

Accessing nature before “allemansrätten”?

Digital history of nature use in Sweden and Finland in the early twentieth century

Matti La Mela, matti.lamela@abm.uu.se
Uppsala University

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— **Maatalouden neuvojaa**
on Jyväskylän maaseurakunta päättänyt
läänin kuvernöriltä pyytää, tietää W. T.

— **Puoluffain wienti.** Waasasta
on taas hiljan lähetetty „Iris” laivassa
Saksaan 1,100 laatikkoa puolukoita, kus-
sakin laatikossa 22 à 23 kappa. Wal-
miina lähetettäväksi „Björn” laivalla on
vielä 1,900 laatikkoa, sisältäen yhteensä
noin 40,000 kappa. Kun puoluffain
hinta on 30 p. kappalta, ovat ne siis sa-
massa hinnassa kuin kaurat. (W. T.)

1108 ENTRY 94/O ``/O Puoluktain/O wienti/O ./O
1109 Waasasta/B-LOC on/O taas/O hiljan/O lähet
1,100/O laatikkoa/O puolukoita/O ,/O kuss
1110 Walmiina/O lähetettäväksi/O „/O Björn/B-F
sisältäen/O yhteensä/O noin/O 40,000/O kap
1111 lun/O puoluffain/O hinta/O on/O 30/O p./O
hinnassa/O tum/O kaurat/O ./O
1112 -LRB-/O W./O 2/O ./O -RRB-/O ``/O
1113 ENTRY 95/O Markkinoista/O Kuopiossa/B-LOC
pikkulaiwat/O tumallisilla/O kultumuoroil
hemostlmtin/O tuli/O maanteitä/O myöten/O
1114 Harmat/O rimit/O niistä/O tuli/O isolle/O
1115 Maalaistamaraa/O ci/O ol/O -/O !/O
1116 lut/O sanottamasti/O enemmän/O kvin/O mui
1117 päiminä/O ,/O sillä/O näin/O syksyllä/O o
1118 Huoiniota/O kui/O -/O j/O tentin/O ansait
aikana/O on/O tumallista/O enemmän/O tuot
1119 Niistä/O on/O maksettu/O aina/O s/O >/O o
mcnäläiset/O ornat/O lähettäneet/O Pietar

Research Project (2025-2028, VR):
Making public property: a digital history of
allmansrätten in Sweden and Finland, 1880–1950

