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2. The food we eat

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In much food research, the social context and meaning of food is actually the focal point: often the food itself plays a minor role, whereas analyses center on social interaction, social structures, social discourses, or on economic and technological developments. The food that is put on the table is of course also a material substance which we incorporate while eating our daily meals. Therefore, the food we eat in daily life is an important starting point for sociological food research.

In this chapter we ask: Has the food we eat changed in the period from 1997 to 2012? As far as our data allow, we pursue the sociological discussions described above.

The main part of the questionnaire focused on respondents' eating events the day before the interview. Questions about each eating event were posed in chronological order, to a maximum of ten events in 1997 and 13 events in 2012. The questions focused on number, timing, social context and structure of eating events. When asking about what was eaten we distinguished between hot and cold food. Cold eating events were registered on a list of food options, whereas hot eating events were recorded in a more complex manner, registering number of courses, and centre, staples, vegetables and trimmings in the main course. In both types of events drinks were registered on a list of drink options. In open questions following hot eating events, respondents could report names of the dishes they ate. The questions and the reasoning behind are described in more detail elsewhere (Mäkelä et al., 1997; Kjærnes, Ekström, Gronow, Holm, & Mäkelä, 2001; Mäkelä et al., 1997). For the questions regarding what was eaten at various events, the change of survey method may be of significance. In 1997 the lists of food items were not read aloud by the telephone interviewers, so that respondents reported on the basis of their own recollection of which foods they had eaten. In 2012, the computer-assisted (CAWI) methodology implied that respondents were presented lists of potential food items. They were thus prompted to recollect items that would perhaps otherwise be forgotten.

We have reconstructed meals on the basis of timing and the character of each eating event. Breakfast is defined as the first eating event on the day, lunch as eating events taking place between 11am and 2pm, and dinner as events taking place in the following country-specific time-spans: Denmark 5pm-8pm, Finland 4pm-6pm, Norway 4pm-7pm, Sweden 5pm-7pm. These are the time spans defined as 'lunch' and 'dinner' by more than 50% of respondents in the 2012 study. The resulting time-span concord with the 1997 data where

the timing of evening meals differed considerably between the countries whereas lunch times were more similar (Gronow & Jääskeläinen, 2001).

In this analysis we focus on describing which are the most typical foods, dishes and meals eaten in the four countries. By so doing we will then – as far as our somewhat limited data allows – pursue the sociological discussions we are interested in. Instead of trying to address trends such as gastroanomy and informalization directly, we will approach them indirectly by looking at the complexity and simplicity of eating events, which is, we contend, inextricably linked with the alleged trends.

Globalisation and de-traditionalization we address by assessing whether differences between the Nordic countries are increasing or decreasing in the period. To this effect we assess whether traditional national dishes are still on the dinner table in 2012 and whether distinct national lunch traditions (cold or hot meals) are still discernible in 1997 and 2012. The effects of the health trend which is discernible from dietary surveys (Pedersen et al., 2010; Helldán, Helakorpi, Virtanen, & Uutela, 2013) we analyze by studying whether core foods from health discourses, fruit and vegetables, are introduced to types of eating events where they are traditionally not included.

We have used SPSS (version 21) for the analysis. Analysis of significant association between variables is carried out by Chi-square tests, since all variables employed are either binary or multiple nominal.

Results

Breakfast

Bread is by far the most common food item in both 1997 and 2012 in the Nordic countries. However, in Denmark and Sweden it seems to be on the decline. At the same time breakfast cereal is increasing in three of the countries. This change points to a more modern, simple and quickly prepared breakfast. The exception is Finland, where instead the more traditional porridge has kept its place, and its consumption has in fact increased a bit. In Denmark and Norway porridge is not an important item in either year, but in Sweden, porridge was among the four most important items in 1997, but its consumption declined, and in 2012 egg had taken its place as the fourth most popular item (Table 2.1). Another important change which also points to a changing character of breakfasts is the rather dramatic increase in yoghurt consumption in all countries. Fruit has increased with between 5 and 12 percentage points in all countries, but only in Denmark and Norway is fruit among the four most frequent breakfast food items in 2012. Egg consumption has also increased in all countries, with between 4 and 12 percentage points, mostly in Norway and Sweden, and only in these two countries are eggs among the most important items. The decline in bread consumption suggests that also items used as toppings for conventional open sandwiches, such as cheese or meat cuts, may have reduced.

