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Modelling residential mobility; a review of recent trends in research

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Abstract. Recent studies add to the large body of literature on residential mobility by presenting a fresh view of the residential mobility process. At the micro level, new research sheds light on the joint decision-making by members of a household regarding a residential move, and clarifies the link between place of residence and place of work. There are also many new studies on finding an alternative dwelling if the most preferred house is unavailable. Household relocation is strongly embedded in housing market conditions at the local and national level. Recent studies analyse variations in the mobility process over space and time.

Key words: housing bundle, housing career, housing market, joint decision-making, life course, residential mobility, turnover rate

1. Introduction

The study of residential mobility has a long tradition: geographers, sociologists, economists and psychologists have contributed extensively to the literature on the residential mobility process and its relationship to changes in the urban fabric. The most frequently cited work is the classic by Rossi (1955), "Why families move: a study in the social psychology of urban residential mobility". In the preface to the second edition of this book, Clark (1980) examines how it has influenced the direction that research has taken since then. Rossi (1955) shifted the focus to the individual household and its motivation to look for another dwelling. Up till then research had mainly dealt with aggregate patterns of mobility and origin-destination patterns. Rossi also placed the process of residential mobility in the context of housing studies, a link now taken for granted but quite unusual at the time.

Another often cited work that focuses on the household's decision to move is the article by Brown and Moore (1970). They divide the mobility process into two stages. In the first stage, people become dissatisfied with their present housing situation, as changes occur in the household environment or its composition. Stress arises in the present housing situation and

eventually leads the household to stage two: the search for a vacancy in the housing stock and the decision either to relocate or to stay in the present dwelling. The authors also consider a situation in which the household, after the search process, decides not to move because no better alternative has been found. The occupants then either adjust their needs or restructure the present dwelling so that it better satisfies those needs.

The strong emphasis on the household level, so evident in the classic studies by Rossi (1955) and Brown and Moore (1970), still pervades the current literature on this topic. Most of the literature on residential mobility concerns how households are matched to houses. There is extensive information on the household attributes, the household life course, and the educational and job career which determine the propensity to move and the choice of a dwelling (for reviews, see Clark and Dieleman, 1996; Dieleman and Mulder, 2001; Strassman, 2001). The major elements of the "housing bundle" – the attributes of dwellings households consider when deciding whether to move or which dwelling to choose – are also well researched (Molin et al., 1996). Time and again, the size, type, price, and tenure of the dwelling and its location with respect to workplaces and services are found to be critical to the decision process. Actual choice ("revealed preference") and stated preference are two approaches that have been developed to analyse the residential mobility process at the micro level (Mulder, 1996).

Strong regularities have been identified in the process of residential mobility, and these seem to prevail in divergent housing market contexts in the Western world, such as the United States (a relatively free market) and Northwest Europe (where till recently the markets were more regulated) (cf. Clark and Dieleman, 1996). Three well-documented regularities are particularly prevalent. (i) There is a strong correlation between the rate of mobility and the stage in the life cycle of a person. In all developed societies, young adults between the ages of 20 and 35 are by far the most mobile segments of the population. (ii) There is a strong correlation between the rate of residential mobility and the size and tenure of the present dwelling. Households in relatively large units are less mobile – probably because there is no "room stress" – than households in smaller dwellings, and owner-occupiers have a much lower mobility rate than renters. And (iii) there are clear interrelationships between the housing career of a person or household and events in other domains of the life course, such as family formation and dissolution, and the educational and job career (Mulder and Hooimeijer, 1999).

The body of literature on residential mobility keeps growing. New case studies regularly appear, elucidating certain sectors of the housing market (Kemp and Keoghan, 2001), or the situation in certain countries (Mandic, 2001). In depth studies examining the mobility behaviour of particular house-

hold types include studies of young adults leaving the parental home (Clark and Mulder, 2000; Mulder and Clark, 2000), senior citizens (Warnes, 1993; Fokkema, 1996) and ethnic minorities (Bonvalet et al., 1995; Bolt, 2001). And there is a constant flow of new theoretical notions and empirically tested models (Lu, 1998; Skaburskis, 1999; Lee et al., 2000; Nordvik, 2001, to give just a few examples). The research effort keeps adding more detail to the body of knowledge, often reconfirming the relationships and regularities mentioned above.