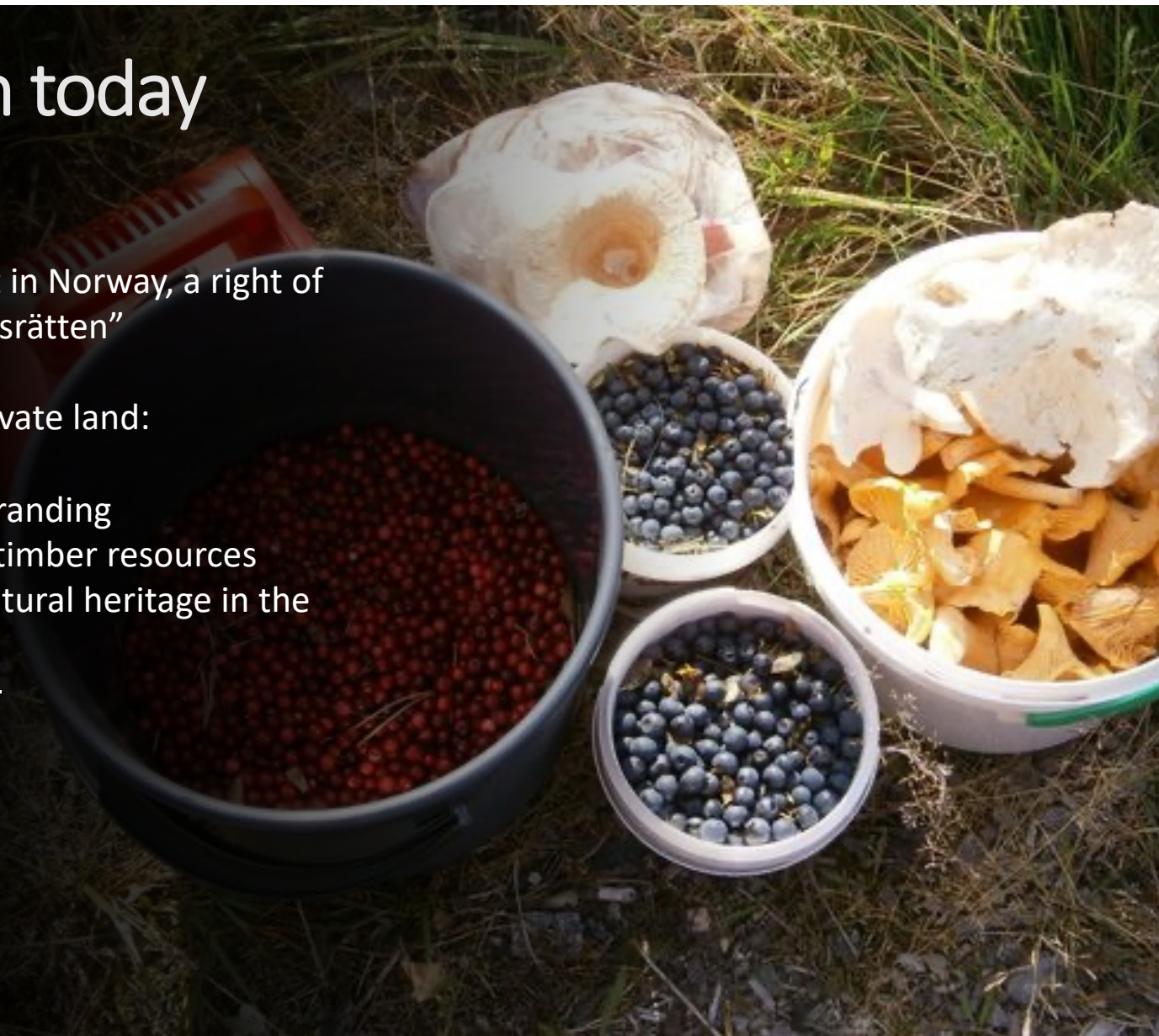
- **Studies the history of the Nordic allmansrätten, a right of public access to nature**
- **Public (open) access rights to economic resources?**
- 1. Critical revision of the tradition of allmansrätten
- 2. Theorising “public property rights”
- Focus on **non-timber resources** (invisible – both the resources and those who pick them)!

— Allemansrätten today

In Sweden, Finland, and to large extent in Norway, a right of public access to nature called "Allemansrätten"

