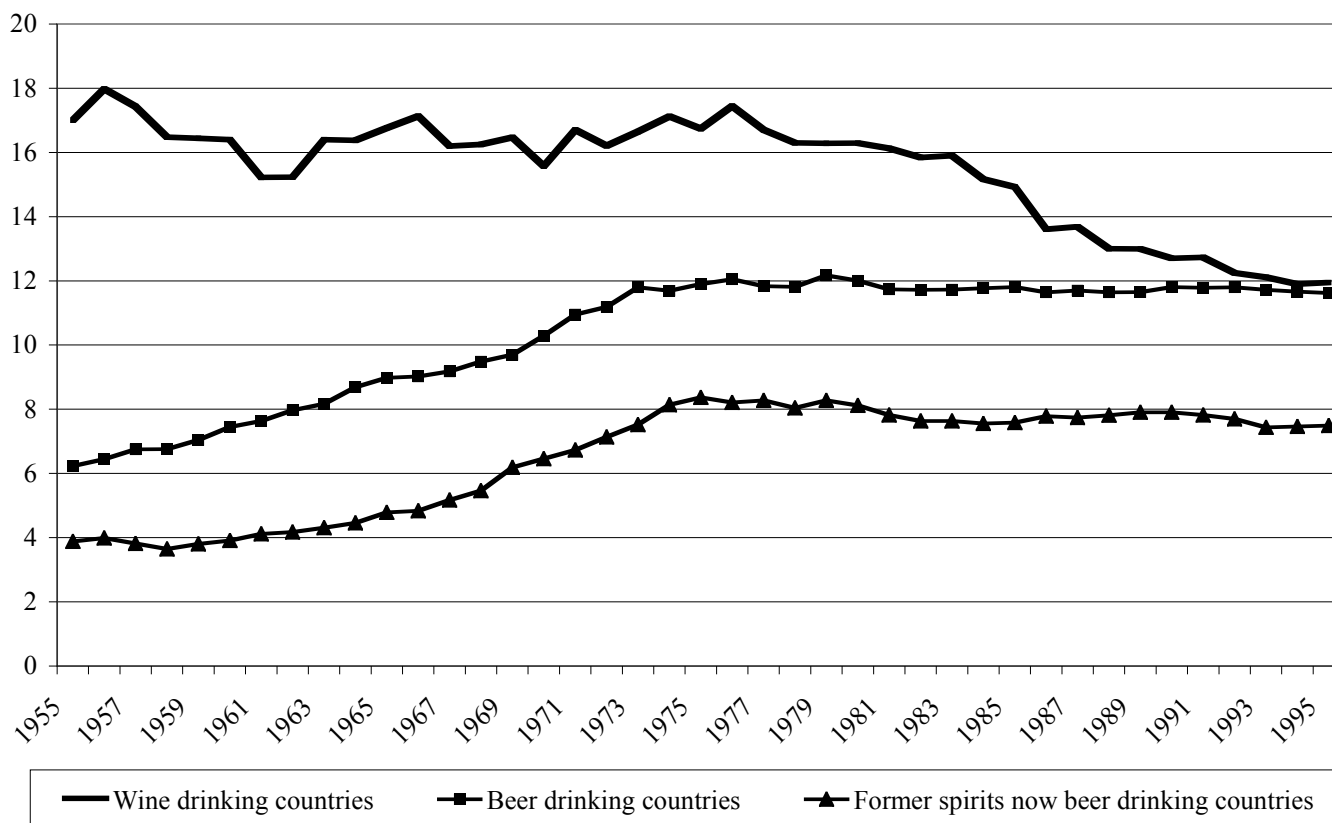


Alcohol consumption and drinking habits in the EU Member States

Paper prepared for the European Alcohol
Policy Conference, “Bridging the Gap”
16th – 19th June, Warsaw, Poland

By Thomas Karlsson
National Research and Development Centre
for Welfare and Health
Alcohol and Drug Research Group
P.O.BOX 220
FIN-00531 Helsinki
Finland

Consumption trends for three groups of countries, per capita, 15+ based on recorded alcohol.