With so much known about residential mobility, one might wonder about the need for more research. Nonetheless, some recent studies offer a fresh view of the mobility process. They also highlight aspects of mobility which are little known and merit further attention. This review article will list and comment on some of these new approaches. Rather than reviewing all new publications on the mobility process, it will single out those which seem to break new ground.

The review will zoom in on studies with a modelling orientation to the process of residential mobility. And that selection will be narrowed down even further to include mainly Dutch, European and North American contributions. The emerging literature on residential relocation in developing countries, or rather the lack of residential mobility in the self-help settlements in such countries, is beyond the scope of this review (Gilbert, 1999; Gilbert and Crankshaw, 1999; Sinai, 2001).

As Strassman (2001) recently argued, European and North American researchers take quite different approaches when analysing the process of residential mobility. European researchers emphaze residential mobility at the micro (i.e., household) level and stress the complexity of the mobility process. Mobility models often treat the supply of housing as an exogenous factor, purportedly because complex government interventions in land use and in finance, construction and pricing of housing constrain the supply of (new) housing (Strassman, 2001). In the United States, dwellings can be designed, financed, built, sold and rented with less government control. This is reflected in the way many North American researchers approach the process of residential mobility. They give primacy to market forces and economic modelling; supply-side factors are often endogenous to the models. Strassmann cites the book by DiPasquale and Wheaton (1996) as a good example of a North American approach to modelling the housing market. But an alternative approach has been taken by scholars who emphasize the social aspects of residential mobility (Kingsley and Turner, 1993). This divergence in the approach to residential mobility also cuts across the studies included in this review.

The literature reviewed here is organized according to a diagram of residential relocation depicting its embeddedness at three geographical scales

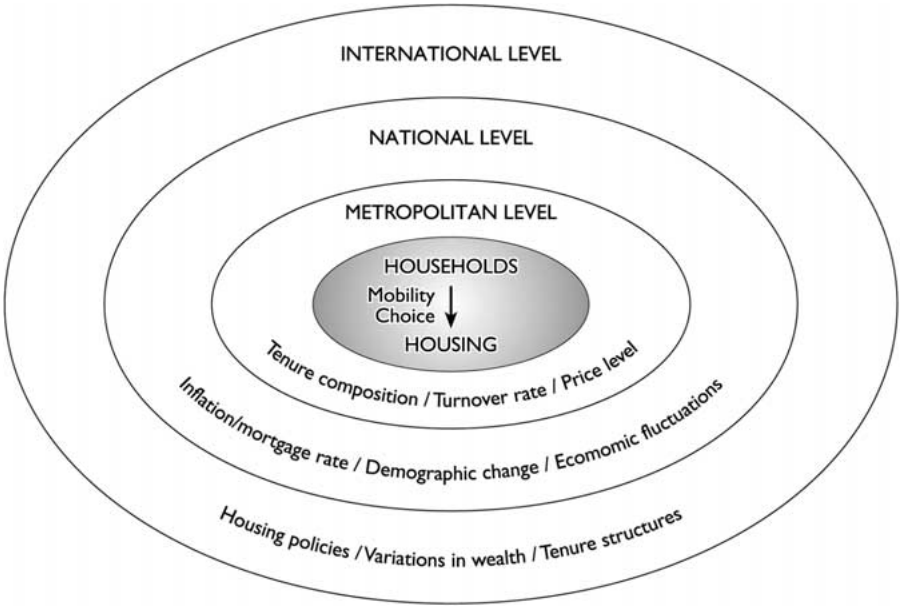

Figure 1. Residential relocation and its embeddedness in three geographical scales.

(Figure 1) (Dieleman et al., 2000). In that light, the body of literature on residential relocation fits into a profile made up of geographical layers. The core consists of studies which disentangle mobility behaviour, tenure choice, and housing preferences at the micro level. This literature identifies who is likely to move and what their housing choice is likely to be. These studies build on the approach originally developed by Rossi and Brown and Moore, discussed above.