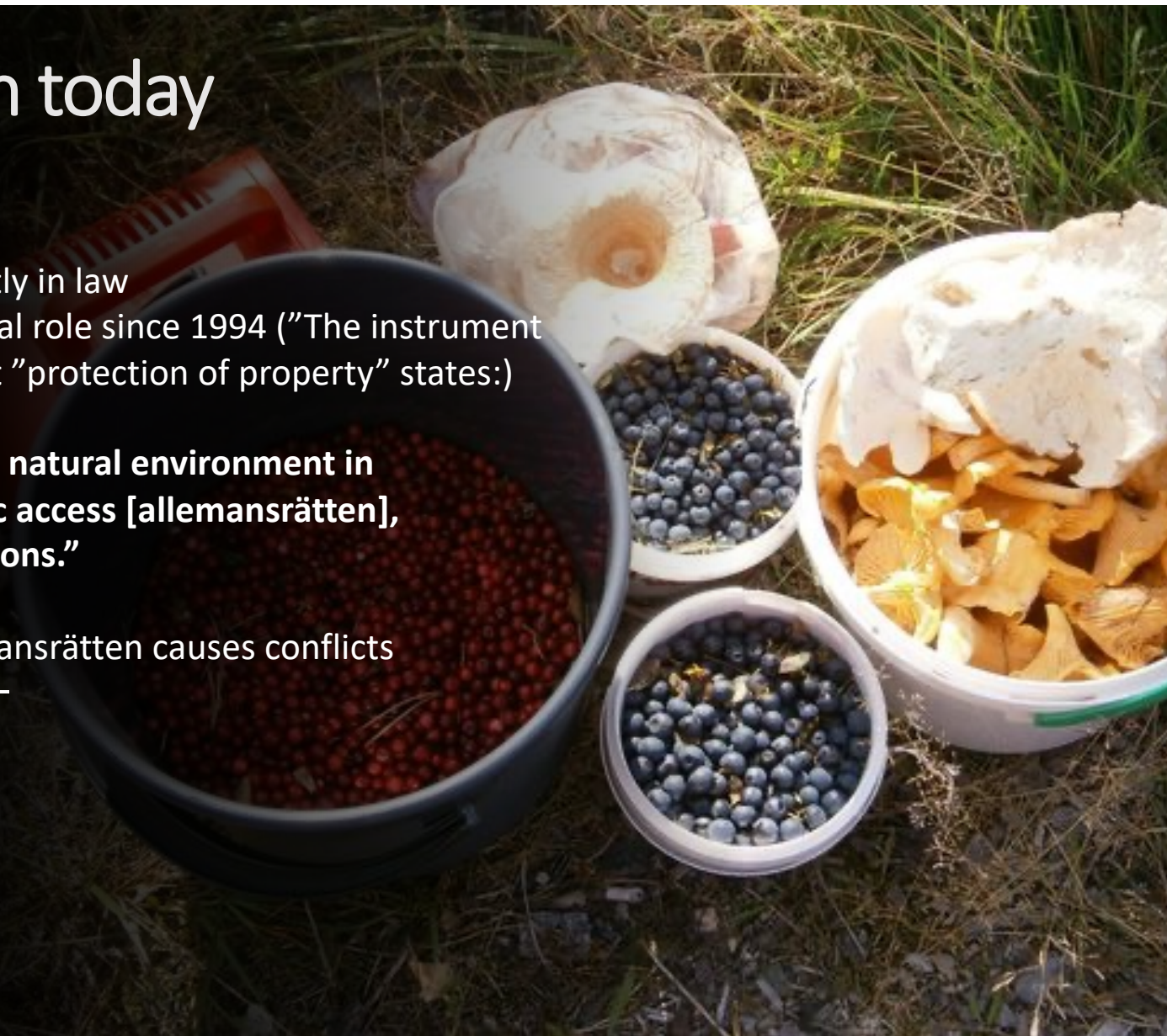
Allows to roam freely on public and private land:

- recreational purposes
 - employed in tourism and country branding
 - allows commercial foraging of non-timber resources
 - often portrayed as a tradition or cultural heritage in the Nordic countries.
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— Allemansrätten today

- Allemansrätten not defined explicitly in law
 - In Sweden, AMR has a constitutional role since 1994 ("The instrument of Government", Ch. 2, art. 1 about "protection of property" states:)
 - **"Everyone shall have access to the natural environment in accordance with the right of public access [allmansrätten], notwithstanding the above provisions."**
 - Especially commercial use of allemansrätten causes conflicts
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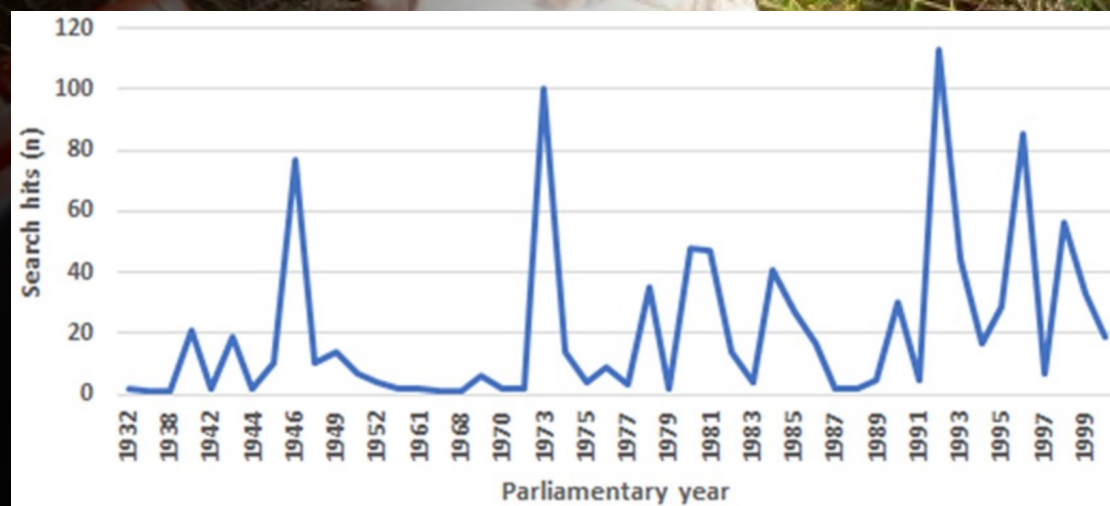


Allemansrätten in the past?

