

Congresspaper *Sources of local charity and social work in the Netherlands*

for the congress on Gender and Social Work, Sankt Gallen

19 October 2002

Vibeke Kingma

Institute of Netherlands History. The Hague

Since June 2000, my colleague Ton Kappelhof and I have been working on a project on social security in the Netherlands in the twentieth century. The project was initiated by the Institute of Netherlands History. The main aim of this Institute is to make source material more easily available for researchers, and it has been doing so for the past 100 years. Ton Kappelhof works for the Institute as a researcher and I work as a junior researcher specifically for this project. Hopefully our research will result in an electronic book describing collections containing sources for social work, social security and poor relief in the Netherlands. This reference book will be published on the website of our institute. Ton Kappelhof has spoken on the conference of the Gender and Social Work network last year and explained to you how the project is organised and so on. His paper is included in the book that was presented yesterday, so I will not repeat everything he said. This time, I would like to speak to you about another part of our project; the municipal sources for social work and poor relief, and the problems and possibilities these sources offer for the researcher.

When we began working on the social security project, we decided at first to include only the archives of institutions that worked on a provincial or a national level. The local and district archives were not added to the project, because the number of local organisations concerned with welfare and poor relief in the Netherlands was very high. The amount of source material these institutions have left behind is incredible and we would never have been able to complete our reference book in three years, had we wanted to include it all. After a while however, we discovered that most of the material we found concentrated on the policies of social work and social security. Local authorities, the churches and private charity put these policies into effect. They were directly responsible for poor relief, social work and unemployment benefit in particular. Ignoring the municipal archives would lead to a sourcebook exclusively directed towards policy. Moreover, the municipalities were the places where those offering poor relief came into direct contact with their beneficiaries. It is only in these local archives that a researcher can find some clues about what the lives of the poor were like as seen through their own eyes. Research on what beneficiaries of welfare organisations actually thought of the way they were treated has won increasing popularity in recent years, which makes the municipal collections ever more valuable. We decided to extend the project and develop some finding aids for researchers studying towns, regions and villages. Currently we are working on two devices. The first is a typology of the kind of material a researcher will be able to find in the archives of a city, a provincial town or a village. We started working on this only very recently, so I cannot tell you very much about it yet. Secondly, we decided to construct a database of local welfare institutions. This latter project, installing a database and some of our findings, are what I would like to discuss with you today.

The database is based on directories of poor relief organisations. These directories mention all Dutch organisations and charities giving poor relief. The organisations were listed thematically or geographically. The first directory for local poor relief in the Netherlands was

published in 1899. It was published because the authors believed at the time that local welfare was badly organised and that people who needed poor relief would have a hard time finding the institutions that were meant to help them. However, according to the introductory text to the first edition, the authors note that their most important aim was to point individual benefactors in the right direction. Instead of giving alms, they could now send the poor to the appropriate institutions and give their donations to these organisations. The authors felt that by rationalising poor relief in this manner, the poor would be much better off since they would not have to depend anymore on the kindness of rich individuals. In the same introduction, the authors complain that the guide is not complete: religious institutions were not very forthcoming with information, since many of them regarded the book as a form of unwanted interference. Even so, the religious institutions still take up a considerable part of the directory. It might be incomplete, but it is certainly extensive: it counts almost seven thousand fivehundred foundations, funding bodies and organisations. This is particularly more astonishing if one remembers that at the turn of the 19th century, there were only five million inhabitants living in the Netherlands.

Since the first directory was very successful, updated versions were published in the thirties and forties of the twentieth century. The most recent guide appeared in 1956. After that, only local guidebooks, for example for Amsterdam and The Hague, were published. In the database, the data of the oldest and the newest national guide, that is 1899 and 1956, have been entered. For some reason these two guides are much more extensive and complete than those published in the thirties and forties.

In both directories the name, place and province of every institution the editors could find are given. Furthermore, there is information on what kind of help the organisations gave; did they provide money, goods, medical care or counselling? And for whom did they provide it? Many poor relief organisations catered for special groups, for example for the elderly, widows, orphans, the unemployed and invalids. In the 1899 guide, the obligations which the poor had to fulfil before the institutions were prepared to help them are mentioned as well. Some organisations obliged their clients to visit the church on a regularly basis, to send their children to school or to have their children vaccinated against smallpox.

Social work is not mentioned as a separate category in the guide of 1899. This makes sense, since it had not yet developed into a separate profession in the Netherlands. Usually, their tasks were incorporated in general welfare institutions. It is possible however, to differentiate between institutions which exclusively concentrated on financial aid and others whom also provided immaterial aid. Sometimes 'giving advice' is mentioned, but more often the difference is seen in whether or not the members of the welfare institutions paid housevisits. House calls were part of new methods of poor relief, which emerged at the end of the nineteenth century.

