

Sociology of Food in Sweden
Instructor, Ken Wagner, Ph.D.

Course Description:

What people eat, when they eat, and how they eat reflect the specific history and culture of a society. We will examine how food in Sweden is a reflection or microcosm of the larger culture. The course will examine the ways in which modern and contemporary social, economic, and political changes—in technology, education, family structure, gender roles, public health, environmental protection, and immigration—have led to changes in food culture. Attention will be given to how class, social status, gender, race, and ethnicity affect food consumption, choice, and behavior. Food policy will also be addressed in the context of the development of the Swedish welfare state. Lastly, we will study the current food “revolution” in Nordic countries, highlighted by the recent emergence of internationally acclaimed restaurants in Sweden and Denmark, many of them focused on farm-to-table ingredients. Pre-requisite: one course in Sociology, Anthropology, or Public Policy. This course is typically given credit by Sociology, Anthropology, and Political Science Departments.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

- Understanding how food –the social act of eating -- in Sweden provides a theoretical lens for sociologically analyzing Swedish society and culture;
- Ability to sociologically connect your own everyday cultural observations and experiences regarding food in Sweden; i.e. with friends, with families, at food markets, at restaurants, etc., with your understanding of historical and contemporary cultural/political trends in Sweden;
- The development of a “sociological imagination” – understanding the connections between biography, history, and social structure.

Week 1: Setting a Sociological Framework: Understanding Food in Sweden as a Microcosm of Swedish Society and Culture

- Culture shock and everyday life: experiencing food as “different”
- The social construction of taste: try salt licorice!
- History, geography, and technology
- Food traditions and holidays: fika and picking mushrooms!
- Outdoor food markets: the intersection of food, culture, and commerce

Week 2: Class, Gender, Ethnicity, and Family Structure: Who is Cooking What and For Whom

- Equality in society, but what about the kitchen?
- Family policy and food
- School lunches: “the public meal” and the welfare state
- Guest lecture

Read:

Sociology on the Menu, chapters 1-4

Integration of ethnic food into Swedish food rituals. The cultural fitness of tacos:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/221862949_Integration_of_ethnic_food_into_Swedish_food_rituals_The_cultural_fitness_of_tacos

Food for Future Citizens: School Meal Culture in Sweden: Food, Culture & Society: Vol 9, No 3: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2752/155280106778813279>

Masculinity and the sociality of cooking in men's everyday lives - Jan 25, 2017: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1467-954X.12420>

Week 3: Food, Nutrition, and the Body

- Diets for whom and why
- Viewing Food as a source of pleasure and harm
- Food and cultural definitions of beauty
- Eating disorders and the influence of culture
- Guest lecture

Read:

Sociology on the Menu, chapter 5-8
Food and Cultural Studies, chapter 3

Week 5: How Public Policy Affects Food Production and Consumption

- Food policy: production, distribution, and the environment
- Public policy and nutrition; family income and access to healthy food
- The welfare state and alcohol
- Food movements: vegetarianism, vegism, organic, farm to table
- In class film: Food Inc.

Read:

Sociology on the Menu, chapter 9-11

How a national food policy could save millions of lives | Michael Pollan:
<http://michaelpollan.com/articles-archive/how-a-national-food-policy-could-save-millions-of-american-lives/>

Week 4: The Rationalization of Food: Efficiency and the Chef as the “boss”

- Work/social life balance: time out for fika
- Consumer culture and food as conspicuous consumption
- The New Nordic Cuisine: Stockholm becomes a Foodie City
- The prix fixe: why choice matters
- Eating out: on-line research before dinner?
- Writing restaurant reviews: is everyone a food critic?
- Food as a form of identity politics: who is a foodie?
- Food as entertainment: a spectator and competitive sport?

Read:

Food and Cultural Studies, chapter 5-11

Week 6: Student Presentations: Readings from Food Journals

Week 7: Immigration: Expanding the Menu

- Diversity in society and on the plate
- Street Food, The Food Truck, and the desire for cultural authenticity
- Study visit to two different food markets

Read:

The food journals of other students

People moving with food: Food, migration and multiculturalism – HiOA:

<http://www.hioa.no/Hva-skjer/People-moving-with-food-Food-migration-and-multiculturalism>

Due: Bibliography for research papers

Week 8: Study Visit: Mats Baren

- Interview with chef and dinner!

Read:

Independent literature submitted for research papers

Week 9: Study visit to the Modern Museum

- Lecture: Charlotte Birnbaum

Read:

Independent literature submitted for research papers

Week 10: Student Presentations (Draft of Final Paper)

Week 11: Student Presentations Continued

WEEK 12: “Food Stories” – Every dish tells a story: Students cook and present one Swedish dish of “cultural significance” – connecting biography, history, and social structure

Exam Week: Final Paper Due (incorporating revisions from feedback on presentations)

Grading:

Class Participation: – 25%

Food Journal: – 25%

Student Presentations: – 25%

Final Paper – 25%