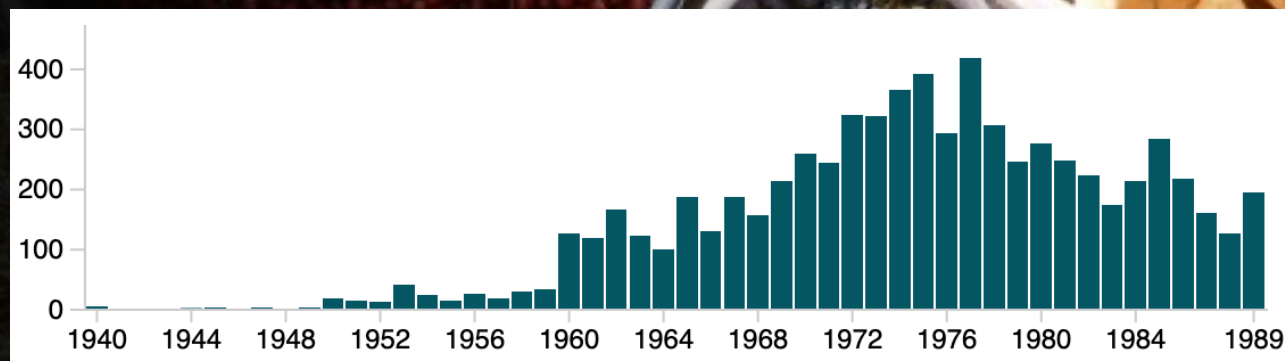
Yet, we know that the *modern* allemansrätten appeared as a term in the 1930s, became **commonly used only in the Post-WW2 period in Sweden and Finland.**

(In Finland, the term appears as “everyman’s rights to fish”)

(e.g. Kettunen-La Mela 2022;
Valguarnera 2010)



okamie in Finnish Parliamentary Debates



Allemansrätt* in Swedish Newspapers

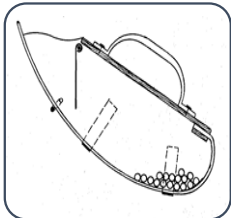
Project areas



1. Concept of allemansrätten in public discourse (1880-1950)



2. Local conflicts about access to nature and use of berries and mushrooms (1880-1920)



3. Industrial and commercial visions about berries and mushrooms (1900-1940)



“And where are you (“man”) from? Currently, everyman is allowed to fish only close to where he lives...” (Helsingin sanomat 7 April 1944)

Today's focus: allemansrätten before “allemansrätten”?

- **What can we say about the history of the concept before it was named**
 - How were the practices of access to nature conceptualised?
 - Previous work on property rights on berries, especially: Sténs & Sandström 2014, La Mela 2014.
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Allemansrätten before “Allemansrätten?”

1) Property rights in historical contexts

- Value and enforcement of property rights: private, common, open (North 1990, Ostrom 1990)
- Property rights embedded in social structures: proper owners, proper objects (Congost, Gelman & Santos 2017; Fuglestad 2018; La Mela 2016; Munzer 2001)

2) Commodification of natural resources

- Entanglement of commodity production/exchange with social structures and context as commodity frontiers, regions, chains (e.g. Beckert et al. 2021; Joseph 2019)
- **Method of digital history:** combining computational and manual work, is iterative and critical (Guldi 2023, 2018; La Mela & Oiva 2022; Fridlund & La Mela 2019)



Allemansrätten before “Allemansrätten?”

Digital analysis of Swedish and Finnish parliamentary debates:

Study on berries and mushrooms (ok today), and lichen (not allowed): the right to forage at the core of today's allemansrätten:

- 1) Study of debates through keywords
- 2) Semantic level: access rights topics?



Allemansrätten before “Allemansrätten?”

