Abstract


Historical agricultural and economical research indicates that the extensive changes in society that occurred in Sweden (within agriculture, trade, landownership and production) at the end of Sweden’s Time of Greatness in 1720 should have noticeably affected the living conditions of the population. A study that systematically compares the 17th and 18th century’s demography has however still not been made. Through different analyses of parish registers and other sources, this thesis shows that changes in important areas of demography took place already in beginning of the 18th century.

Mortality crises as a consequence of harvest failure and epidemics between the mid 17th century and the 1710’s were more frequent and more severe than between 1720–70. They caused a relatively greater number of deaths among adults than crises during later periods, and together with low land prices it contributed to a comparatively low marriage age for women, a factor seen by historical demographers as central to the number of children in the families. The particular economic and demographic conditions (e.g. high taxes, shortage of men) during the Great Northern War (1700–21) brought about an increase in the average age at marriage for women to 25–27 years. This level would remain until long into the 19th century. That the marriage age did not decrease after the war depended chiefly on substantially increased land prices and a lower mortality among adults. With the end of the war and the subsequent changes in society, mortality stabilized and provisions to the population during crop failures improved significantly during the 18th century. This happened through a series of different but often connected factors, the most important were the increased ambition of the state authorities to increase hunger relief, grain imports, market integration and a general improvement in the economic situation of the peasants.

The development of the population in the late 17th century Sweden can be said to have been characterized by crises. At the same time, there was a considerable capacity for the population to recover. The changes in society during the 16th century led to a significant demographic transformation as early as one hundred years before the 19th century’s more recognized transition.

Keywords: history, Sweden, transition, crop failure, demography, 17th century, 18th century, nuptiality, mortality, fertility, diseases, parish register, Tabellverket, Great Northern War, demographic change, grain prices.