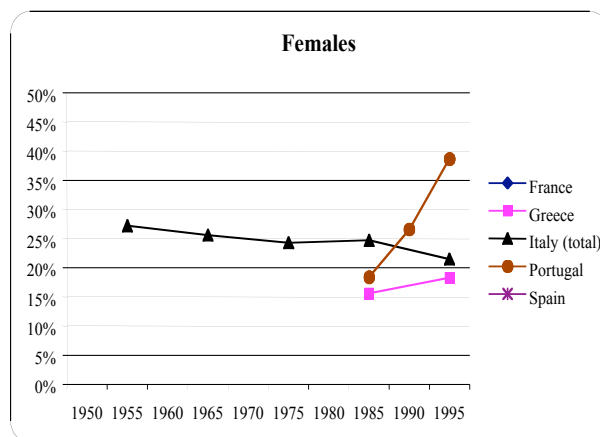
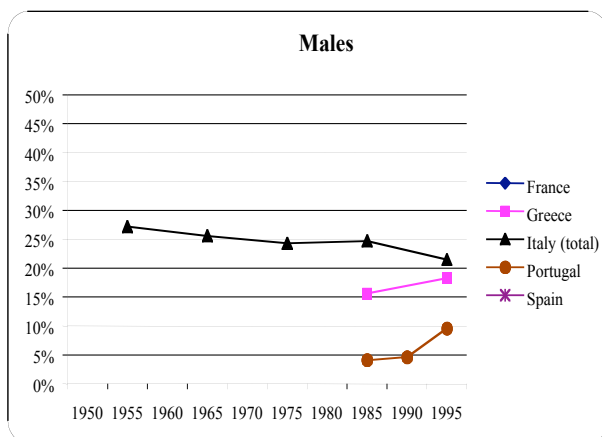
Age standardised liver cirrhosis rates, per capita 15+ in three groups of countries based on cirrhosis mortality data (underlying cause of death) for each country.

3

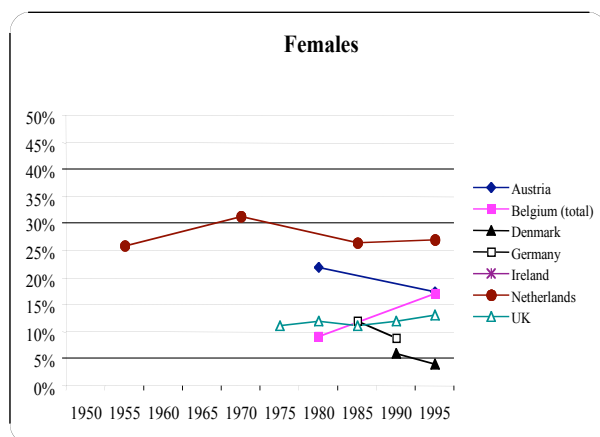
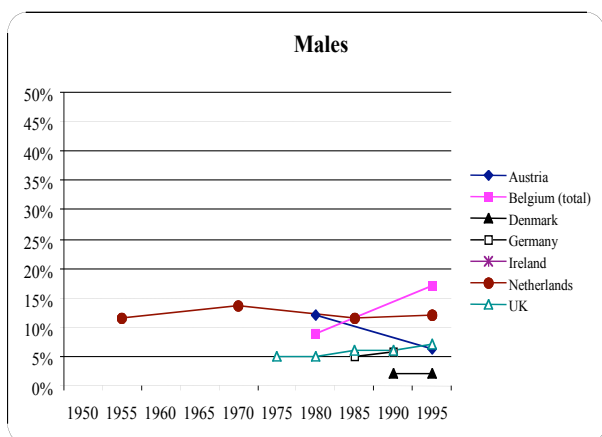