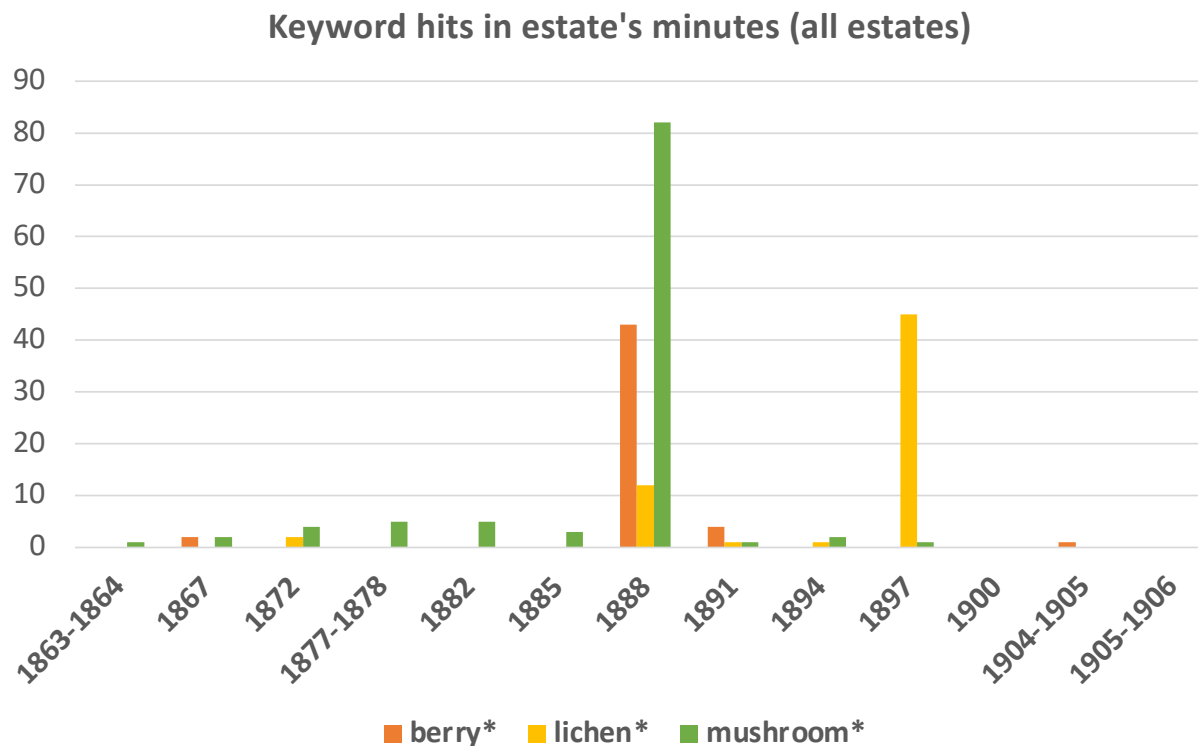
Linked open parliamentary datasets published in both countries:

- Sweden in the SWERIK project for the years 1867-2022 (<https://swerik-project.github.io/>, Yrjänäinen et al. 2024)
- Finland in the Semantic Parliament project from 1907 until today (Hyvönen et al. 2023)

Currently we digitise with SWERIK project (<https://swerik-project.github.io/>) the Finnish Diet of Estates debates, between 1863 and 1906



1) Debates: Finnish Diet of Estates (1863-1906)



