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Het hierna volgende paper werd gepresenteerd op de vierde internationale conferentie voor sociale geschiedenis in Den Haag op 27 februari - 2 maart 2002. Het handelt over de vraag naar en het aanbod van bronnen over de geschiedenis van de sociale zekerheid in Nederland. De voornaamste conclusie is dat onderzoek in archieven het antwoord geeft op veel vragen, dat voor de beantwoording van heel wat vragen archieven zelfs onmisbaar zijn, maar dat archieven niet op alle vragen een antwoord geven. Nijpend is de problematiek van de persoonsdossiers, die nu krachtens de geldende wetten, wanneer de archiefvormer ze voor zijn taakuitoefening niet meer nodig heeft, omwille van de privacybescherming moeten worden vernietigd. Bewaring van deze dossiers of liever nog van een steekproef daaruit is echter noodzakelijk voor het onderzoek naar de sociale geschiedenis van de tweede helft van de twintigste eeuw. Bij ongewijzigd beleid zullen veel thans courante onderwerpen straks wegens het ontbreken van bronnenmateriaal niet meer kunnen worden onderzocht.

The supply and demand of sources on the history of social security in the Netherlands.

by
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Over two years ago a project on Social Security was launched by the Institute for the History of the Netherlands. It should result in an archive guide on the history of social security in the Netherlands for the period 1890-1967 which will be published on the web. You can find more information about this project on the institute's website at www.inghist.nl. In the meantime, we will limit ourselves in this paper to reporting that the archives of 329 organizations and individuals that are actively involved with this material on either a national or regional level have now been broadly researched. It was simply not feasible to research the local organizations one by one. The first inventory in 1899 revealed that there were already about 7,500 local welfare organizations in the Netherlands, a figure that later increased. The two historians carrying out this project, Ton Kappelhof and Vibeke Kingma, have therefore decided to write descriptions for each type of organization and to key in the main points about these organizations in a simple database. In 2002 a pilot version of the file as it now stands will be circulated among experts with a request for feedback. Thanks to extensive literature searches in books and journals and because we already had some idea of the visual material currently being held in archives and musea, we can now provide a survey of the sources that are available to the researcher. This paper will determine whether the demand for source material and what is actually on offer correspond with one another. At the same time we wish to alert the research community to a problem that not only occurs in the Netherlands, and which will effect research into the twentieth century more frequently in the near future. This has to do with the issue of public access to personal files and other information relating to private individuals.

This paper describes the situation in general terms although, as everyone knows, there will always be some exceptions to the rule. However, we will not dwell on that aspect now. Our aim has been to reveal patterns and establish links. We will also look more closely at the second half of the twentieth century as this period has not yet been as well researched as the preceding ones.

The demand for source material

A relatively new trend in social history concerns carrying research into the life stories of individuals or groups of individuals¹. Elsewhere, these are sometimes referred to as life cycles and living strategies. However, generally speaking, the interest in individuals' attitudes, behaviour and lifestyles has increased on the whole. This also applies to those drawing benefits. How did they manage during hard times, how often and when did people resort to charity, did they insure themselves and did they ever succeed in improving their situation permanently? Research spanning several generations has been carried out with regard to questions on the effect of poor relief and social security². It is not just the client in isolation who was important; placing him or her in the right context is just as interesting, and this involves, among others, the family, employer and club memberships. Reports compiled by employees of welfare organizations or local social services departments contain a wealth of data about a claimant's immediate environment.

Much has been published by lawyers, social scientists and historians on the social politics and policy concerning social security³. Researchers belonging to this group usually manage to locate the information they need in the archives that have been kept so far. This is facilitated by the current selection policy which dates from about 1990. Documents on how policy is drawn up and resolved are saved as a matter of priority, while material on how policy was implemented is not so highly rated and is therefore often destroyed.