Abstainers as percentage of adult population in 15 European countries. 1950 to 1995

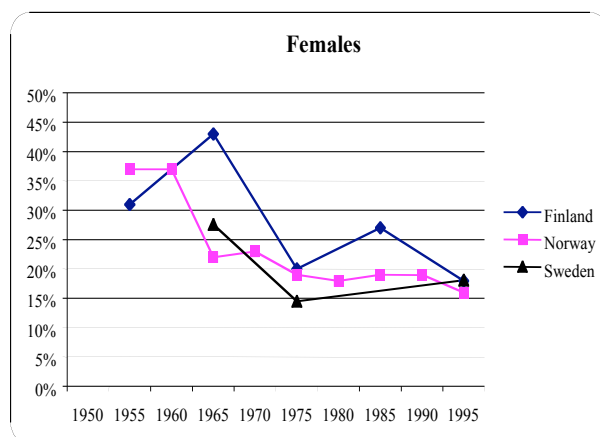
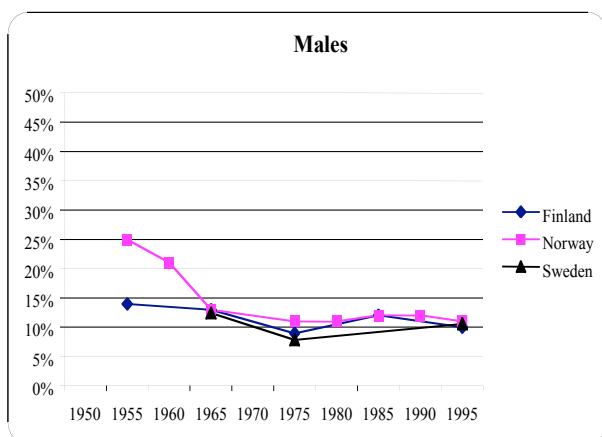
Wine countries



Beer countries

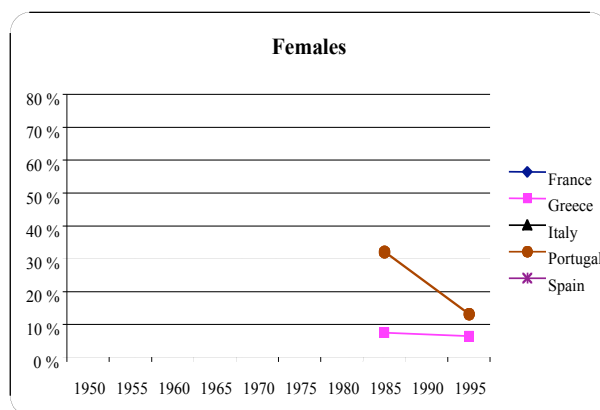
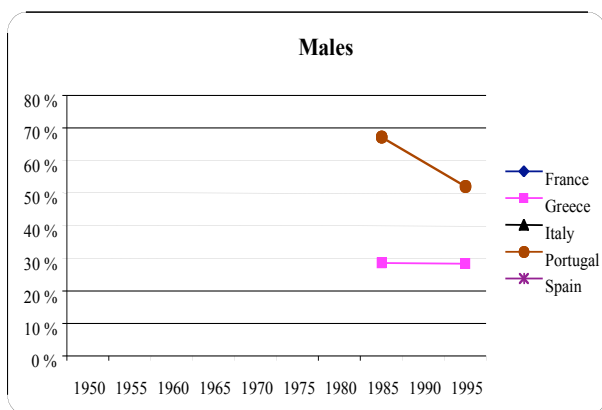