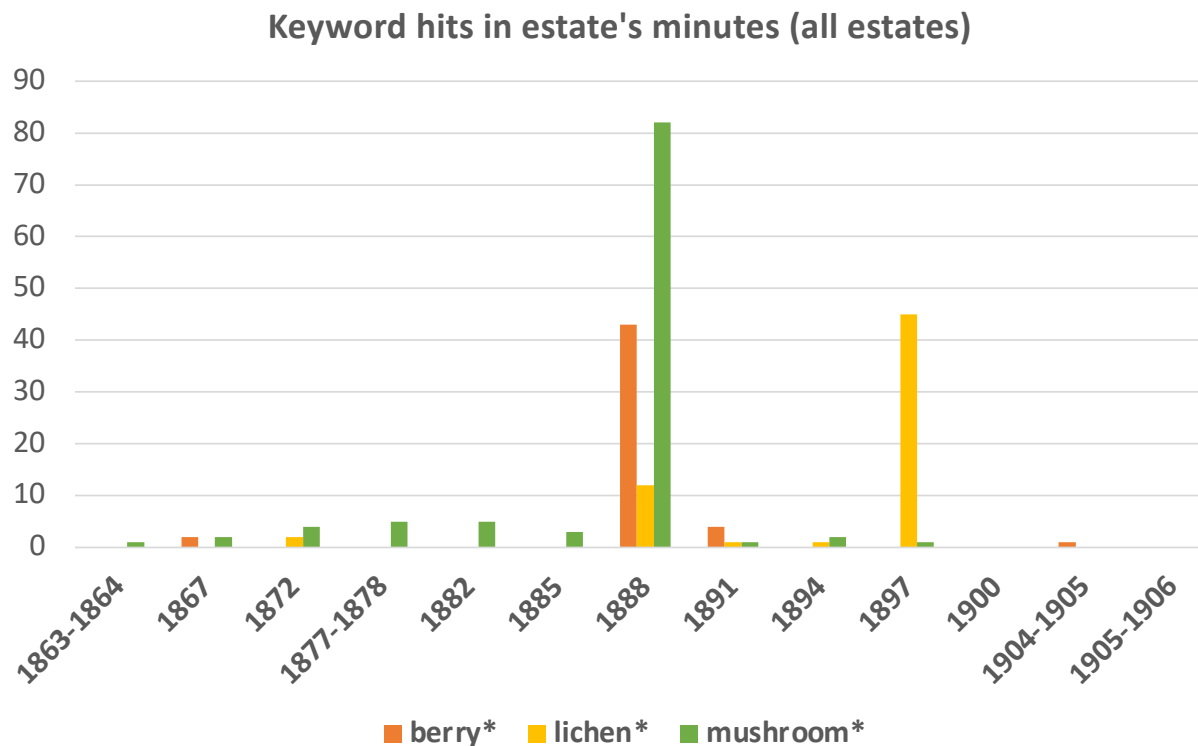
-Penal code reform in 1888:

discussion whether picking of berries and mushrooms should be explicitly prohibited by law:

-Prohibition supported by the Estates of Landowners (Bonde) and Clergy

Diet of Estates in Finland (1863-1906)

1) Debates: Finnish Diet of Estates (1863-1906)



Diet of Estates in Finland (1863-1906)

-Penal code reform in 1888:

1) property rights should be secured, also over berries, mushrooms, lichen

-just: their rising commercial value

-landowners and their tenants vs. other "strangers" / "intruders"

-educative about property

2) too cruel: the poor of the countryside pick berries

(-Lichen included as an object that cannot be collected without landowner's permit – 1897: discussion about right to take lichen on state land)

1) Debates: Finnish Diet of Estates (1863-1906)