TABLE 2.1 The most frequently chosen food and drink items for breakfast in 1997 and 2012 (% of all breakfasts).

	DENMARK		FINLAND		NORWAY		SWEDEN									
	1997	2012	1997	2012	1997	2012	1997	2012								
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%								
Food	Bread	64	Bread	58	Bread	63	Bread	64	Bread	78	Bread	70	Bread	73	Bread	65
	Cereal	15	Cereal	25	Porridge	16	Yogurt	24	Cereal	7	Egg	16	Cereal	19	Yoghurt	31
	Cake	12	Yogurt	20	Yogurt	10	Porridge	17	Egg	5	Cereal	11	Yoghurt	17	Cereal	20
	Yogurt	11	Fruit	14	Cereal	7	Other ¹	16	Fruit	4	Fruit	11	Porridge	12	Egg	17
Drink	Hot drinks	71	Hot drinks	61	Hot drinks	72	Hot drinks	67	Hot drinks	49	Hot drinks	54	Hot drinks	63	Hot drinks	64
	Milk	18	Water	33	Juice	14	Water	36	Milk	48	Water	36	Milk	26	Water	29
	Juice	9	Milk	20	Milk	13	Juice	19	Water	10	Milk	28	Juice	15	Juice	21
	Water	9	Juice	17	Water	11	Milk	16	Juice	9	Juice	29	Water	10	Milk	15
	N	1187	2045	1196	2015	1177	2064	1244	2053							

N is the first eating event defined as breakfast given year and country on all weekdays and weekends.

¹ 'Other' is the last choice from the following list: Bread, cereal, savory pastry, cold cuts, vegetables, porridge, yoghurt, egg, fruit, cake, snacks and sweets, other.

The choice of beverages has undergone some change too (Table 2.1). In both years beverages are first of all coffee and tea, juice and milk. However, both water and juice appear to have become more frequent in all countries and in Norway and Sweden milk drinking declines markedly and significantly (with 20 and 11 percentage points, respectively) whereas it is rather stable in Denmark and Finland.

TABLE 2.2 Number of food components at breakfasts in 1997 and 2012 (% of all breakfasts)

Components	DENMARK		FINLAND		NORWAY		SWEDEN	
	1997	2012	1997	2012	1997	2012	1997	2012
1	80	69	69,3	52,9	88,9	71,2	63,1	50,9
2	16,7	22,3	24,5	30,4	9	21,2	25,9	28,1
3	2,9	6,9	4,9	11,9	2	5,7	9,2	14,8
4 or more	,4	1,8	1,2	4,8	0	1,9	1,9	6,2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N of all breakfast	1121	2045	1056	2015	1085	2064	1186	2053
sig		***		***		***		***

N is the first eating event defined as breakfast given year and country on all weekdays and weekends (excluding events that only consisted of drinks). Test: χ^2 . Sig. defines the p-level of significance: $p < 0,001 = ***$, $p < 0,01 = **$, $p < 0,5 = *$, $p \geq 0,5 =$ Not significant.

In all countries the average number of items for breakfast appears to have increased, but still, having just one item is the most typical in all countries (Table 2.2). However, between 20% and 30% now eat two items for breakfast. In both years Norway and Denmark have more simple and Sweden and Finland more complex breakfasts, but the differences between countries have diminished markedly, especially within the two groups of countries. The rising significance of fruit for breakfast suggests influence from health discourses, as does the decline in cake for breakfast in Denmark.

Lunch

The study of eating patterns in 1997 revealed highly diverse national lunch patterns, the main distinction being between hot, cooked lunches dominating in Finland and Sweden and cold lunches with open sandwiches dominating in Denmark and Norway. Within the countries these features of lunches were more homogeneous indicating that we were observing a basic feature of Nordic food cultures, but also national differences in how lunch was organized. So how does this look in 2012?

About two thirds of the respondents had had something to eat between 11 am and 2 pm, most of them having eaten once during that time interval. Slightly more people had eaten in this timeslot in Denmark and Sweden (72-75 per cent), compared to Norway and Finland (62-67 per cent). The changes from 1997 to 2012 were insignificant. Figure 2.1 show that most meals eaten were a substantial meal (hot or cold), while few meals were only a cake, snacks or fruit. Large and consistent national differences are found again in

2012 when it comes to whether lunch consisted of cold food, like sandwiches, or a hot, cooked meal. These differences do not seem to have diminished from 1997 to 2012. There is a small tendency towards more hot lunches, most significant in Sweden, none in Finland. Somewhat more meals were just a snack (not in Sweden). These two small changes explain why cold lunches have decreased in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. But, still, around 70 percent of the lunches in Denmark and Norway are cold meals, while a similar proportion of lunches in Finland and Sweden are hot.

