

Research article

Strange encounters with ice at US motels – and Nordic translations

Helene Brembeck

This essay is a humble attempt to shed some rays of light on the cultural history of the practice of using ice cubes in drinks, its past, present and to some extent future. Departing from the author's travel documentation from trips to the US and examples from Sweden from the internet, literature, archives and interviews it aims to share reflections on the normalization and translatability to different cultural contexts of the use of ice cubes. It also provides a couple of examples of failed translations and some reflections on the future of ice cubes in an era of environmental crisis. Well aware that there are many stories to be told about ice cubes, the hope is that this essay will arouse interest and curiosity of this tiny object and its possibility to open up perspectives on our society and its history.

Keywords: ice cube; USA; Sweden; normalization; translation

Denna essä är ett kulturhistoriskt försök i all enkelhet att sprida ljus över användningen av isbitar i drycker förstådd som en praktik, dess historia, nutida användning och till viss del framtid. Med utgångspunkt i författarens resedagbok från USA och svenska exempel och med hjälp av ett blandat material bestående av litteratur, material från internet och olika arkiv samt korta intervjuer per telefon och email är ambitionen att förmedla intryck av iskubens normalisering och översättning till olika kulturella kontexter. Essän avslutas med ett par exempel på misslyckade översättningar och reflektioner om isbitens framtid i en tid av ökande klimatmedvetenhet. Väl medveten om mångfalden av möjliga historier och perspektiv på isbiten, är författarens förhoppning att essän skall väcka intresse och nyfikenhet för detta vardagliga objekt och dess möjlighet att ge perspektiv på vårt samhälle och dess historia.

Nyckelord: iskub; USA; Sverige; normalisering; översättning

Travelling across the US by car together with my partner, the first thing that strikes us as first-time visitors to American hotels and motels is the plastic bowl, a few decimeters high, usually round and white, sometimes square and brown, and with a plastic bag hanging over one edge. As if on an altar, it has been centrally placed on a table or low refrigerator along with a few plastic glasses. A slush bucket, we wondered in the first motels we visited. On the other hand, there were rubbish bins in the room, so we did not really understand what the bucket was for. To tell the truth, we used it mainly for rinsing underwear.

The next clue was the ice machine. In the same way that the bowl was mandatory in the rooms, the ice machine seemed to be in the lobby. Next to it was the vending machine filled with 50 centiliter soft drink bottles. But unlike the soda, the ice was free. We were amazed by what we interpreted as the need for ice cubes for

soft drinks – because we assumed that was what the ice was used for – but still did not connect the machine and the bucket. In fact, we did not do so until a little over a week into our trip when we saw a man walking in the attic corridor outside our motel room with the plastic bucket to the brink filled with ice. The bowl was thus neither a slush bucket nor a washbowl but an ice bucket (Author's travel notes).

This experience became the starting point for an interest in ice cubes, which until then had been silent and unproblematized companions of the everyday for me. It took a trip to the US and seemingly strange new practices to open my eyes to the relevance of ice cubes as cultural objects.

Purpose, method and structure

The purpose of this essay is to shed some light on the cultural history of the practice of using ice cubes in drinks, its past, present and to some extent its future. My



Image 1: Luxury version of ice bucket with lid with nob at a NY hotel. Photo: Author.

ambition is by no means to write the full cultural history of the ice cube. Instead, I seek to simply, and through a couple of examples, share reflections on its normalization and translatability to different cultural contexts, and on some of the dimensions and connections this exercise opens up. Although a lot has been written on freezing and ice generally, not much research has focused specifically on the ice cube and its role in shaping history. With this essay, I therefore wish to bring attention to how the ice cube, as a tiny and ephemeral object, matters.

Even though the intention is not to give a theoretical contribution, the essay engages with practice and consumption theories. As a practice, the use of ice cubes connect to works by Schatzki (2002) and Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012), speaking of interlinkages of meanings, materiality and technologies for new practices to emerge. Normalization, making foodstuff a normal part of everyday life, can be better understood following Jackson et al. (2018). Czarniawska and Sévon (2005) disclose processes of translation, or the way objects and ideas move and adapt to different cultures.

Apart from the literature cited, the essay builds on the author's travel documentation from trips to the US, blogs and media searches on the internet, adverts, archival material from The Centre for Business History, contacts with the marketing departments of ICA and COOP, web material and newspaper clippings from the company MR.ICEMAN, and interviews over the phone and via

email with the company's founder and director Jack Stensland. This means that it is methodologically guided by the multi-sited approach common in Ethnology (Marcus 1995), and where the searchlight is directed at interesting examples of the object of study, anywhere they can be found in times, places and different types of data.