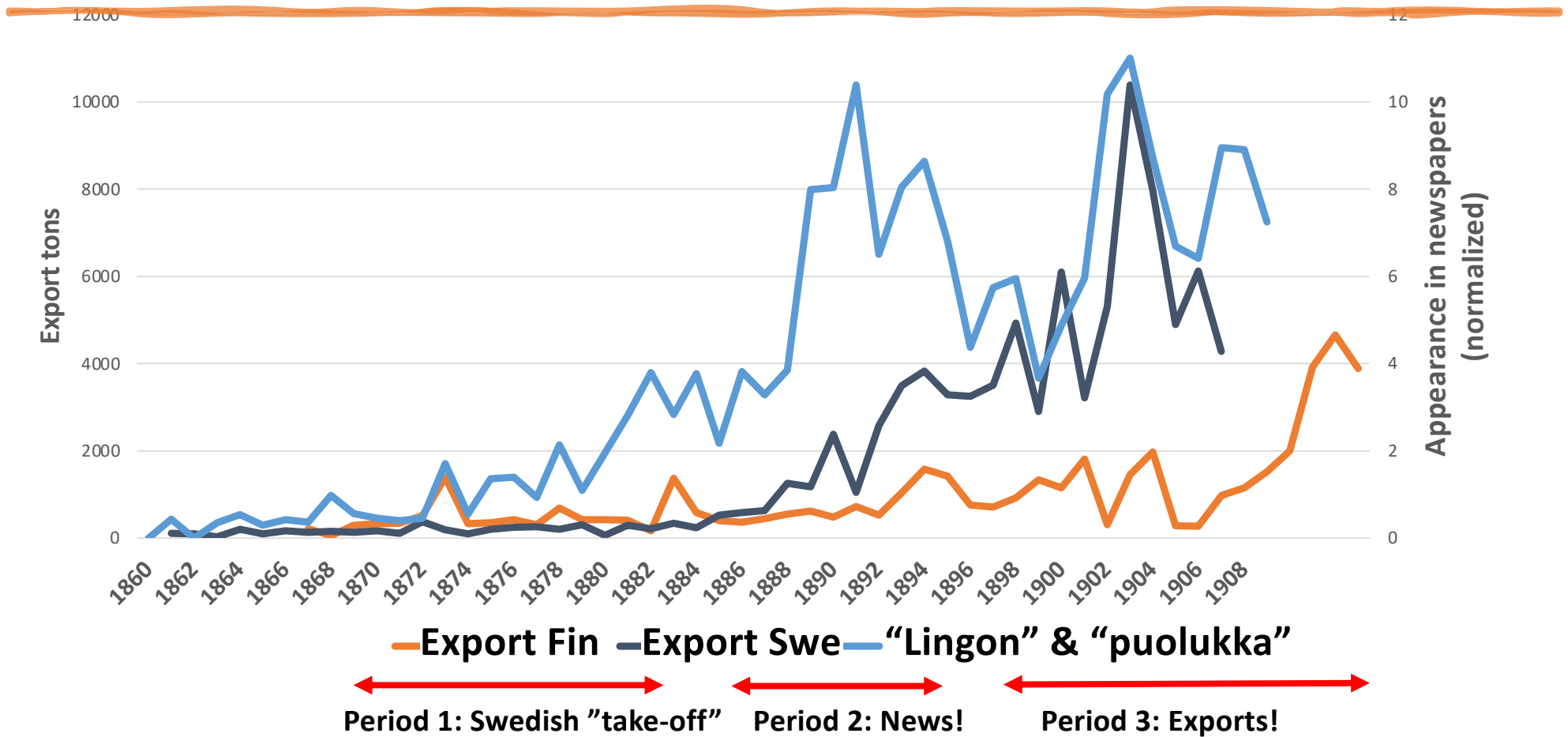
“ .. I just want to say that if these words are erased, it could cause significant harm to many. It is said here that the poor would suffer as a result. Each landlord has his own poor and naturally those who live in his area are primarily entitled to receive help and earnings from him. But the landowner won't even get the chance if his property rights are not protected. ..”

Prof. Dr. Gabriel Geitlin (Clergy, 1888, p. 1337-1338)

ole, niin asia täst'edes käy vielä vaikeammaksi kuin ennen. Minä siis kaikin puolin tahtoisin kannattaa valiokunnan mietintöä.

Tohtori Geitlin: Kun minä pyysin puheenvuoroa puolustaakseni tässä suhteessa valiokunnan mietintöä, en huomannut, että kirkkoherra Karlsberg sen jo oli tehnyt. Ja hänen erittäin ponttevan puolustuslausuntonsa lisäksi on myöskin lehtori Blomstedt puhunut samaan suuntaan, niin että minulla ei ole mitään erinomaista lisättävää. Tahdon vain lausua, että jos nämät sanat pyyhitään, sen kautta saattaa tapahtua useille suuriakin vahinkoja. Tässä on sanottu, että köyhät tulisivat kärsimään sen kautta. Kullakin talonisännällä on omat köyhänsä ja tietysti ne, jotka hänen alueellansa asuvat, etupäässä ovat oikeutetut saamaan häneltä apua ja ansiota. Mutta siihen maanomistaja ei saa tilaisuuttakaan, jos ei hänen omistusoikeutensa suojella. Pyydän sentähden että nämä valiokunnan tärkeät ja hyvin perustetut lisäykset pysytetään.