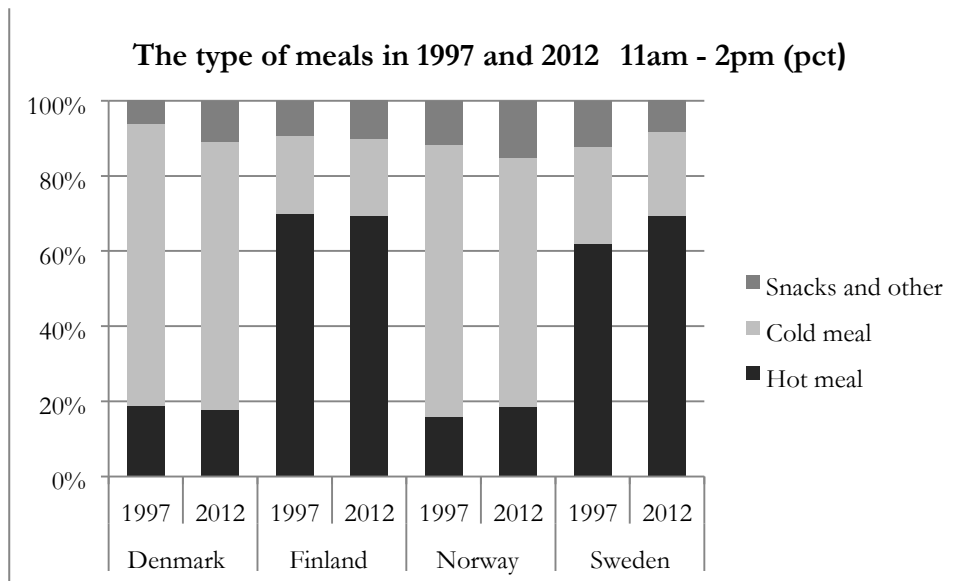


FIGURE 2.1 Types of meals in 1997 and 2012 between 11am and 2pm (pct)

N in 1997/2012 and significance level from χ^2 (Sig. defines the p-level of significance: $p < 0,001 = ***$, $p < 0,01 = **$, $p < 0,5 = *$, $p \geq 0,5 =$ Not significant): Denmark: = 910/1622 (Sig.:***), Finland 903/1369 (Sig.:Ns), Norway 766/1367 (Sig.:*), Sweden 934/1552 (Sig.:***).

Nordic cold lunches most often consist of open sandwiches with a topping of cheese, cold cuts or paté. But in 2012 salads and other vegetables have increased dramatically in all countries and also fruit, to a somewhat lesser degree. Salads and vegetables increased with 9-14 percentage points and are now eaten at 20% and 12% of cold lunches in Denmark and Norway respectively, and at 18% and 23% of these (more unusual) lunches in Finland and Sweden. Fruit has increased with 5-10 percentage points except in Sweden. It is now part of 16% and 18% of cold lunches in Denmark and Norway and 16% and 17% in Finland and Sweden.

The hot lunches have a format similar to the Nordic dinner (staple plus center and vegetables, see also below) and that format seems to be shared across all four countries. Around two thirds consist of just a main course, but quite a few also have a first course or a dessert. The number of courses have been significantly reduced from 1997 to 2012 in Denmark and Norway, likewise in Sweden a small reduction can be found, while in Finland no change can be found. Figure 2.2. show that in all countries around half of the

hot lunches included meat. Lunches with fish were most common in Norway, least so in Denmark, but fish for lunch decreased in all countries but Finland. Lunches with a vegetable centre, however, had become more common in all countries, being most popular in Denmark and Finland (21 and 19 per cent, respectively). The category ‘other’ includes for example pizza, omelet and soups and constituted around 18 percent of the hot lunches in 1997 in Sweden, 13% in Finland and decreased somewhat between the two years in these countries. In Denmark we found a small and in Norway a marked increase in this type of meals.