The essay is structured by first reflecting on the ice cube as a cultural object at US motels, followed by an attempt to contextualize the American use of ice cubes and apply theories of translation and normalization to better understand these processes. It then turns to Sweden and provides glimpses from history, the present, and to some extent the future of ice cubes emerging from the data. It then provides a couple of examples of failed translations and some reflections on the future of ice cubes in an era of climate crisis and environmental concerns, before concluding with some reflections on normalization and translation.

Glimpses from the US

As an ethnologist, my initial approach was to trace the practice of using ice cubes for drinks in history. Searching the internet, I found bits and pieces such as online articles by journalists (for example Schwedel, 2015, Mitenbuler 2016, Julavits 2016). These led me to academic overviews, primarily Jonathan Rees' impressive work *Refrigeration nation* (2013). Soon I found myself immersed in the history of the North American ice trade during the 19th century.

It seemed evident that the prehistory of the ice cube involved giant blocks of ice from North American lakes used to preserve foodstuff. Although many countries with winter climates, such as Norway, exported large blocks of ice from lakes and streams to cities and warmer countries already in the 1800s (see Bagle in this theme section; Norseng 2020), no nation seems to have been as persistent in this endeavor as the Americans, at least from the start. Rees shows how ice, already in the 19th century, became big business (Rees 2013: 11ff). A prominent actor was Fredric Tudor, who would become one of America's first millionaires. Thanks to technologies such as the horse-drawn ice plough, and materials such as sawdust for preservation, it was possible to store and transport ice far from its origin.

Tudor's ice empire extended beyond the big cities of the American north. He began exporting ice to warmer countries on a large scale as early as the early 19th century, mainly to facilitate food storage. But Tudor tried to expand his business further, and thus the ice cube entered the stage. He began to suggest to his customers that not only could ice be used for food storage, but cut in smaller pieces it could also be used for cooling drinks. In other words, translating ice from food storage to drinks equipment. Prior to this, alcoholic drinks had mainly been served hot: toddy, mead, mulled wine. Changing people's tastes is not easily done, but being the skilled businessman Tudor was, he used the strategy

of first donating the ice for free and then only starting to charge when people began to get a taste for chilled drinks, which they eventually did (Rees 2013: 22).

At the end of the 19th century, ice had, according to Rees, become more of an everyday commodity in the USA, to the extent that a British travel writer called the icebox “the country’s emblem” and Mark Twain nominated the devotion to ice-water “the only thing that can be called by the wide name ‘American’” (2013: 84, 121).

This spread and popularization of ice cubes was mainly due to a new technology: the ice machine. As ice gained importance in daily life and newspapers warned about “ice famines” due to unseasonably warm winters, the spread of ice for consumption became dependent on ways of manufacturing rather than on harvesting ice. The first ice machines were powered by steam and weighed tons, and were not something for home use. When industrial-size ice machines were introduced in the 1890s, hotels were among the first businesses to embrace them, providing this luxury to their guests at all times in order to not be at the mercy of harvested ice (Rees 2013). An example of a Norwegian ice machine is provided in image no. 2.



Image 2: Norwegian ad from the early 20th century, likely mainly targeting hotels and other establishments for the upper classes. Illustration: The Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology, Industrihistoriskt Arkiv, Mappe 14.

As refrigeration was introduced in US homes, the ability to make ice cubes in your own kitchen became an effective selling point for electric household refrigerators during

the 1920s (Rees 2013). The first flexible stainless steel ice machine was invented in 1933, and from the 1960s icemakers inside refrigerator doors became common.

A final chapter in the ice cube’s journey from the cobbles and martinis of the wealthy to the plastic ice buckets of low-price motels goes through another American entrepreneur: Kemmons Wilson, the founder of Holiday Inn. From its founding in 1952, the chain offered free ice to its guests via ice machines. Wilson was so upset that he himself had to pay for ice in a hotel that he decided that his hotel guests would get it for free. More importantly, Wilson was also an early proponent of franchising, envisioning a hotel chain where guests could expect the same service and hotel standard wherever they were in the country – including ice machines and ice buckets (Halberstam 1993). Ice had travelled from the cocktail glasses of the wealthy to Cola glasses and ice buckets for almost everyone. Refrigeration has become part of American culture, argues Rees (2013), more so than in any other nation.