Former spirits countries

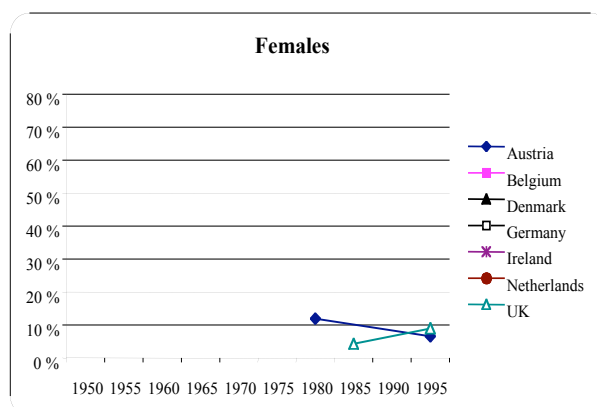
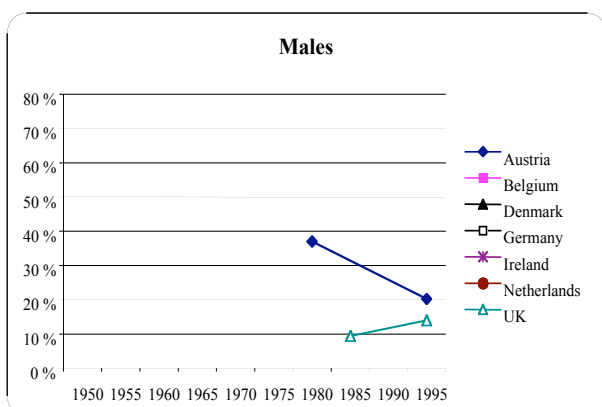


Proportion of daily drinkers (in per cent) in 15 European countries. 1950 to 1995

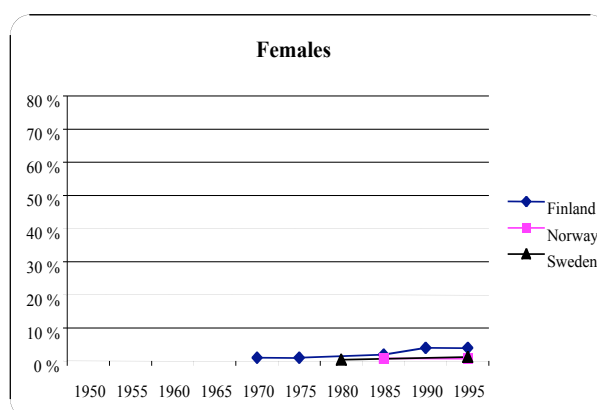
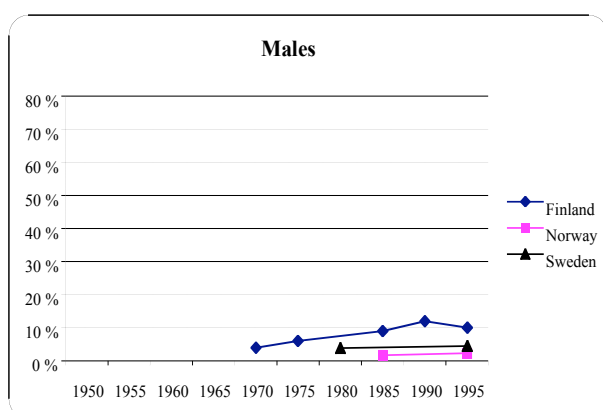
Wine countries