Many scholars recognize that the matching of households and dwellings is not determined solely by household attributes like age, income, and household composition or by the bundle of housing services that each dwelling represents. The matching of households and dwellings at the micro level is embedded in circumstances on at least three geographical scales: (i) the particular (metropolitan) housing market a household lives in; (ii) the national economic and demographic circumstances as these develop and fluctuate over time; and (iii) differences in housing policies, wealth, and tenure structures – differences that are quite substantial between countries – which shape the residential mobility process. Figure 1 identifies the circumstances which seem most important for molding the mobility process at that scale. At the metropolitan level, these are the tenure composition, the price level, and the turnover rate of the housing stock (cf. Dieleman et al., 2000). Studies at the national level have documented the importance of the rates of inflation and

mortgage interest, demographic change, and economic fluctuations for the process of mobility and tenure choice (c.f. Myers, 1999). And differences in residential relocation at the international level can be mainly related, as said, to differences in housing policies, wealth levels and tenure structure (c.f. Strassman, 1991).

This article starts with a review of selected studies at the micro level. It then progresses from the metropolitan and national to the international scale.

2. Household decision-making

As stated earlier, most of the literature on residential mobility deals with the household level. The studies focus on circumstances and events at that level which cause a household to decide to move and to choose a particular new dwelling. This section revolves around three elements of the mobility process that have been given systematic attention in recent research. One is the observed relationship between changing jobs and changing houses. The second is the observation that the decision-making frequently involves more than one individual. In multi-person households, two or more persons take part in the decision-making. The third element is the observation that many households cannot find or afford the dwelling of their first choice and have to find an acceptable alternative. Authors writing on that aspect focus on the determinants of the choice to accept that less preferred dwelling. These three topics are discussed in turn below.

It is recognized that the event of moving from one dwelling to another is part and parcel of the development of one's life course in the various domains of life. The move from one dwelling to another is not an isolated event. Rather, it is linked to events in the development of one's family life and in one's educational and work career. So a move to another dwelling is often caused by and timed in accordance with events such as marriage, birth of children, divorce, death of a partner, entering or finishing stages in one's education, and income changes. All these links are well researched and have been reported in the literature (Wagner and Mulder, 2000). Of course, there is also a link between the location of the home and that of the workplace. The literature on bid rent theory and intra-urban location theory focuses on this link (for some new perspectives see Phe and Wakely, 2000; Waddell, 2000). Research has shown that changing jobs over a long distance naturally necessitates a residential move (Clark and Dieleman, 1996). But for shorter residential moves – i.e. within one housing/labour market area – it is generally supposed that the residential location can be chosen without reference to the location of the job, at least if the commuting distance is not too large. Local

residential moves are therefore categorized as "partial" displacement moves; they involve a change in the place of residence, not in the workplace.

Building upon that train of thought, Clark and Davies Withers (1999) recently presented new evidence for the United States that a job change in the local housing/labour market region often acts as a trigger for a residential move. They found job changes at the local level to be much more influential on residential moves than often believed. A household that had made a job change turned out to be 2.4 times more likely to move than a household that did not make such a change. When this relationship is broken down by type of household, the well-known regularities in the propensity to move surface again. Owners are less likely to change residence in conjunction with a job change than renters; younger households change residence more frequently than older households; and a dual-earner household is more closely bound to the place of residence than a single-income household, which reacts more readily to a job change by making a residential move.

Van Ommeren et al. (1999; see also Van Ommeren, 1996) and Van der Vlist (2001) investigate some of the interactions between job mobility and residential mobility by means of search theory, applying a search model to data for the Netherlands to disentangle the relationships. Particular attention is devoted to how commuting costs (in terms of distance and time) affect the propensity to change jobs or move house. Van Ommeren's dissertation (1996) reports that long commutes reduce both the expected duration (in years) of working at the present job and living at the present residence. The dissertation of Van der Vlist (2001) demonstrates that long commutes increase job mobility but have less influence on the propensity of a residential move. Indeed, this is logical: not only is residential relocation relatively costly, but it is also difficult because of the imperfection of the housing market (see also Nordvik, 2001). Both dissertations draw special attention to the predicament faced by dual-earner households. It may be hard for them to adjust their residence and come out with reasonable commuting distances. Dual-earner households turn out to refuse job offers more frequently than one-earner households. This is probably because they are more closely bound to the place of residence, as Clark and Davies Withers (1999) have shown for the United States.