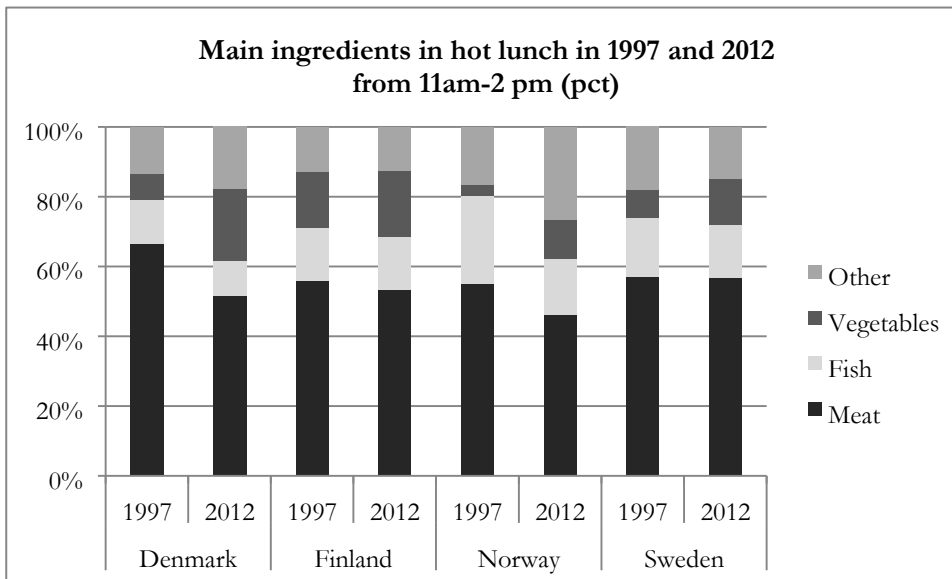


FIGURE 2.2 Main ingredients of the centre at hot lunch in 1997 and 2012 (pct)
 N in 1997/2012 and significance level from chi² (Sig. defines the p-level of significance: p<0,001=***, p<0,01=**, p<0,5=*, p≥0,5=Not significant): Denmark: = 173/287 (Sig.:***), Finland 630/949 (Sig.:Ns), Norway 122/254 (Sig.:**), Sweden 579/1075 (Sig.:**).

Lunch is eaten somewhat later in the day during weekends and this has not changed. While the composition was quite distinct from weekday lunches in 1997, with significantly more meat centers, this was less apparent in 2012 (data not shown). Meat had to some extent been replaced by fish (increasing slightly, contrary to the tendency on weekdays)¹, but more often by mixed dishes without a clear main ingredient. We do not know what this shift signifies, whether it indicates a tendency of informalization, with a less strict lunch format during weekends, a ‘modernisation’, with more dishes that do not adhere to the traditional format, or, whether the mixed dishes are in fact traditional casseroles (see below in the section on Dinner).

¹This should not be interpreted as a tendency of eating less meat, since this is not what we see in aggregate statistics on meat consumption.

TABLE 2.3 Beverages consumed for hot lunch and cold lunch in 1997 and 2012 from 11am-2 pm (pct).

Type of beverage	DENMARK			FINLAND			NORWAY			SWEDEN		
	1997	2012	sig	1997	2012	sig	1997	2012	sig	1997	2012	sig
Milk	22,3	10,1	***	36,5	27,5	***	21,6	11,1	***	19,6	9	***
Water	21,1	58,8	***	27,3	51,5	***	14,1	41,7	***	28,5	62	***
Soft drinks	10,2	8	*	1,8	4,7	***	7,4	5,5	Ns	5,5	6,4	Ns
Juice	3,6	3,2	Ns	5,5	8,3	**	5,2	11,2	***	5,8	3,9	*
Alcohol	11,6	6,3	***	2	1,7	Ns	,5	,7	Ns	8,1	3,7	***
Hot drinks	24,2	24,1	Ns	22,2	28	**	53,8	52,5	Ns	32	26,9	**
Other	10	3	***	7,6	2,9	***	6,9	2	***	6,7	2,1	***
No drink	1,4	5,2	***	4	3,4	Ns	3,5	5,9	*	5,7	4,3	Ns
N	937	1622		947	1369		772	1367		970	1552	

N is the drinks at eating events defined as meals hot or cold in the timeframe, given year and country on all weekdays and weekends. Eating events used: 1997:2-10, 2012:2-13. More than one choice was possible, so % doesn't add up. Test: χ^2 . Sig. defines the p-level of significance: $p < 0,001 = ***$, $p < 0,01 = **$, $p < 0,5 = *$, $p \geq 0,5 = \text{Not significant}$.