The historiography of organizations that administered social security is actually much older, so monographs have already been published about a large number of these organizations. The earliest publications were often written by directors or other people who were in charge. These individuals were well informed, however they also wrote about 'their own' organizations and this involvement meant that they tended to be one-sided. Other publications were sometimes written on management's orders by anonymous copywriters or historians. It can also be said that the quality of these books left a lot to be desired. Many organizations' histories are inward-looking and the reader sees them through rose-coloured spectacles.

To date no history has yet been written about the important administrative organizations that implement the social security regulations such as the Social Security Bank (SVB), the Labour Councils, the numerous industrial insurance boards, the Communal Medical Service (GMD), and the Communal Administrative Office (GAK). The lack of any comprehensive studies on religious welfare organizations such as the diaconates of the protestant churches and the Catholic parochial councils for the poor is also quite striking. Indeed many local studies about these organizations have already been published, but this only increases the need for a general survey. In 1998 the first synthesis on the Dutch welfare set-up was published, followed two years later by an excellently laid-out four-volume work⁴

What archives have to offer

Which archives are available to the scientific researcher and what kind of information do they possess? The numerous archives belonging to organizations generally contain many documents, particularly minutes and lists of resolutions concerning the intended and pursued policy. However, the practice of writing documents in which the policy being pursued is outlined only dates from as recently as about 1960.

Private archives are exempt from Archive Law in the Netherlands, but as far back as the nineteenth century they were being lent out or donated to archives serving the general public. This is how the National Archive in The Hague (formerly the General State Archive) has come to possess an excellent collection of archives belonging to the nation's politicians, while specialist archives such as the International Information Centre and Archive of the Women's Movement (IIAV), the Catholic Documentation Centre (KDC) and the International Institute for Social History (IISG) are also well stocked in this respect. This collection is certainly not representative. Men, people in a higher income bracket, politicians and company directors are greatly over-represented.

It is the frequent exchange of letters that can be found in these archives that is especially important. Roundabout 1960 letters were replaced by the telephone, while after about 1990 emails relegated letter-writing to a quaint hobby. Highly personal documents such as diaries and memoirs are extremely interesting. Although on some occasions these documents are withheld by the next of kin or the extent to which they can be made public is restricted. This is how a revised version of the diaries of the catholic politician, J.E. de Quay (whose different posts included that of Prime Minister from 1959-1963) was put on display for the general public, but researchers have to wait until 1 January 2008 for Baron E.B.B.F. Wittert van Hoogland's memoirs to be made public⁵. People from more ordinary backgrounds tend to write less and indeed they or their next of kin are often inclined to throw their letters away. Mistakenly, they believe that these letters would not be of any value to historiography.

One type of document through which the person applying for welfare or the social security claimant can vent their feelings is complaints and appeals. The 1912 Poor Law gave someone claiming benefit the chance to appeal, should their application be rejected. Letters turned up in the local archive of a rural area of Zeeland which showed that claimants would not to be fobbed off with the decision made by the welfare board to reject their claim⁶. However, during the archive selection process, archivists tend to stick to the rule that says that once complaints involving the authorities have been dealt with they can then be destroyed.

The procedure before a court of law is a formalized form of appeal against the system. Ever since the first social security law (1901) there have been separate courts in the Netherlands which dealt with disputes about benefit allocations and the amount of benefit granted. However, here too the selection policy which is set down in legal terms works to the disadvantage of the researcher: only verdicts and statements are kept, the case files containing, for example, witness statements and the personal statements of those involved, are destroyed approximately 10 years after the case has been closed. We are under the impression that this rule is rigorously observed. The verdict contains the judge's comments and, even though he does cite the facts and various considerations, this information has nevertheless been significantly filtered down and is couched in legal jargon. Besides, we got the impression that these documents have scarcely been studied by historians on a large scale. The historian who does become bogged down in this material would be well advised to bear the context of this type of document in mind⁷.