The second focal point in research at the micro level is the joint decision-making by the members of a household regarding a residential move. Molin (1999) gives an extensive review of some models which might be used to disentangle the way residential group preferences are formed. That work is an important resource for researchers interested in the advantages and pitfalls of the various models. Molin (1999) argues that when households consisting of two or more persons are asked to determine jointly between the partners

and/or the children what kind of housing situation they prefer, they will use at least two higher-order constructs to facilitate the process of formulating their joint preference. So instead of considering all the attributes of the bundle of housing services separately, households will combine these attributes into two groups. One construct refers to the dwelling with all its attributes, while the other refers to the location, the neighbourhood characteristics, and the accessibility to workplaces, schools, and other services. The author analyses this approach empirically for a sample of families with children in the Netherlands. In many families, the members apparently arrived at group preferences by seeking consensus and exchanging opinions. When children participate in the group task of formulating a residential preference, families tend to attach more importance to the number of bedrooms, the size of the children's bedrooms, the monthly costs, and – in the case of the locational construct – to the mother's and children's travel times. The study illustrates how complicated the formulation of residential preferences for families really is. So many aspects of the dwelling and its location are considered, and the various members of the family assign different weight to these aspects. Yet the well-known attributes of dwellings and their location, which play a dominant role in the housing choice of individuals and households, resurface in the empirical tests of the models. The key elements of the dwelling construct are the type of dwelling, the number of rooms, monthly costs, and tenure. And the type of neighbourhood, the frequency of public transport, and travel time to activity places other than the residence itself are important in the locational construct.

The above work by Molin (1999) is part of a wider research programme on human preferences and choices with respect to geographical entities. That programme, which is headed by Timmermans (cf. Timmermans et al., 1994), is closely linked to research in the field of psychology. For scholars interested in choices, preferences, and satisfaction of persons and households with respect to their residence, it is therefore critical to know what bearing recent theories in psychology have on research in the domain of housing. Gärling and Friman (2001) deal with precisely this theme. They argue that many researchers studying residential mobility from a vantage point outside the field of psychology are not fully up to date on recent theories of behaviour. They review developments in psychology on the themes of choice and satisfaction and apply these to the domain of residential choice, preference, and satisfaction.

The themes addressed by Gärling and Friman (2001) correspond to the stages in the process of residential mobility as proposed by Brown and Moore (1970, see above). However, on the basis of psychological decision theory, they argue that the decision to move, search for and choose an alternative

dwelling should be considered integral parts of a single process rather than separate stages. Gärling and Friman also consider the psychological side of the way households evaluate and choose among different housing alternatives. For example, when weighing alternative dwellings, people may be expected to simplify the task by disregarding housing attributes which are less important. The section on *constrained* residential choice merits special attention. The authors reiterate that housing preferences repeatedly fail to show high correlations with actual housing choices. In large part, this is likely to reflect constraints imposed by the housing market: some preferred housing alternatives may be unavailable or in short supply. Households then move into alternative, less-preferred dwellings with which they often become quite satisfied, as demonstrated by follow-up interviews some 6 to 12 months after the move. This may be attributed partly to an adaptation/adjustment process that leads to increased satisfaction with a less preferred housing choice. Conceivably, the inability to accurately predict future satisfaction with a dwelling may play a role in this process.