1) Debates: Public relevance and increasing berry exports



2) Access rights as a theme in the Finnish parliament (1907-1945)

- Topic modeling of the parliamentary debates with BERTopic (Grootendorst 2022; KBLab 2024)
- **BERTopic: builds clusters of documents based on their similarity (uses sentence-transformers), that are the “topics”**
- Benefits: captures polysemy (better over long time periods?), possibility of using a multilingual transformer
- Thompson & Mimno 2020: Topic Modeling with Contextualized Word Representation Clusters: BERT produces very good clustering in comparison to LDA
- KBLab and TurkuNLP Sentence Bert models



2) Access rights as a theme in the Finnish parliament (1907-1945)

- First results for Finland (1907-1945: 643 topics in the parliamentary debates)
- Berries, mushrooms appear in the discussions, **but part of other topics**, e.g.
 - 1908: as part of debates about children's work and work conditions
- Fishing rights / water law topics very clear (allemansrätten first conceptualised as "everyman's right to fish")
- Forest topic very central, but forestry as the main question (forest companies land ownership)



Conclusion: Allemansrätten before “Allemansrätten?”



1) the economic value, either rising or inexistent, of the resource central in public discussion (not really arguments related to an tradition of open access..)

2) **social context:** who are picking the berries; who should be picking the berries and why

Transforming hierarchies in the rural communities: the tenants vs the strangers, or rather: the poor population in the nation-state?

Conclusion: Allemansrätten before “allemansträtten?”



The “commercial” roots of allemansrätten?

“When the lingonberry trade is properly organized among us, even **our poor people will have their own export good**. While the rich export trees from our land abroad, the poor people rush to the forests [...] and then come to **be represented in our trade with their own export good**.”

(Business newspaper *Kauppalähti*, 11 May 1904)

Sitten kun on hankittu varmat me-
nekkipaikat, järjestettäköön puolukoiden
osto koko maata koskevaksi siten, että
kaikilta paikoilta puolukat tulevat nou-
kituksi, se tahtoo sanoa, että kaikilla
paikkakunnilla annetaan puolukoiden
poimijoille tilaisuus huokeasti vaihtaa
marjansa rahaan.

Sitten kun puolukkakauppa on meillä
oikein järjestetty, on köyhälläkin kan-
sallamme oma vientitavaransa. Kun
rikkaat vievät meiltä ulkomaille puita,
kiiruhtaa köyhä kansa vakkojen ja tuo-
histen kanssa metsään, ja tulee sitten
omalla vientitavarallaan kaupassamme
edustetuksi.

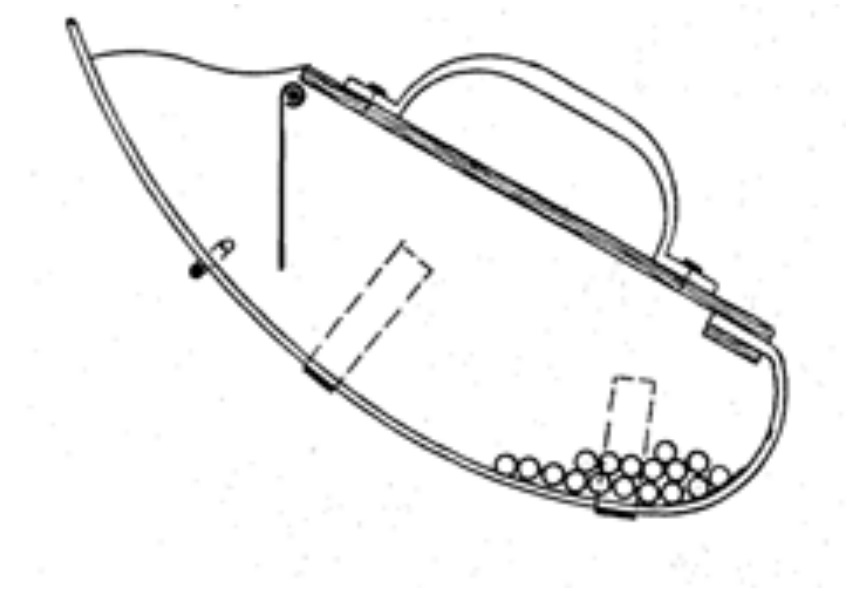
Roope Järvinen.

Thank you!

Questions, comments?

matti.lamela@abm.uu.se

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