Case files

And now we come to the case files. This source provides us with a front row seat in the interview room where the claimant and the Social Services employee meet each other. These files used to be compiled by people working for welfare organizations or by civil servants working for social services. The municipal archive of Amsterdam contains several large files, namely the case files of the council's Social Services department (and its predecessors), the Poor Relief Coordination Board (in Dutch: Armenraad; 1913-1964) and the Municipal Health Service (GG and GD). In the older archives one comes across many registers containing the names and personal details of people who were receiving benefit or who had been placed in an institution. It is our impression that these registers go as far as approximately 1925-1940 and that after this case records started to be filed, which were destroyed as a rule. However, there were also people working for welfare organizations who themselves systematically destroyed items relating to poor relief. There was no need for future generations to find out who had received benefit⁸.

Objections have also been raised about using this source. The reports written by social workers about so-called antisocial families provide more information about the thought processes of these employees and their value systems than about their clients. Whenever the welfare worker had to fill in a set form he would hardly ever bother to answer all the questions⁹.

Nowadays these types of case files are destroyed *en masse* after a relatively brief period - the usual length of time is roundabout the 10 year mark or slightly longer. On the one hand this is based on the Personal Data Protection Act which came into effect in 2001, on the other hand the archivists rightly wish to limit the volume of material that they take up in the archive. Files containing the case studies of individuals do tend to be enormous. The above mentioned

law is based on a European guideline and is therefore applicable to other member states of the European Union.

This problem was highlighted in 2001 through a note that was published on the websites of DIVA (the umbrella organization of the archives of the Netherlands) and the IISG. In September 2000 this subject was presented in the form of a paper at a conference in Mainz, Germany on 'the history of gender and social work'. An elaborated version of this paper will be published in 2001 in English and German. The problem has been placed before the board of the Royal Historical Society of the Netherlands [Koninklijke Nederlands Historisch Genootschap] and DIVA. They were of the opinion that the problem, which in 1997 had already been a theme of a workshop held by the city council of Amsterdam, should be placed on the agenda once again¹⁰. At present, more practice-oriented follow-up research is being carried out and the use of random sample files is being looked at as a possible solution. When this research is finished the matter will be presented once again in 2002 to representatives from both the archives and the historical scientific research community.

Other sources

When archives fail to provide answers to specific requests, then a number of other sources can act as a stopgap. Since the late nineteenth century newspapers have increasingly come to contain items sent in by members of the public as well as thought-provoking articles. Following World War II interviews have also been featured, and after about 1970 'ordinary' people were also increasingly allowed to express what they had been through. We are referring here to the local newspapers and magazines in particular which used to be far more commonplace than they are today. In those days a distribution area containing 10,000 inhabitants would be enough to make a newspaper profitable. These newspapers contain many news items and features about incidents that sometimes shed light upon how the poor lived. Advertisements for wonder-cures that helped cure all ailments thereby avoiding having to call in the doctor were rife in these types of magazines. Volunteers sometimes made extensive indexes which make it easy to carry out a quick search¹¹.

Local archive services often house large collections of amateur photographs. When they contain descriptions they certainly provide valuable information. When they are viewed, therefore, approximate information should be known at the very least about the: date, either the names of the key people in the photo or otherwise information on their background, where the photo was taken and what it portrayed. At a rough estimate, 80% to 90% of these amateur photos depict events such as holiday trips, jubileas and birthdays, in other words situations that deviate from the norm. The images of daily life are much more interesting; pictures of that which was considered 'ordinary' at the time and which now captures our attention. In fact, the Netherlands Centre for Popular Culture has recently launched a project to preserve photographs of daily life. The IISG began a Historical Image Archive on Migrants, in which photographs are collected from private collections of migrants who have come to the Netherlands during the last hundred years¹².