While Gärling and Friman (2001) dwell on the psychological aspects of the choice of a dwelling which is not the most preferred house, other studies have analysed who is most likely to make such choices (Goetgeluk, 1997; Hooimeijer and Oskamp, 1999; Floor et al., 1996). Goetgeluk (1997) argues that the willingness to substitute the most preferred dwelling for a less-preferred alternative is partly determined by the urgency of the move from one housing situation to another. For example, events in other domains of life such as entering higher education, job change, marriage, or divorce make a move very urgent. If the desire to move is based on the preference for a better dwelling, the move can easily be delayed till a vacancy in the preferred segment of the market occurs. Goetgeluk (1997) but also Hooimeijer and Oskamp (1999) demonstrate empirically for some regions in the Netherlands that the willingness to substitute a preferred dwelling for a less-preferred one is related to the urgency of a move as well as to the present housing situation. Goetgeluk (1997) and Floor et al. (1996) apply the Decision Plan Net method to disentagle the willingness of households to substitute some *attributes* of their preferred housing alternative. Are households more prepared to make do with a smaller dwelling than they really want if the preferred unit is not readily available? Or are they willing to pay more to obtain a larger house at a higher price than they had in mind? There is some evidence that households are more likely to adjust the price they have to pay for the new situation than to make concessions on the tenure or type of house they prefer. Hooimeijer and Oskamp (1999) feel that micro-simulation techniques are especially appropriate to evaluate how the housing choice of persons and households is related to the circumstances under which the decision

is made, which naturally constrain choice. Indeed, this approach has been gaining popularity in housing research. For example, Bramley (1999) uses a simulation model to study how the housing market in the United Kingdom at the local and regional level responds to planning regimes which regulate and limit the supply of land for new housing construction. This topic leads us to the next section, which highlights the interaction of the residential mobility process with the varying circumstances at the local and national level.

3. Residential relocation and housing markets

As discussed above, relocation at the household level is closely tied to conditions in the local housing market (Figure 1) because most moves are made over very short distances (Clark and Dieleman, 1996). Therefore, the conditions in local markets limit or widen the set of choices that households have when they initiate their housing search. The characteristics of local housing markets vary considerably within any one country and thereby shape the residential mobility process differently from place to place (Pawson and Bramley, 2000).

Persons and households also react to economic, demographic, and political circumstances, as these vary over time at the national level. Numerous factors – variations in the level of new construction, mortgage interest rates, taxes and tax relief on housing investments and costs, changes in demographic structure etc. – all have repercussions on residential mobility. These factors influence how persons and households make choices – for instance, between renting and owning (Clark and Dieleman, 1996; Myers, 1999). Current research on the mobility process, including studies on the matching of households and housing at the micro level, often build models using indicators about regional variations in circumstances and indicators of variations over time. In one of the articles discussed above, Lu (1998) analyses moving behaviour using the four census regions of the United States as an indicator of regional variation. He finds significant regional differences in the prospensity to move. Lee et al. (2000) introduce local price variations in their model of choice for the United States and find significant local effects on choice. In a study of nest leavers in the United States, Clark and Mulder (2000) introduce measures of city size, region and period. They find that all three have a significant influence on the prospensity of those who leave their parents' home to either rent or buy a dwelling.

Recent research has examined two aspects of the link between residential relocation and conditions in local and national housing markets. It is worth taking a closer look at those aspects here. One is the explanation of variations between locations in turnover rates and house prices and how these variations

interact with the mobility process at the micro level. The second aspect is that of the development of housing careers of persons and households over time. These two issues are discussed in turn in the following paragraph.

Turnover rates and prices vary over space and time. Moreover turnover rates and prices may be expected to have a strong influence on mobility and housing choice. Therefore it is important to understand the mechanisms by which they influence the residential relocation process. Surprisingly, the literature on turnover rates in local housing markets is quite limited (Moore and Clark, 1990). In the United States, for example, there is a wide geographical differentiation among metropolitan housing markets, with turnover rates ranging from 20 per cent or more in the South to 10 per cent or less in the Northwest (Strassmann, 2000; Dieleman et al., 2000). DiPasquale and Wheaton (1996), who also observe these differences, argue that the growth in population and in the local economy drive high turnover rates in the stock. Dieleman et al. (2000) substantiate this argument for the United States. They point out that the high rates of new construction and a high proportion of young people in the local housing market help create high turnover rates in the local housing stock. Strassmann (2000) explains the varying turnover in the metropolitan housing markets in the United States in terms of the degree of policy intervention in housing, an argument he used previously for an international comparison of mobility levels (Strassmann, 1991). But he concludes that it is most likely the variation in economic and demographic growth between cities that leads to differences in turnover rates. Strassmann (2000) also tries to relate the level of turnover in the housing stock in cities to affordability and price levels in cities, as DiPasquale and Wheaton do (1996).