Around 95 percent had a drink with their lunch, the most common being water, which also increased markedly and significantly from 14-29 per cent in 1997 to 42-62 per cent in 2012 (Table 2.3.). Having milk with lunch varies between the countries, but had been reduced from 22-37 per cent to 10-28 percent. Tea and coffee are also popular, most so in Norway (included in half of the lunches, around 25-30 per cent in the other countries), increasing only in Finland. Soft drinks as well as alcoholic drinks are rare in 2012 (5-8 and 1-6 per cent, respectively). Likewise, juice has been a rare type of beverage for lunch but it is becoming more popular in Norway in 2012 (11 per cent).

Taken together, the national lunch patterns seem highly persistent, with hot lunch perhaps having strengthened its position slightly. Still, cold lunches dominate in Denmark and Norway, hot in Sweden and Finland. The meal format is also stable, but a few more had a vegetable center. There has been a noticeable shift towards water as the dominant drink with lunch. These findings do not support assumptions of “breakfastization” tendencies often purported in Sweden, with people more often having lunch with items typical of breakfast.

Dinner

As Table 2.4. shows, a large majority of hot dinners consisted of only one course in all countries both in 1997 and 2012. The share of one-course dinners increased over time in Denmark and Sweden, remained constant in Norway and declined in Finland. An opposite development can be seen in the share of two-course dinners – in which desserts were much more typical than starters (data not shown) –, which declined in Denmark and Sweden and increased in Finland. The share of threecourse dinners remained very low. It thus seems that Nordic dinners are still characterized by “platefuls” (Murcott, 1982) of main course, and desserts and especially starters are relatively rare. This pattern is more prevalent on weekdays than weekends, but the difference is not very large (data not shown).

TABLE 2.4 Number of courses at hot dinner in 1997 and 2012 (pct)

	DENMARK (5-8 PM)		FINLAND (4-6 PM)		NORWAY (4-7 PM)		SWEDEN (5-7 PM)	
	1997	2012	1997	2012	1997	2012	1997	2012
Number of courses								
1	73,3	78,2	72,4	64,6	69,8	72,9	71,9	76,6
2	24,1	19,6	25	33	28,7	25,5	26,3	19,7
3	2,5	2,3	2,6	2,4	1,5	1,6	1,8	3,7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	833	1452	392	666	599	1115	452	898
Sig.		*		*		NS		**
Mean	1,2917	1,2410	1,3010	1,3784	1,3172	1,2870	1,2987	1,2706
St.d.	,50729	,47807	,51195	,53262	,49704	,48696	,49539	,52074

N is the hot eating events in the time frame, given year and country on all weekdays and weekends. Hot eating events used: 1997:2-10, 2012:2-13. Test: χ^2 . Sig. defines the p-level of significance: $p < 0,001 = ***$, $p < 0,01 = **$, $p < 0,5 = *$, $p \geq 0,5 =$ Not significant.

Complexity of the dinner can also be measured by looking at how many meal components – centre, staple, bread, vegetables and trimmings (Mäkelä, 2001) - were included. Our data suggest that the complexity of the platefuls has increased from 1997 to 2012, as the mean number of components has increased in all countries (minimum 1, maximum 5). In Denmark it increased from 2.6 to 3.3, in Finland from 2.4 to 3.0, in Norway from 2.6 to

3.2 and in Sweden from 2.8 to 3.3. Especially trimmings appear to have become more common. If we take the number of dishes at the dinner or the complexity of the dishes as a rude indicator of the degree of formalization vs informalization of the Nordic dinners our results point in two directions: on the one hand, the number of courses has remained more or less constant, on the other hand, the number of the components in individual meals has increased.