Normalizing and translating ice cubes in new contexts

The story of the ice cube is a good example of the interconnectedness of meanings, materialities, and technologies for new practices to establish and spread. Thanks to inventions such as ice plows and ice machines, and materials such as sawdust, the luxury item was able to spread and become a normalized part of everyday life in the US. Normalization involves the meanings attached to ice cubes, the practices with which they are associated, the embeddedness of iced cubes in the routines and rhythms of everyday life, and what Bente Halkier (2010) has called “do-ability” in terms of technical feasibility and cultural appropriateness: ice cubes have to be easily produced, easily obtained and considered okay (fun and festive) to use. Moreover, they seem to have a special quality as easily translatable to different places and contexts.

An example of the ice cube’s capacity to translate to new cultural contexts from the early period is given by Hi’ilei Julia Hobart (2016) on the ice trade to Honolulu. In 1850, Honolulu received its first shipment from North America of cold, clear ice for public sale used to chill cocktails and other refreshments, much to the delight of the city’s elite who found its refreshing qualities most agreeable. In Hawaii however, coldness and ice traditionally had dubious connotations to class, ethnicity and gender. For those who were not used to rapid cooling in the hot climate and were considered lacking in self-control, notably natives and women, ice consumption could cause disease and even death. Hobart shows the complex ways in which Euro-American uses of ice was gradually translated to uses in the local context (Hobart 2016: 468). In fact, the delight in the ice cube among the upper classes was spurred not only by its ephemerality, coldness, and newness, but also by its “dangerous” and exotic cultural associations. At the

same time, ice cubes gradually became common for household uses among the less fortunate “and no longer starred at as a curiosity, or monopolized by the gentlemen at the bar” (Hobart 2016: 247). This shows that although the first meaning construction of ice was as an expensive and difficult to procure luxury for the very rich, another quality was its high degree of translatability to more everyday and less affluent settings.

Hobart’s example proves the involvement of the body in processes of normalization. This process is to a large extent about bodily arousal and attachment: getting a taste for chilled drinks. This is partly due to processes that Sidney Mintz (1985: 122–123), in his historical studies of another new substance – sugar has called “extensification”: larger numbers of people are becoming used to the substance on a daily basis, gradually reducing its status as a glamorous luxury and precious good, at the same time as it is “intensified” as a festive luxury item in its original context. These processes are examples of the spread in time and space of objects and ideas through translation. Extensification involves how old meanings are detached from the past and translated to new settings. Free ice cubes at motels are one example, ice cubes in the context of family outings another. On our trips to the US, we learned that a traditional summer activity for Americans is to go on a tour of various state and national parks, of which there are many in the United States.

On these trips, giant cooler bags with foods and drink were packed and every morning refilled with new ice, which gradually melted during the day and needed to be refilled at home the following morning. There are even special compartments for melt

water and openings where this can be poured out. (Author’s travel notes).

The ice cube had been translated, “extensified”, to other contexts and acquired new meanings and uses in an assemblage with practicing family time and outdoor summer activities.

Glimpses from Sweden

The Swedish history of commercial ice resembles the American, with harvesting in the winter and ice men delivering to the growing city population (e.g., Vretblad 1989). Ice cubes first entered the homes of the wealthy at the turn of the 20th century, not least spurred by inventive new techniques of consuming alcohol as drinks and cocktails thus subverting alcohol restrictions during the otherwise “roaring twenties”, which provided new lifestyles and a more glamorous commercial and media culture (e.g., Aléx et al 2001; Fornäs 2004).

The connection to luxury, upper class, flair, and ice was evident at the introduction of the new soft drink Pommac in the 1920s. The target group was “the beautiful people” and Pommac was intended as an alternative to alcoholic beverages. Advertising posters in soft pastel colors show smart young people in 1920s’ dresses and hairdos riding in open sports cars, racing, horse riding, sunbathing on the beach, having parties, sitting at bridge tables, dancing the Charleston at tea dances, and being served Pommac in cocktail glasses with ice cubes. The Gin-Flip was a fancy drink made from chilled Pommac, a shot of gin and “preferably an ice cube in the glass” (Blom 2004: 4–5). Even more obvious is the connection between drinks and ice a little over a decade later (1944), when famous actors Max Hansen and



Image 3: Iceman with blocks of ice on his back by his horse and carriage on Strandvägen, Stockholm. 1912–1925. Photographer: Unknown. Image number: SSME030566 Stockholm City Museum, Sweden.