In 1987 a report was published about families in Rotterdam who had received one-off benefit payments in 1984 because their usual benefit was not enough to buy anything over and above the bare essentials. The research was based on 113 interviews with members of this group. In their introduction, the authors reported that this type of research is rare in the Netherlands¹³. During the 1980s the economic recession forced the social services to start implementing a more active policy. Directors of these services wanted to become better informed about the

people who 'were on their files'. The age when social services were there just to hand out benefits was over. The overriding view was that the clients should be 'directed towards the job market'. Consequently, it is not beyond the realms of possibility that there might be internal, unpublished reports dating from about 1980 concerning the behaviour of clients that would serve as an excellent source for historical research.

An archive rule that does not add up

According to the currently accepted archival theory in the Netherlands, each government transaction results in a written account in the form of archive records¹⁴. In archive management this is often expanded to the axiom that every transaction, including those that emanate from private organizations, results in a document or file. When viewed from a historical-scientific perspective this claim is extremely suspect. Many transactions have not been recorded in documents. Normative documents in particular such as laws and their commentaries often deviate from the situation in real life. A good example of this is the 1912 Poor Law that was already out of date by the time it took effect, but which nevertheless was to survive until 1965¹⁵. Even if it were possible to reconstruct the type of policy that people wished to implement, it would be much harder to track down the motives that inspired the administrators to set a different course. Often no notes at all were made about the motives. There was sometimes a huge discrepancy between words and deeds, or put differently between the policy as it was written down and what was done in practice. Similarly, the assumption that administrators always acted on the basis of policy can also be hotly disputed. Boards often acted irrationally, for example, because there were personal conflicts or because board members were ambivalent about new developments. Sometimes it seems as if things were done on the spur of the moment¹⁶. Researching the case files of clients can clarify matters and shed some light on what actually happened.

Conclusions

The request for source materials to do research on the history of social security during the period after 1890 cannot always be satisfied with what is available. This is due to the insufficiently client-oriented manner in which archivists perform their selection as well as the laws governing privacy. Personal files and other documentation linked to individuals, which nowadays have to be destroyed because of strict legal requirements, are vital for research into life-styles and living strategies in particular. Preserving these files, or to put it better a portion of them, is necessary for the social history of the twentieth century.

We have made a couple of suggestions for substitute sources, namely local newspapers and magazines, internal reports from the social services and photos taken by amateurs. The current archival theory now present in the Netherlands that holds that every government transaction results in a written record in the form of archive material, is in our view untenable and shows a poor understanding of the way in which the public authorities tend to function. As far as individuals are concerned the archive is actually much more of a record of the personality of the individual and the norms and values to which he or she adhered than a record of his or her activities.

Archives provide answers to many questions, with regard to answering quite a few questions they are even indispensable, but the researcher will not find the answers to all of his or her questions in an archive.

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sent by e-mail January the 14th 2002

¹ Jan Kok, "Transities en trajecten. De levensloopbenadering in de sociale geschiedenis", in: *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, 26 (2000), p. 309-329 see other literature. The HSN (Historische Steekproef Nederland) [Historical Random Sample of the Netherlands] carried out by the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam is also important. The project entitled "Dataverzameling leefstrategieën geboren Rotterdammers (1959-1980)" [Collection of data on the living strategies of people who were born and bred in Rotterdam], subsidised by the Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijke Onderzoek (NWO) is at the initial stage of implementation.

² Loo, L.F. van, Armelui, armoede en bedeling te Alkmaar, 1850-1914, [Translation: *Poor people, poverty and charity in Alkmaar, 1850-1914*] (Bergen (N.H.), [1986].

³ D.P. Rigter e.a., Tussen sociale wil en werkelijkheid. Een geschiedenis van het beleid van het ministerie van Sociale Zaken [*Between social will and reality. A history of the policy of the Ministry of Social Affairs*] (The Hague, 1995); Joop M. Roebroek and Miriam Hertogh, 'De beschavende invloed des tijds'. Twee eeuwen sociale politiek, verzorgingstaat en sociale zekerheid in Nederland [*The civilising influence of those days' Two centuries of social politics, state welfare and social security in the Netherlands*] (The Hague, 1998) and Miriam Hertogh, Geene wet, maar de Heer! De confessionele ordening van het Nederlandse socialezekerheidsstelsel (1870-1975) ['Not a law, but the Lord! The religious disposition of the Netherlands social security system (1870-1975)] (The Hague, 1998).

