Chapter 4

TECHNOLOGY AND HOUSEHOLD ACTIVITIES

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1. INTRODUCTION

The modern household is full of activities in which technology plays an important part. During the 20th century, a variety of different technologies has been introduced in households that have improved the quality of life of those who perform household tasks, as well as of other members of the household. They have enabled households to enjoy a higher standard of living, as eased the work, provided comfort, and created opportunities to meet the greater demands of a more complex living standard (Visser, 1969; Groot-Marcus, 1984). Household and Consumer Science focuses on households and household activities from a sociological, economical, and technological point of view. Its sub-department of Consumer Technology has to do with the technological approach. They study the relationships between technology, behavior, and environmental effects.

The way in which household activities and relationships between technology and behavior are conceptualized in Household and Consumer Science is presented in this chapter. In this context, household activities are the behavioral component of the household. Attention will be paid to the opportunities and constraints that are encountered when technological interventions are introduced in a household system.
2. DEVELOPMENTS IN HOUSEHOLD SCIENCES

Concepts of Household and Consumer Sciences have been developed from Home Economics. That science started in the U.S. a century ago and focused principally on households as management systems (Deacon and Firebaugh, 1968; Gross and Crandall, 1973). In Germany, the emphasis is more on economics and functionality (Egner, 1952; Von Schweitzer, 1969). The development in the Netherlands in the 1970s and 1980s was characterized by a view of the household as a social phenomenon with functional relationships (Presvelou, 1980). The basic entity is the household group\(^1\), which performs activities aimed at the satisfaction of everyday material needs of human beings and which creates material conditions for their immaterial needs (Zuidberg, 1981). The purpose is to achieve well-being for the members of the household group.

The group normally provides its own human resources\(^2\). They form, with non-human resources\(^3\), together with information, facilities and services from outside organizations, they generate an output: the level of living\(^5\). This is the result of all household activities taken together. Resources are generally used for different domains, such as personal care, the provision of food, clothing, etc. This causes the activities within households to be interrelated. If more of a resource is utilized for one domain, the availability for other domains will be reduced.

Household groups try to bring their level of living in line with their ultimate goals for their everyday life, the standard of living\(^6\). This is a set of

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1 household group: social unit, often family-based, with a communal household, i.e. one or more persons with a number of communal activities.
2 human resources: means vested in people that can be used for attaining goals and creating events: cognitive insights, psychomotoric skills, affective attributes, health, energy, and time.
3 non-human resources: non-human means for attaining goals and creating events: natural and processed consumption goods, housing, space, household capital, physical energy, money and investments.
4 household resources: means for attaining goals and creating events generated within the household system, partly provided by the group (human resources) partly present as goods and services acquired earlier, or assets.
5 level of living: quantity and quality of goods and services consumed or available. It is the result of household activities.
6 standard of living: complex of conceptions, views, habits and wishes of the members of a household group with regard to the aim of household management and the way to employ household resources.