Sickan Carlsson enjoy the drink Gröna hissen (literally meaning “the green elevator”) in the film of the same name. “Do you know how to make a cocktail?” Max Hansen asks. “I guess you pour well until it tastes good. And then you add ice”, answers Sickan Carlsson (Blom 2004: 8).

Although there are many uses for ice cubes, for example for health purposes, the possibility to make your own ice cubes and be able to serve your guests chilled drinks was a major selling point for refrigerators as they became affordable for the upper and middle classes in the 1920s and 1930s. Matilda Marshall (2021) provides examples of adverts for refrigerators from the 1930s announcing “Half-warm grogs – what if Svensson had a Frigidaire...” and “Mrs Cooleman can always offer something extra [...] even for the unexpected guests. The selling point was refrigerators (and ice cubes) as social facilitators (ibid).

Ice cubes gradually found their way into Swedish households. By the 1950s, domestic refrigerators could be found in almost every Scandinavian home. As shown by Marshall (this theme section), freezers were introduced in the 1940s and were commonplace by the 1960s. There were already attempts at introducing small ice machines for use in homes, hotel rooms, caravans, boats or in truck cabins at the turn of the 21st century. Another Scandinavian invention was the ice cube bag: a plastic bag in which you pour water to make your own ice cubes. Danish inventor Erling Vangedal-Nielsen applied for a US patent for this “freezing mold bag” in 1987 (US patent 4181285 published 01/243/1978, issued 1 January 1980).

For contemporary households there are still basically two means of production. Firstly, as a luxury from a built-in ice machine in the refrigerator. This way “you’ll never again have to worry about not buying enough ice cubes for the party”, as one ad says (Elgiganten 2022). Secondly, as a party detail. There is an abundance of ice cube molds and trays available from which you can make your own ice cubes of all sizes, shapes and colors for your children’s birthday parties and other festive occasions.

But the translation of ice cubes doesn’t stop there. In the beginning of the 2000s, a new product entered the grocery store. Plastic bags filled with ice cubes. Although this commodity had long been for sale in the US, this was something new and previously unheard of in Sweden. In the Nordic countries, where there is no shortage of water or energy, there is clean water directly from the tap, and almost all families have freezers, the idea of paying for this commodity in shops seemed peculiar. As shown by comments on the internet, the icebag as a commodity at Swedish ICA in the mid-2010s was met with great distrust by consumers. This commodity was discussed as something completely unnecessary. One blogger wrote for example, “Buying bottled water is bad enough, but buying ice is one step worse” (Money for nothing 2017).



Image 4: Jack Stensland poses in front of what he argues are “The world’s largest ice machines” soon to be unveiled at the opening of the new ice factory in 2019. Photo by an employee at the factory.

“Like selling sand in Sahara” – ice cubes in bags

The biggest ice company in Scandinavia is the Norwegian company MR.ICEMAN. On the homepage (www.mriceman.com) I read about the company and its products, and its founder Jack Stensland provided me with information of the transformation to big pack from his and the company’s perspective.

According to Stensland, commercial ice cubes found their way to the Scandinavian consumer market as a party ingredient in drinks for festive occasions, much in the same way as they did in the US market. Stensland told of how he as a young partygoer in the 1980s recognized that the ice cubes in the fridge were old and unappetizing. This observation lingered in the back of his mind when he visited Spain years later and encountered the delights of cold drinks. In 1999, he bought an ice machine intended for hotels and started Scandinavia’s first ice factory in his father’s garage. Like Fredric Tudor, Stensland was first met with great suspicions on the possibility of selling a product that you could make yourself for free in the freezer. “Selling ice in Norway was like selling sand in Sahara”, Stensland contends. Coincidentally, the company that first allowed him to try was American 7-Eleven, a well-known chain of

MAKE AN AVERAGE DRINK FEEL A LITTLE LESS AVERAGE.



ICE BALLS – 45MM KRYSTALLKLARE ISKULER SOM
VARER DOBBELT SÅ LENGE SOM VANLIG ISBITER.
– KJØPES HOS MENY, JACOBS, SPAR, JOKER OG BUNNPRIS.
mriceman.com

MR. ICEMAN

Image 5: Everything gets a little better with ice cubes, argues this ad for the (then) new ice balls. Published with permission from MR. ICEMAN.

convenience stores. According to Stensland, this company's history was made on ice, as ice blocks for ice boxes was one of its first products at the opening in Texas in 1927.

Part of the MR.ICEMAN's' expansion the first years after its founding in 1999 was due to Stensland spotting a niche market in Oslo.

