RESIDENTIAL PATTERNS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ROTTERDAM: A HISTORICAL CASE STUDY*

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Historical studies of residential patterns in pre-industrial cities that were carried out in the 1970s were mainly concerned with examining them in terms of G. Sjoberg’s or J.E. Vance’s rigid models. One of the best known of these studies is J. Langton’s examination of several seventeenth century English towns. Sjoberg held that pre-industrial towns had a wealthy and exclusive central core, surrounded by a much larger area where the social status of the population diminished outwards. Vance saw the towns as pre-capitalist towns with a pattern of plural cores that had been formed under the guild system.

There are two weaknesses in the approach of studies like Langton’s. First, the city in question was examined by comparing it with the models. However, any difference between the residential pattern of the city and the pattern of the models was simply evidence for unreliability of the models themselves. Questions about how and why the difference occurred, were avoided. Second, case studies cannot correct generalizations. Sjoberg’s model especially shows several tendencies for ALL cities from ancient to early modern age in the world.

In the Netherlands, studies on seventeenth or eighteenth century residential patterns are few. One exception is a case study on Leiden in the middle of the eighteenth century carried out by H.D. Tjalsma. At the end of his paper he tried to compare the pattern in Leiden with those of the pre-industrial model and the industrial model.

"In hoeverre vertoont het in deze bijdrage geschetste beeld van Leiden in 1749 overeenkomst met een van deze typen steden? ... Het is niet mogelijk Leiden in 1749 in één van deze uiterst schematische modellen in te delen."

These studies do not solve the historical problems of what the difference between models and the pattern in the city means, and what kind of factors were influential in the residential pattern.

Fortunately, there are enough sources for Rotterdam to be able