Beer countries

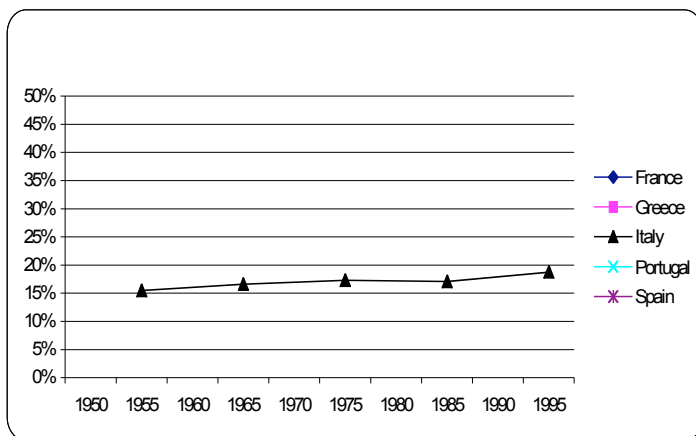


Former spirits countries

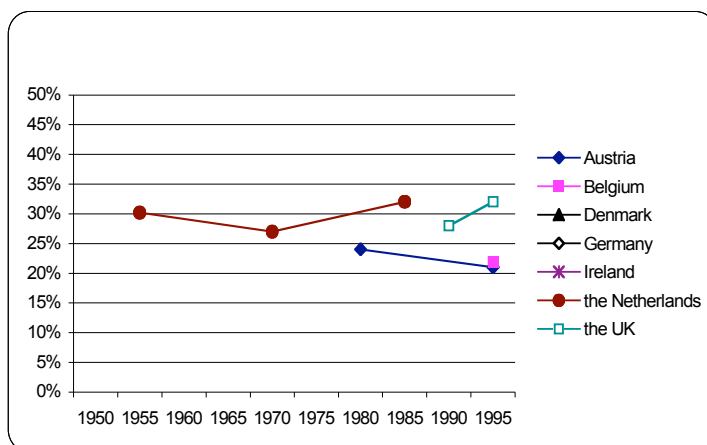


Women's share of total alcohol consumption (in percent). 1950 - 1995

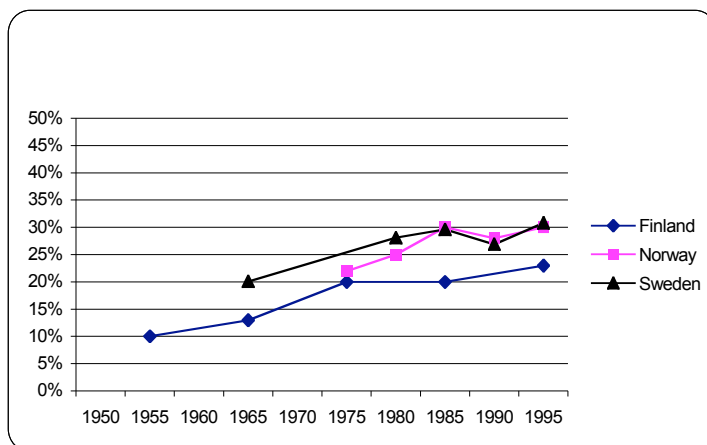
Wine countries



Beer countries



Former spirits countries



Binge drinking

- National studies suggest that the share of occasions of binge drinking may change very slowly.
- Qualitative features of drinking, such as binge drinking, can be very resistant against change, despite changes in living conditions, the economy and even alcohol policies.
- According to the six country ECAS survey the highest intoxication-oriented drinking is found in north and the lowest in south.

Drinking contexts

- The timing of drinking over the week has been influenced by the introduction of a five-day weekly working schedule.
- Drinking seems to be more concentrated in the weekends in Central and Northern Europe than in the Mediterranean countries.
- Drinking alcoholic beverages at lunch is most common in the Mediterranean countries and least common in the Nordic countries.
- It is often assumed that homes would be contexts of low risk, whereas public premises would be a context of elevated risk of alcohol-related harm. There is, however, great variation between countries and between different points of time.

Concluding remarks

- Many qualitative features of drinking patterns change all the time, but they do so very slowly.
- There are some weak signs of homogenisation in drinking patterns between the European countries.
- A behavioural pattern that is considered traditional and declining in one country (e.g. wine drinking at family meals in the Mediterranean countries) may be modern and increasing in other countries (e.g. wine drinking at family meals in the Nordic countries).
- Cultural friction against changes in drinking patterns may easily be overlooked, and similarly, prospects for positive results from influencing the patterns exaggerated.