In Norway, Oslo is a tiny metropolis, and there were the ones who were a little cool, the ones who partied quite a lot, a generation of 20–25 year-olds, they were the first to start... thinking 'yeah, but this is so much fun'... (Jack Stensland)

The idea was that, on your way home from a night out with friends and craving for an after-party, you could pop into 7-Eleven and buy a couple of icebags as a "cool, a little bit crazy thing to do". The intended target group was mostly wealthy young men who had profited from the upsurge of the financial market of the 1990s, leading to a somewhat extravagant life, and were eager to try "cool" and "crazy" things.

Although a small segment of cool partygoers adopted this practice of buying ice cubes, the road to more general acceptance was long and demanded a lot of work, Stensland says. It took about 10 years for ice cubes in bags to be accepted. Without means to advertise, the diffusion was very gradual and mostly by "word of mouth".

Today, more than 20 years after their introduction, bags of ice cubes can be bought in most larger shops and petrol stations. Stensland considers that this process has happened much like Coca Cola, hamburgers and pizza, having become parts of the Scandinavian diet. Young partygoers have become parents and there is now a generation growing up that is habituated to ice cubes as a normal ingredient at bars and for festive occasions.

In the early 2010s, Stensland started cooperating with a Swedish colleague and expanded his business to Sweden. His company is now the biggest ice producing company in the Nordic countries and one of the biggest in Europe. One could imagine that the possibility of making your own ice with the help of the increase of inbuilt ice machines in refrigerator's doors would diminish the need for commercial ice. But for some reason this has not happened. In both Norway and Sweden, you can find large 2 kg bags of ice in any well stocked grocery store and petrol station. Large distributors such as ICA and COOP are not only selling ice from MR.ICEMAN, but also ice their own brand (although often produced by MR.ICEMAN). So how have Swedish consumers reacted? "Now we've got MR.ICEMAN Ice Balls. Crystal clear and completely oxygen-free, not just good-looking in the drink – lasts twice as long as regular ice", ICA Maxi in Linköping announced on its Facebook page under the heading "På er önskan" ("At your request"). This was both to customers' delight ("to be tested!") and disbelief ("make the ice in the freezer at home instead") (ICA Maxi Linköping 2020).

In early summer 2022, the ICA Supermarket in Håsta outside Hudiksvall advertised the possibility to book three 2 kg bags of ice for Midsummer for a special price, resulting in 41 comments from consumers eager to book up to 12 bags. "Is it too late? Otherwise, I would like 6 bags" one concerned consumer comments. "Hello!", another one anxiously exclaims, "Missed the deadline! Is there a possibility to order anyway if you pick it up today?" and when the shop answers that this is ok the customer exclaims "Thanks god, that's great"! I'll have three" (ICA Maxi Håsta 2021).

From information on the homepages cited above, it is likely that part of this ice is used to cool food in summer cottages, caravans, and boats etc., not least for a traditional outdoor holiday in Sweden like Midsummer. The function to chill drinks and create festive atmospheres, however, is evident in the variety of ice for drinks that is sold, such as balls, sticks, crushed, and of course cubes. The desire to vary your drinks seems endless.

Failed translations

The adoption of ice cubes for chilling drinks is not straightforward. This was noted already in the 19th century by US ice companies trying to cultivate the British market. Although skilled bartenders were sent to Britain to teach the English how to make American-style mixed drinks, the ice market in England failed (Rees 2013: 25f). In the mid-1900s, ice was a luxury only indulged by the aristocracy. Since the poor and middle classes could not afford this, it never got hold of their drinking habits. The stumbling blocks were both logistic, economic, and cultural. Likewise, Stensland never succeeded in the attempts to conquer Denmark with his products. Stensland refers to stinginess but there is probably a combination of reasons, such as a different drinking pattern favoring beer, and perhaps other freezing practices, such as using the Danish invention of the freezing mold bag.

Where ice cubes have succeeded, there have been a number of co-constitutive factors forming an assemblage: material, technological, symbolic, coupled with the high degree of translatability. The specificity of ice, its fragility and ephemerality, contribute to its status as a luxury for festive occasions, and the belief that it enhances sociality seem to have contributed to the success. Equally important is the possibility to produce and transport ice in large quantities, as well as clever marketing and cunning entrepreneurs such as Tudor or Stensland.

