Appetite 119 (2017) 23–33

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Appetite

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/appet

Eating out in four Nordic countries: National patterns and social stratification

T.B. Lund [a, *], U. Kjærnes [b], L. Holm [a]

[a] Department of Food and Resource Economics, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
[b] Consumer Research Norway, SIFO Oslo and Akershus University for Applied Sciences, Denmark

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 19 September 2016
Received in revised form
11 June 2017
Accepted 16 June 2017
Available online 17 June 2017

Keywords:
Eating out
Nordic countries
Questionnaire study
Cross-country comparison
Status
Social stratification

ABSTRACT

Using a survey conducted in four Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) in 2012, we investigated whether eating out in cafés and restaurants in these countries is best characterized as a workday pattern activity or a leisure activity; and, whether frequent eating at cafés and restaurants is related to socio-demographic factors and factors relevant to the organization of daily life.

We found that eating out is not a fundamental part of everyday eating. It is something which takes place occasionally. This may be taken to suggest that eating out in the Nordic countries is primarily a leisure activity. However, while this is an accurate portrayal of Denmark and Norway, eating out in Finland and Sweden is somewhat more common and linked to work-life. This difference probably reflects contrasting historical-institutional paths: in Finland and Sweden a food culture emphasizing cooked lunches and dedicated public policies supporting the provisioning of lunches outside the home may have promoted eating out.

Multivariate analysis revealed that eating out declines with age. An urbanization effect exists, as residence in a capital city increases the propensity to eat out. There were socio-economic differences in all countries. We hypothesized that education and status would not significantly explain eating out activity after people's gastronomic interest had been controlled for. However, education was statistically significant in Sweden and Norway, and surprisingly status was negatively associated with eating out in Sweden. As expected, eating out was positively associated with income, and it was more frequent among the higher salariat and the self-employed (although not in Norway).

1. Introduction

The four Nordic countries, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, share important political and cultural traits, and their histories are deeply intertwined. All four countries are what Esping Andersen called Social-Democratic welfare states, with universal access to welfare services, high levels of female employment, high average incomes, and comparably high socio-economic equality (Esping-Andersen, 1990). In many ways, ordinary life in the four countries is similar; and on the whole Nordic people also eat similar foods and dishes (Holm, Lauridsen, Gronow, Kahma, & Niva, 2015). However, distinct differences have been identified in terms of the social patterning of eating. The timing of the main meals of the day differ somewhat: thus, the timing of the typical lunch hour during which around half of the population eat is 11am–12pm in Norway and Finland and 12–1pm in Denmark and Sweden. Turning to later in the day, only one country, Denmark, has a clear, single peak hour (6–7pm) during which almost half of the population has a main meal. In the other countries, the timings of eating events are more spread out (Lund & Gronow, 2014). The character of the midday meal also differs from one country to another: while in Finland and Sweden more than 60% of the population had a hot, cooked meal at this time, almost 80% in Denmark and Norway ate a cold lunch, typically consisting of open sandwiches with a topping (Holm et al., 2015). Considering the basic socio-cultural similarities, the four Nordic countries provide a good opportunity to analyze the way in which variations in food culture influence, and are influenced by, the social organization of eating. Where the study of eating out is concerned, they offer a basis for studying in some detail what role eating out plays in eating practices within modern, relatively wealthy welfare states.

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: tblu@ifro.ku.dk (T.B. Lund), unni.kjarnes@sifo.hioa.no (U. Kjærnes), loho@ifro.ku.dk (L. Holm).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2017.06.017
0195-6663/

Considerable attention has been given to the idea that, with the commodification of food, the home may no longer be the primary location for meals, as eating is increasingly taking place in public areas and in commercial venues such as restaurants, cafés, and so forth (Cheng, Olsen, Southerton, & Warde, 2007; Dinkins, 1992; Dumangan & Hackett, 1995; Julier, 2013; Mandemakers & Roeters, 2015; Mogelonsky, 1998). While empirical data providing systematic evidence of changes over time in the localization of eating are rare, time-use data show that trends in the time spent eating in and outside the home are not uniform across countries (Bonke, 2002; Cheng et al., 2007; Mestdag & Glorieux, 2009; Mestdag & Vandeweyer, 2005; Mestdag, 2005; Warde, Cheng, Olsen, & Southerton, 2007). Thus, studies focusing on different national contexts are necessary to supply the basis for a fuller understanding of contemporary trends in eating practices.

In research and statistics, definitions of eating out differ, depending on the focus of the research. Thus some population surveys address 'commercially prepared' as opposed to 'home made' foods or meals (Kant & Graubard, 2004), or 'outsourcing' (Ekström & Hjälmeskog 2006; Mandemakers & Roeters, 2015), and thus include take-away food, others talk of 'away from home' or 'out of home' food and meals (Noel, 2003; Cheng et al., 2007; Bugge & Lavik, 2010; Orfanos et al., 2007), or eating in 'other places' (Mestdag & Glorieux, 2009). In this paper, our interest in 'eating out' is first of all an interest in events framed in terms of the place of eating (whether food is eaten in or out of the home), not in the source of the foods and dishes. We define 'eating out' as events where food is consumed which take place in commercial venues outside the household, such as restaurants, cafés, and similar places where people can be seated while eating. In this paper, we do not examine eating in the workplace, and thus we exclude canteens from this definition.