Of course, high or low turnover rates in the local housing stock will increase or reduce the opportunities of households to make an adjustment move. Dieleman et al. (2000) show that on average more than 75 per cent of all turnover in local housing stocks is generated in the rented sector. This is in line with the general tendency for mobility rates to be higher in rental housing than in owner-occupied dwellings. So those living in the rental sector are particularly influenced by the variations in turnover rate, as these can be observed across the metropolitan areas in the United States. Yet these authors also show that high or low turnover rates penetrate all sectors of a local housing market and therefore influence the adjustment process of households in both the rental and the owner-occupied sector. Adjustment moves within renting and owning and between these sectors are high in cities with high turnover rates and vice versa.

Households living in different housing markets have quite different opportunities regarding the choice of another dwelling because rates of turnover in the stock vary widely. Furthermore, the house prices also differ

quite substantially from place to place (Abraham and Hendershott, 1996; Meen, 1996, 1998; DiPasquale and Wheaton, 1996). As with turnover rates in the housing stock, there are clear geographical patterns in house prices across local housing markets which in the United Kingdom seem to persist over fairly long periods (Meen, 1998). Dieleman et al. (2000) find three clusters of metropolitan regions in the United States, each with their own pattern of house price development. One group of six large cities on the east and west coasts have high and strongly fluctuating house prices. The other two groups represent a broad geographical division of the United States. Cities in the Northeast and Northwest had fairly low price levels in 1985 with a gradual rise in the prices after this date. Metropolitan regions in the Midwest and South had also moderate house prices in 1985 with a slow decline in prices over the years observed. The research findings in the various publications present a long list of possible explanations for the fluctuations in house prices over space and time. House prices seem to be related to the size of cities, the cost of construction, and the volume of new construction (Meen, 1998). DiPasquale and Wheaton (1996) make an interesting observation on the "myopic foresight" of consumers with respect to house prices. There is evidence from surveys that when housing prices are rising, households will expect prices to rise similarly in the future, even though they know from experience that prices of owner-occupied units may also drop substantially in periods of slump.

There is a growing body of literature on the impact of local housing market circumstances on housing choice and the wide variation of these local circumstances across housing markets. Nonetheless, conceptually, the literature does not yet clarify the relationship between the behaviour of persons and households and the variation over time and space of, for example, turnover rates in the stock and the drift of house prices. It is evident that this relationship is recursive; by their combined behaviour households create a set of circumstances in local housing markets. These conditions have an impact on the residential mobility of these households. As yet, this recursive relationship has not been convincingly described, either conceptually or empirically.

Myers (1999) points out the need for more studies which take account of the variation in housing circumstances over space. But he also calls for more rigorous analysis of the drift of housing conditions and housing choices over time. Understanding this aspect of the housing market can help predict shifts in housing markets and conditions that may occur in the near future. He illustrates his argument with examples from the United States. For instance, he describes how preferences for and access to owning and renting have developed and how the phenomenon of crowding has re-emerged among lower-income groups. Indeed, it is important to look at the behavioural

aspects – how people make choices and how housing careers of different cohorts develop over time – to fully appreciate the trends in the housing market.