None of this guaranteed that ice cubes would be more than a fad for the rich in new markets. For lasting success, ice cubes needed to be translated to become part of the common diet, at least for some and on some occasions. People needed to acquire a taste for ice and become habituated to it as an embodied part of their everyday life, which takes years, maybe even a generation or two. Such processes have been described in many cases where people have acquired tastes for

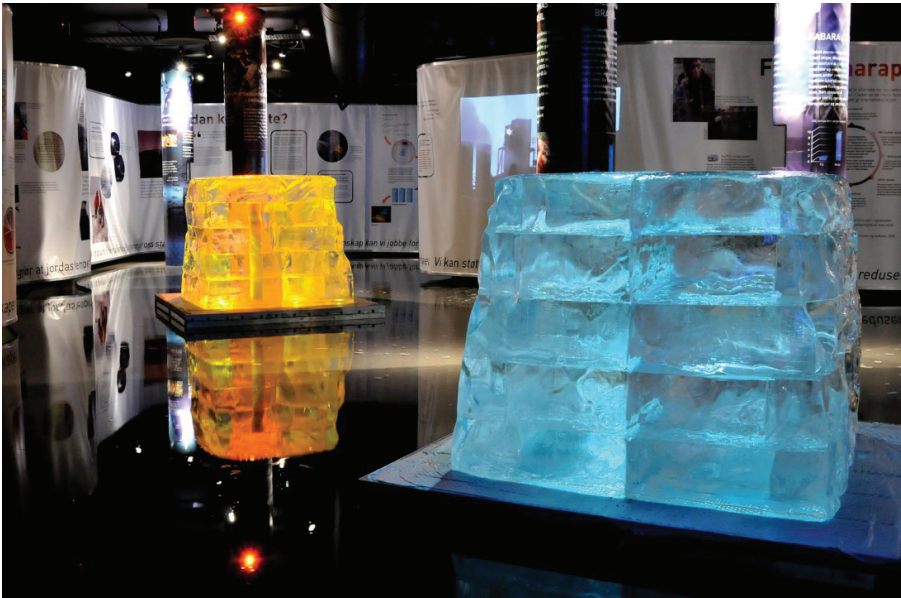


Image 6: Sponsored ice from MR.ICEMAN at the exhibition Klima X at Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology. Photo: Jack Stensland.

initially odd things, such as canned, powdered, or frozen food because it is available, cheap, and considered modern, fashionable, and perhaps healthy. Such was the case with frozen foods that were considered healthier than what could be found in stores because they were frozen fresh (Jackson et al. 2018). If these products become part of your childhood dinner, palate, and family time, you are inclined to like it and go far to get hold of it.

Tracing ice cubes for drinks highlights how the diffusion has been linked to positive associations with status, luxury, festivity, and leisure. These things still seem to hold, and MR.ICEMAN advertises its ice cubes “for festive occasions” and how ice makes “everything a little better”.

Climate change

But what about ice cubes in a time of increasing climate concern and rising temperatures? The production and transportation of ice cubes devours a lot of energy, and always has. Until recent years this has been an unproblematic fact. Uses of natural resources such as water and ice has instead been associated with progress and modernization and man conquering nature, as shown by Bagle (this theme section). Due to increasing climate awareness, the cubes risk fatal associations to waste and unsustainability. “I like Maxi but isn’t it unnecessary from an environmental perspective to transport frozen water from Norway”, one of the comments on Facebook to the previously mentioned introduction of Ice Balls at Ica Maxi in Linköping declared (ICA Maxi Linköping 2020).

For the survival of the ice cubes as a festive social enabler, the challenge for entrepreneurs like Stensland is to convincingly connect ice cubes to sustainability. Stensland’s ambition today is to make his new ice factory

“the most sustainable ice factory of the world” in terms of sustainable energy, sustainable packaging, as well as social sustainability, for example by hiring asylum seekers. The company also sponsors public activities for the benefit of sustainability, the climate, and the environment, such as the exhibition Klima X at the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology. Image no. 6 shows ice cubes translated to esthetic objects and exhibits for the sake of the environment and sustainability.

It remains to be seen if the gradual attempts to give ice cubes new meanings as healthy and sustainable will eventually normalize and legitimize their use in times of climate change. This is what MR.ICEMAN aims to accomplish. The company argues that their ice cubes are pure and clean and never taste or smell bad, the way homemade ice cubes left too long in the freezer might. This is because their ice cubes are “made from pure Norwegian water that is filtered and rinsed and then frozen under pressure which guarantees no smell or bad taste”. Their new ice cubes, wittily called “Nice cubes”, are made with a minimal carbon footprint: 100 % renewable energy is used and packaging is made from recycled plastic (www.mriceman.com). Stensland’s hope is that the use of ice cubes has become sufficiently integrated in the minds and bodies of Scandinavians for translations of the ice cube as sustainable and eco-friendly to succeed, and for the ice cube to keep its position as an actor in the net forming a good atmosphere and friendliness in social encounters. Otherwise, the ice cube itself risks becoming an example of failed translations of sociability in a time of climate change.