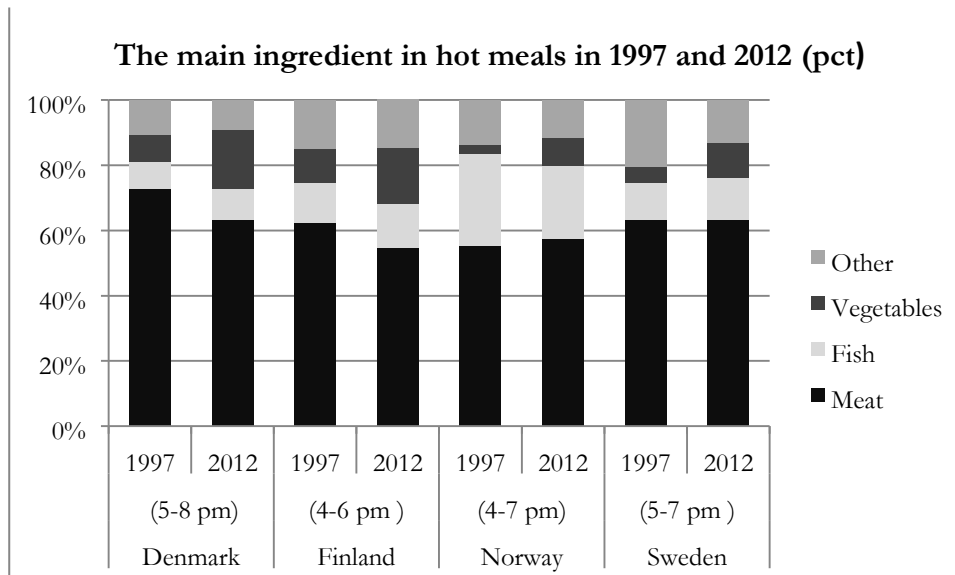


FIGURE 2.3 Main ingredients of the centre at hot dinners in 1997 and 2012 (pct)

N in 1997/2012 and significance level from χ^2 (Sig. defines the p-level of significance: $p < 0,001 = ***$, $p < 0,01 = **$, $p < 0,5 = *$, $p \geq 0,5 =$ Not significant): Denmark: = 833/1452 (Sig.:***), Finland 309/666 (Sig.:*), Norway 599/1115 (Sig.:***), Sweden 452/898 (Sig.:***).

Our data suggest that people in the Nordic countries like to eat first and foremost meat dishes at dinner (Figure 2.3.). In both years, more than half of the respondents in all countries identified meat as the main ingredient of their dinner. The share varied between 55% (Norway) and 73% (Denmark) in 1997, and between 55% (Finland) and 63% (Denmark and Sweden) in 2012. However, meat dishes seem to have become somewhat rarer and vegetable dishes somewhat more popular both in Denmark and Finland, but not in Norway and Sweden. Fish was in both years most popular in Norway, where its use as a main ingredient however has declined – while in the other countries changes in fish dishes are minor. Vegetables as a main ingredient has increased in all countries, while the “other” category shows minor changes apart from decreasing in Sweden.

More can be learned about dinners when looking at open-ended qualitative responses about the name of the dinner dishes. Our data does not allow this analysis for 1997, and the following analysis is therefore based on responses only from 2012 about all self-defined dinners irrespective of the timing of the meal. In general, the qualitative descriptions of dinners were very short. Hardly any fancy (a la French cuisine) names appear in the list. A typical answer was simply “steak” or a bit more elaborated “steak with potatoes”. On rare occasions, the respondent had taken the time to describe the dish

in detail: “Mørbrad biff m/ fløtegratinerte poteter, bernaice og brokoli” (NO). The dish depicted was almost always a plateful (Murcott, 1982). Interestingly, in all countries there were references to buffet but this did not refer to the traditional Scandinavian smorgasbord but to offerings such as ”SushiThai buffe” (SE) in ethnic restaurants. Generally, ‘buffet’ may indicate “a bit of this and a bit of that”.

However, there were recurrent dishes that belong to Nordic/Scandinavian food traditions. One example is the almost iconic comfort dish Pyttipanna/Biksemad, which is a bubble and squeak -type dish known and reportedly eaten in all four countries. Another classic in all four countries was meatballs, which come in many forms and variations. In Norway and Denmark there were also a lot of fishballs. In all countries people mentioned dishes that are probably more typical to the respective culinary culture than to all Nordic countries. For example, in Norway there was “komle med pølse og salt kjøtt, kålrabistappe, gulrot, bacon og smør”, which means a large potato dumpling with sausage and salted meat, kohlrabi mash, carrot, bacon and butter. In Finland, liver casserole, one of the first ready-to-heat convenience foods on the market, was mentioned. The Danish “forloren hare” (mock hare meatloaf) was reported several times. In Sweden, there was “ärtsoppa, senap med pannkakor och sylt”, i.e. the pea soup with mustard traditionally eaten on Thursdays and followed by pancakes and jam as dessert.