In fact housing careers and their relationship to economic and demographic circumstances seem to be of growing interest to many researchers of the mobility process (cf. Abramsson et al., 2000a; Arbonville and Bonvalet, 2000; Kissoon, 2000). This rising interest in the development of housing choices over time is undoubtedly stimulated by the wider availability of panel data in many countries. Meanwhile, young housing researchers have been trained in the handling of such data sets, which can be quite complicated and time consuming (Myers, 1999). Interestingly, many studies on housing careers relate to the housing conditions of immigrants in European and North American cities. Bonvalet et al. (1995), for instance, studied the trajectories through the housing stock of immigrants who came to Paris, where they were surveyed on their housing careers in 1986 and in various earlier years. The authors found that immigrants are more mobile than the native French. That study also demonstrates the importance of the diverse housing stock of the inner suburban ring in Paris, to their housing career. At the ENHR conference in Gävle in 2000, several researchers reported on the housing careers of minority groups: Turks and Moroccans in Utrecht; the Polish and Somali in Toronto; the Pakistani in the United Kingdom; and the Yugoslavi, African and Turkish immigrants in some Swedish cities. Bolt and Van Kempen (2000) report on the prevalence of extended families in Utrecht among the Turks; many newlyweds live with their parents or in-laws. Bowes et al. (2000) observe similar conditions among the Pakistani in the United Kingdom, where racism and harassment of immigrants play a significant role in their housing careers. Bolt and Van Kempen (2000), Murdie (2000) and Abramsson et al. (2000b) distinguish between the housing careers of different immigrant groups in any one city. The distinct patterns are partly related to cultural differences and partly due to socio-economic variations among the groups. The theme of differences between housing markets resurfaces in the case study by Abramsson et al. (2000b). The differences they found in the tenure position of immigrants in Jönköping and Gävle correspond to differences in the composition of the housing stock. Some related themes keep appearing in the literature. One is the success or failure of immigrant groups to move up the housing ladder (cf. Bier et al., 2000 for a recent empirical study of a housing hierarchy and its influence on the mobility patterns of households). Another recurrent theme is the role of various types of neighbourhoods in the housing careers of immigrants.

As these examples suggest, the analysis of housing careers either on the basis of existing panel data or through the collection of housing histories

of people in small surveys can be a fruitful means to gain insight in the residential mobility process of households over longer stretches of their life course.

4. International variation in the residential relocation process

There is already a large body of literature comparing the regimes of intervention in housing markets across countries (World Bank, 1993; Balchin, 1996). With few exceptions, the literature does not deal with how these variations in national housing policies impact the residential relocation and housing choice of persons and households. A few studies do analyse the levels of mobility between countries and the differences in tenure preferences.

In a very general way, Long (1991) compares the mobility rates of households in developed countries. He shows that mobility rates in the United States and New Zealand are higher than in Northwestern Europe. Strassmann (1991) argues that these differences are mainly due to the level of government intervention in housing markets. Overall, these interventions raise the price of owner-occupied housing and reduce rents relative to household incomes, leading to lower mobility rates.

There have also been some attempts to relate diverse national patterns of owning and renting to housing policies and financial arrangements with respect to home mortgages. Börsch-Supan (1993) shows that the specific fiscal treatment of rental housing versus home ownership and the structure of mortgage provision may explain the differences in tenure preferences in the United States, Germany, and Japan. Mulder and Wagner (1998) present the differences in first-time home ownership between Germany and the Netherlands in a comparable perspective. And Clark et al. (1997) make similar comparisons between Germany and the United States. In Germany, mortgage lending practices seem to explain the late stage at which German households move from renting into owning, as compared to the two other countries. However, hardly any studies compare variations in the process of residential mobility across nations in some detail. There is an obvious need for studies that link these differences convincingly to economic, policy and other circumstances in these countries. Yet there are no signs that much research of this nature will be forthcoming in the near future.

5. Conclusions

The process of residential relocation is the fundamental dynamic of change in the living conditions of individuals and households. At the same time, it is

the key to understanding the changing geography of residence in metropolitan areas. There is now a substantial literature that documents and models the process of residential relocation at the micro level. It deals with the way in which households bring their housing consumption into alignment with changes in family composition, income, and job location. Undoubtedly, ongoing and future research will keep expanding this large body of research on household behaviour. Two themes in particular – joint decision-making by members of a household regarding residential moves, and decisions on how to act if a preferred house is not readily available – seem to offer fruitful avenues for further research.

But the research frontier in the field of residential relocation seems to lie elsewhere. It is most likely to be the analysis of how the residential relocation behaviour of persons and households interacts with the circumstances in local and national housing markets. The key question is how changes in circumstances over space and time influence the housing choice patterns of individuals and households. It is evident that this relationship is recursive. By their combined behaviour, households create a set of circumstances in local housing markets, such as a certain level of turnover in the stock and varying price levels. Those circumstances, in turn, may expand or limit the opportunities to move for individual households. How this process works is not well understood and has not been modelled yet. In the same vein, the study of how housing careers of households develop over time and space in interaction with changing economic, demographic, and fiscal circumstances offers ample scope for new insights in the residential relocation process.

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