From cobblers to plastic buckets

In this essay, I have used ethnological perspectives to broaden horizons of cultural processes of translation

and normalization with the help of a tiny, mundane object like the ice cube. The story of the ice cube is a good example of the introduction, normalization, and transformation of new practices. It shows the interlinkages of meanings, materiality of ice, and technologies, for new practices to emerge and spread.

Work on mundane consumer objects such as freezers (Hand & Shove 2007) and walking sticks (Shove & Pantzar 2005) convincingly illustrate how normalization (or becoming “normal”) is an integrative process involving materials, technological systems, meanings, understandings, and doings that co-evolve over time. Writing on the appropriation and normalization of freezers in the UK for example Hand and Shove describe normalization as a process where consumer goods move from “novelty to ordinary invisibility” by becoming part of “successful alliances of objects and ideas” (2007: 81). Gradually the ice cube has become a “common and expected and proper and accepted” (Halkier 2019) part of drinking practices, used in the enactment of hospitality. For some at least, there is the feeling of “something missing”, as Stensland put it, if ice cubes are not in the glass.

In terms of meanings, normalization involves continuous work where products are invested with moral capacities (Hawkins 2011). During its history, the ice cube has held many meanings; healthy, pure, festive, upper class, sustainable, but also negative and sometimes thrilling meanings of dirt, danger, sex, class, and unsustainability, and always with special capacities to enhance sociality. The material aspect of normalization applies both to the body, in terms of acquiring a taste for cold drinks and bodily adaption to the brisk and sparkly character of ice, and a liking and fascination of its very materiality: its purity, crispness, ephemerality. Technological aspects include inventions such as the ice machine, the plastic packaging, the transportation system, and the new technology to compress long-lasting crystal-clear ice cubes free from air and odors. Not least important is the do-ability of ice cubes: they are easily available and relatively cheap, and they are easy to store and to handle. Putting ice in your soft drink is simple and does not demand much effort or special skills.

The normalization of ice cubes can also be studied in terms of translation, and here Sidney Mintz's concepts of extensification and intensification have proved useful. It seems that ice cubes have kept the association to luxury, leisure, and the upper class while simultaneously having migrated to other contexts and making alliances with other components. The ice cube is thus an emblem of luxury as well as a trivial component of everyday life. This is how they can be found for free at low-price motels, in the picnic freezer bags of American visitors to their national natural treasures, as a meal ingredient for visitors to fast food outlets in Sweden and, together with fizzy drinks and crisps, endowing cinema visits a special glow. A final proof of transformation to Scandinavian structures and mindsets is the introduction of ice cubes under grocery stores' own brands,

where they occupy a discrete yet decisive part of the freezer section. This is an illustration of Hand and Shove's (2007) normalization as a move from “novelty to ordinary invisibility”: a discrete and modest product that, in the right context, can transform into festivity and luxury in combination with alcohol, crystal, and happy people, as well as raise issues of unsustainability and climate concerns. No doubt there are further translations to be discovered in the future.

Author biography

Helene Brembeck is a professor emerita of Ethnology and former director of Center for Consumer Research at Gothenburg University, where she is still affiliated as an associated researcher. She has led several large projects and published extensively within the field of consumption often related to food and family.

