

Trends in picking of wild berries and mushrooms in Sweden 1977–2011

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Introduction

The habits of picking berries and mushrooms among Swedish citizens have been studied in three similar postal inquiries conducted in 1977, 1997 and 2011. This abstract reports preliminary results.

A rapid urbanization occurred between 1900 and 1970 in Sweden and most of the former rural population moved into more densely built-up areas. In 1970 about 80 % of the population lived in densely built-up areas. After 1970 the urbanization have continued but more slowly and in 2011 about 85 % of the population lived in densely built-up areas (Statistics Sweden 2012). During this period larger cities grew while the population of smaller municipalities and rural areas shrank and grew older.

The aim of this study is to describe and analyze the trends in berry picking and mushrooming in this changing society.

Method

During all three years of investigation postal inquiries were sent to a representative sample of the adult (15–75 years of age) Swedish population late in autumn after the main berry picking and mushrooming season. Two reminders were used.

In the latest study (2011) an extra sample of respondents was made in three rural communities in different parts of Sweden to provide an opportunity to study differences between rural and urban areas. Quantities of berries and mushrooms gathered to be consumed in the own household were estimated by the respondents. The picking of four species of wild berries, Blueberries (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Lingonberries (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*), Raspberries (*Rubus idaeus*) and Cloudberries (*Rubus chamaemorus*) were measured separately. No differentiation between different species of mushrooms was made.

In the latest investigation (2011) more qualitative open questions were added to increase the possibility to explain changes in berry picking and mushrooming habits. In the open questions the respondents were asked to share some memories from berry picking or mushrooming during their childhood and to describe why they found berry picking and mushrooming important or less important.

The response rate has decreased from 82 % in 1977 to about 53 % in 1997 and 2011. The answering population was compared with background data of the whole population according to age, sex, family economy and if they live in a rural or urban environment. The non-response was in the latest study considerably higher among the youngest group of respondents. The response rate was also slightly higher among women and people with higher education.

Results

The proportion of the respondents who have picked wild berries to be consumed in the own household decreased from about 64 % in 1977 to 40 % in 1997 and 42 % in 2011. For Mushrooming we can see an opposite trend where the proportion of respondents gathering mushrooms has increased from about 38 % in 1977 and 1997 to about 53 % in 2011.

The amounts of wild berries picked to be consumed in the own household had in 1997 decreased to about ¼ of the amounts picked in 1977 (Figure 1). The relative decrease is very similar for all four species of berries. Concerning mushrooming the amounts picked was slightly lower in 1997 compared to 1977 but in 2011 the amounts picked were more than twice compared to the earlier studies.

Discussion

The high non-response, especially among the youngest respondents, has probably affected the results in the latest study. Picking of berries and mushrooms is less common in groups with high non-response and it is likely that the actual decrease in berry picking is even larger than showed in this abstract. For the same reason it is likely that the actual increase in mushrooming is smaller than showed in our results.

The mushrooming season in 2011 was for most parts of Sweden reported as very good and due to the late arrival of the winter even longer than normal. The increase in mushrooming in 2011 compared with the earlier studies might be a reflection of annual variation.

Theoretically the empirical differences we have found can be understood as reflecting changing ways of life related to societal changes and changing socialization processes according to both structural conditions (lifemodes) and individual choices (lifestyles). During the 20th century berry picking as an activity has transformed from being an activity seen as an extra economic resource base in a rural farming society, into a modern context of spare time and landscapes of experiences as part of an urban consumer society. For some respondents their attitudes to berry picking are marked by those changes. “I got tired of picking berries and mushrooms in my childhood when this was necessary and obliged to our domestic economy”. “I can buy this at ICA”. Others are more positive: “Wonderful feeling to pick in the middle of nature and then make lingonberry jam”. For many people berry picking can be seen as a symbolic enactment with nature, but especially older people in the country side still continue to practice berry picking on a larger scale. Mushroom picking can be interpreted as belonging to urban lifestyles, where forests and nature can afford a particular setting for recreation. Several respondents noted

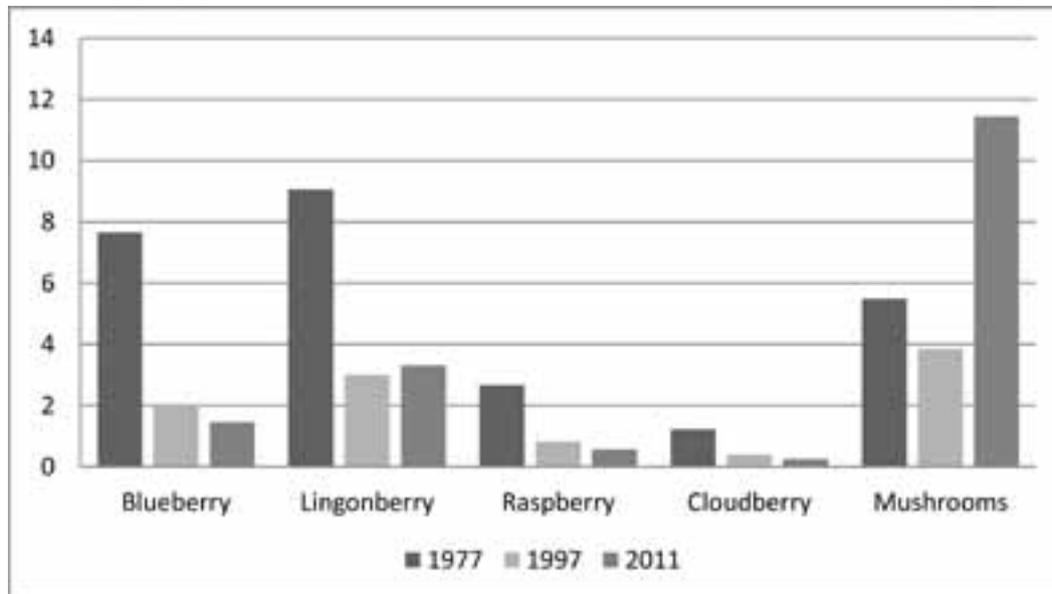


Figure 1. Mean values of the quantity of wild berries and mushrooms the respondents have gathered to be consumed in the own household during the last picking season. (estimated values in liters)

that they now prefer to pick mushrooms instead of berries, but an often expressed barrier to picking mushrooms is lack of knowledge. The social and cultural context of mushroom picking seems in particular to be urban middle class people. Our preliminary results are similar to those found in a Norwegian context (Odden 2008).

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