elsewhere was necessary. That is why the peat area did not become a “pull” area for migrants, but turned into a “push” area after the 1850’s. Industry only moderated this tendency. So the loss of inhabitants by emigration was not as severe as it was in the clay area in the north of the province of Groningen.

The development of the potato flour and straw-board industry together with the improvement and the extension of infrastructure lead to the inclusion
of the peat area as a region of economic specialisation into the unifying national economy. The main centres in the area were connected to the national urban network directly. More and more the channels of migration changed into non-hierarchical ones, especially from and to Veendam and Winschoten. Migration from and to these cities to and from areas far away existed now, without the migration step in the city of Groningen. Of course, as the most important and nearest town in the region Groningen continued to be an important destination for (e)migrants from the peat area. The stepwise migration via Groningen however disappeared.

The rise of industrialisation supported partly the existing pattern of central places. In the first half of the nineteenth century each of the three central places in the peat area developed more or less in a similar way. When industrialisation started, this changed. In the municipality of Veendam there was a tendency of deglomeration due to the rise of the potato flour factories, because many of the jobs in this industry were far outside the urbanised heart of Veendam. So the outer villages within the municipality grew stronger than the centre itself. The growth of the central function of Veendam came to a stand-still. The spatial development of Veendam was in tune with this stagnation. During the hey-days of sea-shipping the main node of infrastructure became the nucleus of the urban centre development, but after this period new impulses were absent.

In Hoogezand-Sappemeer industry and population agglomerated along the Winschoterdiep at the cost of the outer agrarian villages, although the growing number of industrial jobs did not cause an immigration surplus in both municipalities (i.e. Hoogezand and Sappemeer). The industry was not dominated by potato flour factories. The movement of the industrial main point towards the west together with a better connection with Groningen frustrated the development of the central place function in Hoogezand-Sappemeer. In coherence there was no development of an urban nucleus in Hoogezand-Sappemeer. The ribbon only grew longer.

In Winschoten the development of a service centre pulled through. Only the agricultural depression of the 1880's proved to be less in favour of this development. Industry however did not play a role in the town itself. The adjacent village of Oude Pekela showed an industrial development with a strong emphasis on the straw-board industry. This implicated however that the economic basis of the village was narrowed to the production of straw-board. Oude Pekela lost its multifunctionality to Winschoten and entered into a dependent relationship to Winschoten. This was supported by the better connection through the tram-way line. Winschoten remained one of fastest growing municipalities in the entire area. Its spatial extension was in a concentric way. The railway line, the Omsnijdingskanaal and the road through St.Vitusholt together constructed a circle around the existing town and proved to be a border of the centre. The extension of the town was done by filling the empty spaces within the circle.
Stadskanaal was one of the fastest growing settlements in the area as well. The peat digging and the colonisation towards the south-east went on. The older parts witnessed an economic development similar to what happened in the north in the second half of the nineteenth century. There were some industries, but the number of jobs grew too slowly to meet the loss of jobs in agriculture and the increase of population. Around 1900 there were no central functions that did more than satisfy the local needs in Stadskanaal.

The pattern of urbanisation in the peat area continued to be characterised by three central places. One of those was around 1900 under pressure (Hoogezand-Sappemeer), one did not develop any further (Veendam) and the third, in the contrary, developed its central function strongly (Winschoten). Industry did not support the central functions in the industrial centres themselves. Only the centre of service Winschoten, where industrialisation hardly began, knew to benefit from the industrial development in its provision region.

Around 1900 the industrial development changed. The rise of the co-operative enterprise in the potato flour industry lead to further deglomeration. The co-operative factories were established outside the main centres even more than the earlier potato flour factories did before. The strong decrease of the number of potato flour factories in Veendam is a plain illustration for this development. Around 1900 shipbuilding transformed into a branch that produced for the (inter)national market. Far more important was the rise of new industrial specialisations. Some of them were a consequence of the existing agro-industrial industry, like the dextrin production mills and cardboard factories. Other new branches had no ties to the ‘old’ industries, like the knitwear factories, the ready-made clothing factories, the metal, bicycle and machinery production mills and the furniture factories. The number of jobs in these industries grew rapidly in the years between 1900 and 1930. The same counts for the potato flour and straw board industries, that kept their share in industrial employment at the same level.

This did not mean that migrants from elsewhere were pulled to the peat area. On the contrary, the emigration surplus for the entire peat area remained voluminous, but the distinction between the agrarian municipalities and the municipalities with an urbanised centre became clearer. Especially the agrarian municipalities kept on suffering from great losses of people by emigration. The same counted for industrial Oude Pekela. In municipalities with an urban centre the emigration surpluses did not disappear, but they were less voluminous than in the agrarian municipalities. The urban centres attracted people from the agrarian villages within the region.

This period of on-going industrialisation changed the pattern of central places. The position of Winschoten being the most important service centre in the peat area, was unchallenged and was at its peak around 1910. Some of the professions, that supported this central function, were among the highest
income groups. The central function now attracted industries too. The factory owners were new among the highest income groups in Winschoten as well. The developments in Winschoten and Veendam converged. In this period the new industries in Veendam were established near the centre of the town. In connection the central function flourished. The conversion went even further. In the nineteenth century Winschoten was extended as a concentric settlement. Winschoten kept this morphological character for the greater part. However, the extension of the town in this period partly had the shape of ribbon development, because of the lack of town planning. In Veendam the opposite happened. The morphological extension in the nineteenth century broke the ribbon development only partly. The plan “Tusschendiepen” for the extension of Veendam however was a town planning, that tied on to the few concentric developments that already had taken place and consolidated the concentric character of Veendam.

Veendam and Winschoten both had ties directly connected to areas far away. In the migration pattern to and from these cities Groningen no longer played a role in the long distance migration. Especially the institutions, that were connected to the central function like law courts and schools, caused this long distance migration. In the regional migration the city of Groningen kept playing a major role.

The pattern of urbanisation began to change. Winschoten and Veendam were the most important cities in the area. In Stadskanaal a central function emerged. In the Kanaalstreek the peat digging and the colonisation came to an end after 1900, slowly but surely. Here population had grown so much that central functions to satisfy the needs in the Kanaalstreek, could develop. Gradually these functions were established in Stadskanaal, although the central function of Stadskanaal was only rudimentary until 1940. Another important change was the decay of the central function in Hoogezaand-Sappemeer. The shifting of industry and the main point of population towards the west, in combination with the easy to reach city of Groningen, undermined the central function of Hoogezaand-Sappemeer. A distinguishing mark for this development was the spatial extension of the town. Hoogezaand-Sappemeer got the shape of a series of ribbon developments. An urban centre did not come into existence and was not necessary to accommodate a regional central function. The town became the industrial south-east of the conurbation of Groningen. Like Oude Pekela as a centre of industry became dependent on Winschoten, a similar situation developed in Hoogezaand-Sappemeer with regard to Groningen. In the migration circuit the town hardly had an independent position. The migration pattern emphasised the strong ties to the regional capital.

Urbanisation in the East Groningen peat area did not create big cities, only cities in the second rank and no regional capitals. The area became an industrial area and not an area with industrial cities. In the period before
industrialisation a pattern of three urban centres emerged, quite many in an area, where only 42,550 inhabitants lived in 1850. Because part of the factories were established outside these urban centres, industrialisation supported the existing pattern of central places only slightly. To give an answer to the main question of this thesis, urbanisation did take place in the peat area, but in many respects this process was different from the urbanisation process in other areas of economic specialisation.