References

- The author's travel notes 2018–19.
 Telephone interview with Jack Stensland 9 December 2021 transcribed and kept by the author, and additional questions and answers using email during the spring of 2021.
 www.mriceman.com, articles presented under the headline Presse, retrieved during the autumn of 2021 .
 Aléx, Peder et al., eds (2001). *Förbjudna njutningar: Spår från konsumtionskulturens historia i Sverige*. Stockholm: Ekonomisk-historiska institutionen, Stockholms universitet.
 Blom, Edvard (2004). Survatten, Pommac, jäst Sockerdricka och Sveriges första Cola, *Företagsminnen. Tidskrift från Föreningen Stockholms Företagsminnen*, No 4, 3–12.
 Czarniawska, Barbara & Guje Sévon, eds. (2005). *Global ideas: How ideas, objects and practices travel in the global economy*. Malmö/Copenhagen: Liber/CBS Press.
 Elgiganten (2022). Därför bör man välja en kyl med integrerad ismaskin, <https://www.elgiganten.se/magazine/nyttvaror/fryslfrys-med-integrerad-ismaskin>. Retrieved 2022-08-17
 Fornäs, Johan (2004). *Moderna människor: Folkhemmet och jazzen*. Stockholm, Norstedts
 Halberstam, David (1993). *The fifties*. New York: Villard Books
 Halkier, Bente (2019). *Consumption challenged: Food in medicalized everyday lives*. Farnham: Ashgate.
 Hand, Martin and Elisabeth Shove (2007). Condensing practices: Ways of living with a freezer. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 7(1), 79–104.
 Hobart, Hi'ilei Julia (2016). Snowy mountaineers and soda waters: Honolulu and its age of ice importation. *Culture & Society*, volume 19, issue 3, September 2016.
 Hawkins, Gay (2011). The politics of bottled water: Assembling bottled water as brand, waste and oil, Tony Bennett and Chris Healy (eds), *Assembling Culture*, London: Routledge, 177–189.
 ICA Maxi Linköping (2020). På er önskan!, <https://www.facebook.com/ICAMaxiLinkoping/posts/3497792180302458/>, published 16 November 2020, retrieved 19 August.
 ICA Supermarket Håsta (2021). Snabbokning – is till midsommar, <https://m.facebook.com/icasupermarkethasta/photos/4464085073635760/>. Published 21 June 2021, retrieved 19 August 2022.

- Jackson, Peter et al. (2018). *Reframing convenience food*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Julavits, Heidi (2016). An American exceptionalism on ice, *The New Yorker*, 8 July <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/american-exceptionalism-on-ice>. Retrieved 12 September 2022.
- Marcus, George (1995). Ethnography in/of the world system: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography". *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, 95–117.
- Marshall, Matilda (2021). Prepared for a crisis and the unexpected: Managing everyday eventualities through food storage practices". *Food, Culture & Society* 0(0), 1–22.
- Mintz, Sidney W (1985). *Sweetness and power: The place of sugar in modern history*. Penguin Books.
- Mitenbauer, Reid (2016). The bizarre but true story of America's obsession with ice cubes", *Epicurious*, September. Available: <https://www.epicurious.com/expert-advice/why-ice-cubes-are-popular-in-america-history-freezer-frozen-tv-dinners-article>. Retrieved 26 March 2019.
- Money for nothing (2017). Isförsäljning på ICA, 15 June 2017. Available: <https://money-f-nothing.blogspot.com/2017/06/isforsaljning-pa-ica.html>. Retrieved 12 September 2022.
- Norseng, Per (2020). From ice cream and chocolate to fish & chips – the export of natural ice from Norway to Britain", *Anglo-Norse Review*, Summer 2020, 14–18.
- Rees, Jonathan (2013). *Refrigeration nation: A history of ice, appliances, and enterprise in America*. Baltimore: John Hopkins.
- Schatzki, Theodore, R. (2002). *The site of the social: A philosophical account of the constitution of social life and change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schwedel, Heather (2015). A chilly reception: Why do hotels think guests want access to ice in their rooms, *Travel Explainer*, 10 August 2015. Available: <https://slate.com/human-interest/2015/08/why-are-there-ice-machines-in-so-many-hotels.html>. Retrieved 26 March 2019.
- Shove, Elizabeth & Mika Pantzar (2005). Consumers, producers and practices: Understanding the invention and reinvention of Nordic walking, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 5(1), 43–64.
- Shove, Elizabeth, Mika Pantzar & Matt Watson (2012). *The dynamics of social practice: The Everyday life and how it changes*. London: Sage.
- Vretblad, Gunvor (1989). "Djupfryst. Om en nygammal förvaringsmetod, *Fataburen, Nordiska Museets och Skansens Årsbok*. Stockholm: Nordiska Museet, 142–154.

How to cite this article: Helene Brembeck. 2023. Strange encounters with ice at US motels – and Nordic translations. *Kulturella Perspektiv* vol. 32. s. 1–10.

Received: 8 April 2022 **Accepted:** 1 September 2022 **Published:** 03 March 2023

Copyright: © 2023 The author(s). This is an Open Access article, distributed in accordance with Creative Commons, license CC-BY 4.0, which permits unlimited use, distribution, and reproduction in all media formats, granted that original author(s) and source are duly attributed. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Kulturella Perspektiv – Svensk etnologisk tidskrift, ISSN 1102-7908, is a peer reviewed Open Access journal, published by the association Föreningen Kulturella Perspektiv.

OPEN ACCESS 