There are no uniform data on the eating-out market in the four Nordic countries. Statistical records and reports operate with different types of data, and different categorizations of eating-out venues. However, there seems to be general agreement that in all Nordic countries the activity of eating out has become more common over the last three decades (Horesta, 2015; MARA, 2014; Amilien, 2003; Roos, 2016). Still, eating out can take many forms, depending on the type of venue or food outlet in question. Eating in a restaurant with table service differs from eating in a grill-bar or by visiting a fast food take-away. Based on the available data it appears that restaurants with some kind of table service account for approximately one third of eating venues in Denmark, and more or less half of the venues in Finland, Norway and Sweden. Fast-food outlets and grill-bars appear to make up one third of the venues, more or less, in all four countries (Bergström, 2016; Bugge & Lavik, 2010; Horesta, 2015; MARA, 2014). Judging by these data, it would appear that while cheaper and faster food venues are widespread, the consumption of food in proper restaurants is also an important element of eating out in the Nordic countries.

The place of eating is a matter of how people choose to spend their time, and specifically where. The practice of eating out may be seen as an elementary part of the complex organization of an everyday life in which work and leisure-time activities imply that household members are away from the home for longer or shorter intervals during the day (Grignon, 1999; Rotenberg, 1991; Warde & Martens, 2000). Eating out may therefore be a practical solution to everyday logistical needs. Several US studies confirm that this perspective adequately characterizes the steady increase in eating out in America—an increase that has been documented both in terms of proportion of total food expenditure (Kant & Graubard, 2004) and in terms of total energy intake (Nielsen, Siega-Riz, & Popkin, 2002). In the US studies these changes are regarded as a result of women's increasing participation in the workforce, which has led to rising household incomes, long working hours, and limited free time, together with a parallel decrease in average household size (Bowers, 2000; Guthrie, Lin, & Frazao, 2002; Campbell, Nayga Jr., & Lin, 2014). In the adult American population, between 1977/78 and 1994/96 the percentage of total caloric intake accounted for by eating out rose from 18% to 32%, and this increase took place especially as a result of more frequent consumption of fast food and take-out meals. This means that food prepared away from the home is now a major part of the American diet. It is "not the occasional treat of yesteryear" (Guthrie et al., 2002, p. 148).

Whether or not the developments witnessed in the US were echoed in similar trends in other parts of the world is an empirical question. In areas outside the US, eating out may still be 'an occasional treat', a leisure activity driven by personal preferences and priorities. Equally, it may be the case that practices of eating out differ within populations: for some, eating out may be a frequent routine linked to a busy work-life, while for others it could be a more occasional, perhaps even a rare, leisure activity. In the first of these alternatives, eating out during working hours, alone, with colleagues, or with family members, will typically occur rather frequently. In the second, it will happen more rarely, at more irregular hours, and be linked with socializing with friends. Thus, we may expect to find patterns in the frequency of eating out, the timing of such events, and the social company they involve. Together, these elements will describe different practices and social patterns.

The US studies document some differentiation in the eating-out practices of the American population. People of lower age, resident in urban areas, white, and with higher education and income tend to eat out more frequently (Noel, 2003; Kant & Graubard, 2004; Campbell et al., 2014). But the large increase in energy intake from fast-food outlets includes all groups in the population (Nielsen et al., 2002), and the major shift in eating practices is therefore seen as a broad change involving the whole of the American population.

It is therefore an important question whether, and if so what kind of, differentiation can be found in the Nordic populations. Does phase of life matter, as reflected in features such as family structure, age and employment status? In the US it appears that such factors influence the timing of eating out, in that older people and people with children eat out more for breakfast and lunch, while younger people and people without children do so more often later in the day (Campbell et al., 2014). In the Nordic countries, likewise, it is likely that life phases and family structure will be affecting people's decisions to eat out.

It is also worth asking whether there is any social stratification in the patterns of eating-out in the Nordic countries. As mentioned above, these countries can be described as Social-Democratic welfare states. Their governments pursue policies designed to support de-commodification and the promotion of equality in life chances—an equality that can be seen in education, health care, economic welfare, and access to social and cultural activities (Esping-Andersen, 1990). One might expect these policy efforts to encourage cultural homogeneity, which in turn would imply that leisure activities such as eating out are not patterned by social stratification. Challenging this line of thought, stratification theorists would argue that consumption variation emerges almost as a force of nature, as the result of differences in economic assets, educational assets and knowledge, social and cultural networks, and the intergenerational transmission of these. Cultural differences may express themselves in different routes, on which an important distinction can be drawn between tangible aspects of consumption (*what*? *where*?) and the cultural logic behind this consumption (*why* are cultural products consumed, and *how* are