

Två vita och en brun, La Paloma och notan

En studie av svensk alkoholpolitik och statliga
restaurangföretag, cirka 1920-1974

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ABSTRACT

Two whites and one brown, La Paloma and the bill. A study in Swedish alcohol policy and state owned restaurants, circa 1920-1974.

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This is a study of how the Swedish alcohol policy influenced the restaurant business between 1920 and 1974. All fully licensed restaurants are studied in general, but the specific focus is laid on describing the development and changes of five public restaurant companies, established around 1920. The theoretical framework, in which the policy influence on the market is analyzed, consists of institutional theory. Furthermore, the analysis falls within the business-history tradition of branch and company studies. This is a qualitative study that builds mainly on primary material from various archives as well as public and parliamentary reports.

The Swedish alcohol policy entered its most restrictive phase when sales of spirit in retail shops were rationed from 1920 to 1955. In order to strengthen the functioning of the restriction, the alcohol sales in restaurants also became strictly regulated. Almost all the alcohol policy measures worked in favour of the five public restaurant companies. They grew extensively both geographically and in number of establishments in the 1930s. In the 1940s, it was considered a policy necessity to increase state influence over the public restaurant companies. They were nationalized in 1946 and reorganized into companies affiliated to a state-owned parent company; the restaurant group was given alcohol policy goals. From 1946 and decades onwards, the group was the biggest hotel and restaurant company in Sweden.

It is argued that path dependence characterized a great deal of the regulation of on-the-premises sales of alcohol. While the policy regarding off-the-premises sales shifted from regulations to alcohol taxation as the main alcohol policy instrument by the mid-1950s, restaurant sales of alcohol were to a large extent still regulated. However, the regulations were not as strict after 1955 as they had been, and this paved the way for changes in the restaurant business. The restaurant offers became more diverse and the competition increased as more fully licensed restaurants were established. The fiercer competition led the restaurant group to market-adjust their restaurants and to make heavier investments. Partly because of the investments, the restaurant group underwent a severe economic crisis in the beginning of the 1970s and the group liquidated a large number of restaurants. The state-imposed rules and regulations surrounding the restaurant group were seen as obstacles to a profitable business by the group's new owner after 1970, the state-owned holding-company Statsföretag. In 1975, these rules and regulations were abolished. From then onwards, the restaurant company competed with other restaurant companies on equal terms.

KEYWORDS: Alcohol policy, restaurants, restaurant business, public restaurant companies, state owned enterprises, state monopoly, institutions, regulation, deregulation, alcohol taxation, nationalization, privatization, alcohol consumption, competition, market adjustment, business history, economic history, Sweden