⁴ Gerwen, Jacques van, and Marco H.D. van Leeuwen (eds.) *Studies over zekerheidsarrangementen. Risico's, risicobestrijding en verzekeringen in Nederland vanaf de Middeleeuwen. [Studies on social security systems. Risks, avoiding risks and insurances in the Netherlands since Mediaeval times]* (Amsterdam, 1998) and Gerwen, Jacques van, and Marco H.D. van Leeuwen, *Zoeken naar zekerheid - Risico's, preventie, verzekeringen en andere zekerheidsregelingen in Nederland 1500-2000. [Looking for security - risks, prevention, insurances and other social security arrangements in the Netherlands 1500-2000]* (Verbond van Verzekeraars/NEHA The Hague/Amsterdam, 2000; Four volumes with register).

⁵ The archive of De Quay is deposited in the State Archive in North-Brabant. Also worth mentioning are the projects relating to personal documents like diaries of the Institute for the History of the Netherlands (see website project no. 98.3; being carried out by Dr J.P. de Valk) and the Erasmus University of Rotterdam (being carried out by Dr R.M. Dekker).

⁶ Albert L. Kort, *Geen cent te veel. Armoede en armenzorg op Zuid-Beveland, 1850-1940* (Hilversum, 2001), [Not a penny too much. Poverty and poor care on Zuid-Beveland, 1850-1940], p. 262.

⁷ P.J. Horsman, F.C.J. Ketelaar and T.H.P.M. Thomassen, *Context. Interpretatiekaders in de archivistiek Jaarboek 2000* [*Context. Frameworks for interpretation in the Archive Annual*] published by Stichting Archiefpublicaties [The Foundation for Archive Publications].

⁸ One example is the archive of the Poor Relief Borad (Diaconate) of the Dutch Reformed Church of Amsterdam.

⁹ Paul T. Kok, *Burgers in de bijstand. Werklozen en de ontwikkeling van de sociale zekerheid in Leeuwarden van 1880 tot 1930* (Franeker, 2000) [Citizens on welfare. Unemployed and the development of social security in Leeuwarden between 1880 and 1930], p. 180-182; see also p. 310-312 for reports that were filled in well.

¹⁰ Klep, Paul M.M. *Steekproeven uit massale archiefbestanden ter wille van het historisch belang* (The Hague, 1997).

¹¹ The archive of the town of Breda owns a keyword index for the Bredasche Courant [Breda Chronicle] covering the period 1793-1900.

¹² For more information about this go to the IISG website and click on 'collections'.

¹³ Godfried Engbersen, Romke van der Veen and Kees Schuyt, *Moderne armoede. Overleven op het social minimum. Een onderzoek onder 120 Rotterdamse huishoudens* [*Modern poverty. Surviving on the social minimum. A research study of 120 families in Rotterdam*] (Leiden/Antwerpen, 1987); they do not mention where the interviews are stored or if they can be looked at by third parties.

¹⁴ *Handelend optreden. Overheidshandelen: modellen, onderzoeksmethoden en toepassingen* (Project Invoering Verkorting Overbrengingstermijn, The Hague, 1994), p. 15-16. Since 1990 this theory has also been taught in the archive schools to up-and-coming archivists.

¹⁵ among others: J. de Vries, "De periode van 1912 tot 1940", in: *Honderd Jaar Armenwet* [One Hundred Years of Poor Relief] (Alphen aan den Rijn, 1955) p. 150-190.

¹⁶ Kok, *Burgers in de bijstand*, p. 377; Kort, *Geen cent te veel*, p. 129-134.