In all countries various dishes made of minced meat were very popular. People had eaten hamburgers with or without the bun, but minced meat appeared also in soups and stews. In Finland, one of the most popular and characteristic casseroles (“makaronilaatikko”) is made of macaroni, minced meat, milk and eggs. In Norway, minced meat is frequently used in convenience type dishes like spaghetti with meat sauce, taco and pizza. In addition to minced meat, people reported eating a lot of poultry, i.e. broiler chicken. Today, broiler chicken is one of the most often used meat types in the Nordic countries, and in our data it was used in a variety of dishes from Chicken Korma to grilled whole chicken. Often chicken seemed to be an ingredient in dishes inspired by other than Nordic culinary cultures. An interesting detail in both the naming of the meat and consuming it was the fact that no-one in Denmark or Finland reported eating ‘entrecote’, a dish that several respondents in both Norway and Sweden had eaten. Otherwise, beef and pork were eaten a lot.

Fish in various forms and species was also a favorite especially in Norway and Denmark where many had dishes based on minced fish. In Sweden and Finland fish balls and cakes were rarer but fish was consumed in soups or cooked in the oven.

The picture presented above based on the open-ended responses is backed up by national top ten lists of popular dishes. In Denmark, the latest data show that chicken, meat-sauce and meatballs are the most popular dishes in Denmark (Fagt & Jensen, 2012) In Finland, the top four favorite dishes in 2013 included sauce made of minced meat, fried fish, steak or schnitzel, and meatballs (Suomen Gallup Elintarviketieto OY, 2013)p. 67.

Dessert patterns – in terms of what is eaten for dessert – seem relatively stable. In all countries berry or fruit desserts were the most typical dessert types in both years. In 1997,

between 8% (Finland and Norway) and 14% (Sweden), and in 2012 between 6% (Denmark and Sweden) and 11% (Norway) of hot dinners included a berry or fruit dessert. Ice cream or other frozen desserts, cake or sweet pies and in Norway also pudding competed for the second and third place in all countries. All in all, the differences between the years and the popularity of the most common dessert types were rather small.

For beverages enjoyed during dinner there were significant differences between the four countries and also quite large changes over time. Table 2.5. shows, first, that drinking water at dinner increased considerably, around 20 percentage points or more in all countries, and drinking milk declined particularly in the milk-drinking countries Finland and Sweden. Drinking soft drinks increased somewhat in Finland and Denmark and remained stable in Norway and Sweden. Having juice with dinner remained at a relatively low level. Drinking alcohol at dinner showed a variable pattern across countries. It was quite low in all countries, highest in Denmark, but here it declined. We found an increase in Norway and Finland, but still drinking alcohol with dinner was in 2012 more popular in Denmark and Sweden than in Finland and Norway. Hot drinks during or immediately after dinner were relatively rare, but their share increased in all countries, and in Finland they were in 2012 more common than alcohol.

TABLE 2.5. Types of beverages at hot dinner in 1997 and 2012 (pct)

Type of beverage	DENMARK (5-8 PM)			FINLAND (4-6 PM)			NORWAY (4-7 PM)			SWEDEN (5-7 PM)		
	1997	2012	sig	1997	2012	sig	1997	2012	sig	1997	2012	sig
	Milk	15,8	9,5	***	52,3	38,4	***	7	3,7	**	27,9	17,1
Water	27,1	58,4	***	27	45,8	***	44,2	66,3	***	28,3	50,9	***
Soft drinks	9,6	13	*	2,3	6,8	**	15,2	13	NS	7,7	8	NS
Juice	2,6	3	Ns	6,1	7,1	NS	3	3,5	NS	3,3	4,6	NS
Alcohol	31,6	26,9	*	3,3	7,2	**	6,3	14,9	***	25	22,2	NS
Hot drinks	1,9	5,3	***	2,3	12,2	***	7,2	8,1	NS	8,6	9,5	NS
Other	12,1	3,6	***	7,1	,9	***	18,9	4,8	***	6	3	**
No drink	6,7	2,1	***	4,3	2	*	2,7	2,4	NS	3,5	1,6	*
N	833	1452		392	666		599	1115		452	898	

N is the drinks at eating events defined as meals hot in the timeframe, given year and country on all weekdays and weekends.

Eating events used: 1997:2-10, 2012:2-13. More than one choice was possible, so N and % doesn't add up. Test: χ^2 . Sig. defines the p-level of significance: $p < 0,001 = ***$, $p < 0,01 = **$, $p < 0,5 = *$, $p \geq 0,5 = \text{Not significant}$.