In this period, new theories were developed on the causes of poverty. It was not seen anymore as a state of being which society would just have to accept, but as a stage which one could outgrow, given the right support and education. Just giving money and goods was not seen anymore as a proper way to help people fight their poverty. Social work was often regarded at this time as a method to introduce people to a more civilised way of living. There was a strong feeling that the poor needed to be educated to learn the rules of what was considered as civilised society. If they could apply these rules, their standard of living would rise accordingly. To obtain this result, counselling and sanctioning was needed. 'Modern' welfare institutions checked, before giving an allowance, for example that parents stopped alcohol abuse and that their children were fed and dressed properly. All these things are noted in

occasionally the directory of 1899, but house calls are the clue that most often occurs. Often it is mentioned who paid these visits and here a gender aspect comes in. In cities and towns especially, the private organisations employed female volunteers, while the religious and civil institutions mostly opted for men. If it was a religious organisation it was often a priest who paid the visit at home. Civil institutions on the other hand, very often had a clerk or male boardmembers who would make house calls. In villages, institutions were very modestly organised. Board members would know all the poor personally and didn't feel a need to do visit them. We know from other sources that there were poor relief organisations run by women in villages as well. For example those who distributed food to women who had given birth. This information can unfortunately not be found in the poor relief directories. Only in the case of housecalls, it is mentioned who made them. Background information on other volunteers, like those working in soup kitchens whom were very often women, is again not given. So there is some information on the role of women in these directories, but it is limited.

The 1956 guide is more systematic and more complete than the 1899 guide, but, paradoxically, it gives less information on certain subjects. Institutions specialised in social work are categorised as a separate group, so they can easily be found. There are several organisations however, whom might still be involved in social work but of whom it is not noted. One reason is because their most important task was to give financial aid. For the 1899 directory, the organisation received an open questionnaire and this makes the entries in the guidebook very diverse, but also very informative, as the entries show what the organisations themselves actually thought was most important to tell. The 1956 directory is set up as a matrix with columns and codes and there is simply no space left for the organisations to say anything about for example the methods they used.

It is also more difficult to find specific references to women in this latter guide. Visits are not mentioned anymore. One can assume that some aspects of poor relief, such as helping housewives with domestic work, were carried out by women, but this is not mentioned.

Difficulties aside, why is this database important? In the first place, it is meant as an aid for researchers who want to know which organisation existed in a specific town, village or province. In the database the researcher can find information on what kind of support these institutions used to give, how much they would give and to whom. For research in the archives, it is valuable to know if an organisation existed already in 1899 and if it continued its work in 1956. An organisation existing that long, and many did, is bound to have left some material behind, so it is an important clue for researchers who are considering research in the local archives.

Furthermore, the database can be used to make analyses on poor relief in the Netherlands as a whole and in the various provinces of the Netherlands. Since the database is not yet complete for 1956, I will give you a small example based on the data for Noord-Holland, a province that lies in the north-western part of the Netherlands and Amsterdam is it's biggest city. The data for this province have been completely entered. One issue that can be researched for this database is the form providing material aid to giving immaterial aid. An interesting paradox is that when reading literature on the history of poor relief and social security, one finds that poor relief funded by private charity and the church is generally thought to have declined more and more in favour of social security, provided by the state. If one looks however at the number of institutions in 1899 and compares them to 1956, it is striking that the number of religious and private institutions has risen. 332 religious institutions are mentioned for Noord-Holland in 1899, while in 1956 there are 585 references. Moreover, in 1899 there were 345 private institutions, as opposed to 417 in 1956. The number of civil organisations on the other

hand, declined. In 1899 there were 146 civil organisations concerned with poor relief, while in 1956 there were 106. Especially in the larger cities of Noord-Holland such as Amsterdam and Haarlem, the number of private organisations has grown exceptionally. From other sources we know, however, that financially, poor relief by the local government did become much more important than financial aid by religious and private charity. From the database it can be learned that many new organisations gave immaterial support instead of financial aid. The database is vital in proving that private initiative and religious charity didn't gradually fade away when social security took over. They specialised instead in other areas of welfare, such as social work.

Hopefully, when more data have been entered, more analyses can be made, for example about the way the elderly were supported, or about the state's role in poor relief. It would be interesting to know if poor relief directories or reference books existed in other European countries and if it would be possible to compare them. From essays published in the Dutch magazine of poor relief dating from around 1900, we know that the authors of the 1899 directory travelled extensively in Europe to find out about poor relief in other countries. In one article they mention a directory like this that was published at the time in Germany. It could be very useful to compare them and see if there are essential differences in the way charity and poor relief was organised in different countries and to find out if how they influenced each other. So I end with a question to everyone present. Do you know if any statistical material on poor relief, social security and social work exists in your county? And do you have any plans to make it available by data-entry, or is it available already? If we could find more material, it could be an interesting addition to the matrices we talked about earlier and we could maybe define more easily exactly how social work developed as a profession in Europe.