In-betweens

Between the main meals, people in Nordic countries eat snacks or in-betweens. We have constructed variables for such in-betweens as eating events which only included either fruit, cake or snacks and sweets. Table 2.6. presents the proportion of cold eating events (excluding breakfasts) which only includes these items.

TABLE 2.6. The frequency of fruit, cake or snacks and sweets at “in-between” in 1997 and 2012 (pct)

	DENMARK			FINLAND			NORWAY			SWEDEN		
	1997	2012	sig	1997	2012	sig	1997	2012	sig	1997	2012	sig
Snack in detail												
Fruit	20,5	39,2	***	32,4	27,6	NS	30,2	40,3	***	30,4	38,6	***
Cake	57,1	18,1	***	54,6	38,5	***	47,6	29	***	50	29,1	***
Snacks and Sweets	19,8	36,9	***	10,4	29,5	***	18,8	23,9	*	16,3	26,2	***
Combinations	2,6	5,8	**	2,5	4,3	NS	3,3	6,8	**	3,3	6,1	**
N of in-betweens	767	1176		709	691		483	837		852	818	

Combinations mean the combination of fruit, cake, snacks and sweets. N is all meals that were only snack given year and country on all weekdays and weekends. Test: χ^2 . Sig. defines the p-level of significance: $p < 0,001 = ***$, $p < 0,01 = **$, $p < 0,5 = *$, $p \geq 0,5 =$ Not significant.

The table shows that in all countries the frequency of cake has declined markedly and significantly, whereas snacks and sweets have increased. Fruit increases markedly in Denmark, less so in Norway, not in Finland and decreases in Sweden. These changes suggest a somewhat mixed result with respect to health, but they do suggest a cultural change in the role of cake eating. In all countries cake eating in the evening goes down, whereas snack eating goes up (data not shown).

Discussion

Our analysis shows that the food we eat in the Nordic countries in the period from 1997 to 2012 is characterized by stability but also some change. Core elements in traditional Nordic national food cultures persist such as the existence of two marked lunch cultures based on hot and cold meals respectively, the dominant position of meat in dinner dishes, and the rather simple meal-formats of both hot lunches and dinners, as 'platefuls'. But many changes can be identified too, such as the marked tendency that water is becoming a most

popular everyday drink for all meal types, the radical decline in cake served as an in-between, the apparent increase in vegetarian hot lunches and dinners, the introduction of fruit and vegetables at meals, where they are not to be found by tradition (breakfasts, cold lunches) and the rise in cereals and yoghurts for breakfast.

As for the trends of change suggested in the sociological literature, our results are mixed. The many Nordic traditional dishes eaten for dinner as well as the sharp distinction between hot and cold lunch countries suggest that national distinct traits persist. On the other hand the marked changes we identify are in most cases shared by all countries suggesting a certain harmonization between the food cultures. Thus, we do see some homogenizing tendencies but the underlying distinct national patterns do not seem to dissolve.

There are mixed indications of potential informalization in the sense of changes in simplicity and complexity of meals. In most but not all countries we see that hot dinners and lunches are reducing to one-course meals and some changes in the items chosen for breakfast suggest that foods without any preparation such as yoghurt and cereal are prioritized. On the other hand, our data suggest that the number of items included in meals is increasing. This, however, needs to be confirmed by other studies, as our shift in study design results in some uncertainty on this point.

The trend towards including foods which are categorized as healthy in more types of meals is evident in our data about both breakfast and lunch, and to some extent dinners, too. Fruit is increasingly included in both breakfasts and lunches, and salads and vegetables in cold lunches. Vegetables have also become a more typical main ingredient in both lunches and dinners. The decline in cake for in-between meals is open for more composed interpretations: on the one hand a sign of more healthy in-betweens as fruit has increased for these meals – but, on the other hand snacks has gone up, so another explanation could be that the traditional cake culture is in decline and being substituted by more simple and easy ready bought snacks.

Conclusion

There is much stability with respect to the food we eat in Nordic countries. Distinct national patterns with respect to types of meals and dishes eaten persist in spite of evidence of marked changes going on which are quite similar in all four countries. Still, we do not see a general harmonization of Nordic food cultures. The evidence regarding informalization in terms of complexity of meals points in two directions and need to be analysed further by other studies. The importance of health discourses is reflected in the inclusion of healthy foods meals that are new compared to tradition.