
Sources and Pitfalls in early trade statistics:
findings and issues from the surveys
(questionnaires)

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From	Country/geographical area	Period covered
Patrick Walsh	Ireland - National	1698-1829
L. Charles/G. Daudin	France – National and desaggregated by regions	1714-1828 (with lapses)
Ann Coenen	Austrian Netherlands (Regional)	1759-1791
David Jacks	England (1700-1780) ; Great Britain (1790-1800), UK (1810-1899) - National	1697-1899
Alessandra Sambo	Republic of Venice (Regional)	1713-1800
Ragnhild Hutchison	Norway (Ports of trade)	1731-1828 (with lapses)
Béatrice Dedinger	Germany Territorial states	1844-1871
Klemens Kaps	Habsburgh Monarchy (Austrian Empire) - Regional	1790-1918 (Aggregate) 1720-1789 (single regions with lapses)
Giovanna Tonelli	State of Milan (Regional)	1762, 1766, 1767, 1769, 1778, 1790
Daniella Ciccolella	Kingdom of Naples (Regional and local)	16th century-1809
Maria Cristina Moreira	Portugal (National)	1775-1831
Silvia Marzagali	Navigocorpus (local – ports of trade)	18 ^e -19 ^e
Luisa Piccinno, Andrea Zanini	Republic of Genoa (port of trade)	16th century-1797
Javier Cuenca-Esteban	Spain (National)	1717-1827 (with huge lapses)
Javier Cuenca-Esteban	United-States (National)	1790-1814

Geography

- The stats accumulated so far can be classified according the geopolitical unit they belonged:
Port/Region or part of a larger political unit/Kingdom, empire or nation.
 - (1) Port stats are in general better for geographical analysis (e. g. gravitation models), but they usually are difficult to handle (too micro, no value/prices), difficult to aggregate.
 - (2) Regional stats are often problematic: difficult to aggregate at the national level, regions/ countries of origin/destination not indicated, value/prices when indicated are usually problematic. On the other hand, when they exist they provide an interesting complement to either national or port data.
 - (3) National Stats are interesting because they are more easy to use for an economist. On the other hand, they are often less precise than more local data.
- A second point liked to geography is whether we are faced with a political/geographical unit that include a significant (from an economic point of view) land frontier or not.
- This is the case for France, or central European states, but not for England, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and most of the Italian States for which land trade if any is of little relevance

Institutions

- Although fiscal issues have been crucial in triggering the institutional will to measure interregional /international trade flows, there is a strong distinction to be made whether the balance of trade were measured by local or by national institutions.
- Data produced at the national level are more coherent (units of measure, series, etc.) and the personnel who did them was more competent.
- They are also produced for a different purpose. The data produced at the national level are the only ones that can truly called balance of trade data. Data made at the various local levels may be aggregated in such a way that they would provide some sort of balance of trade for a port-region-nation, but they were not made for this reason. They were in general done for a fiscal purpose.
- Most of the states who set up a balance of trade administration throughout the eighteenth century were motivated by mercantilist objectives.
- This was self evident in the cases of England and France, the two economic super powers of the time, but this example was later emulated by Portugal, Prussia, Spain, Sweden and others.

Technical issues

- Prices: this is I believe the most difficult issue to address. In some statistics, there are lacking (e.g. Austrian Netherlands), in others prices are fixed throughout a long period of time (e. g. England), and often problematic in the remaining cases (Venice).
- I believe that a project aiming at compare data produced in different areas of Europe must find a way to resolve this problem, which may be separated in three:

Finding a common measure between the different units of monetary accounts used.

Finding a common measure between the different units of weight, quantity, length used.

Finding a common procedure to calculate or recalculate prices that is satisfactory from an economic point of view.

One possibility would be to use the one set of prices e. g. Amsterdam prices and calculate a premium that would include cost of freight, insurance to provide prices at other Atlantic ports. Do the same for the Mediterranean (using perhaps Marseille or Genoa). However we have to find a different solution for land areas that are too remote from sea to make port prices meaningful.

Economic issues

- First of all, it is important to underline that the scope of the economic/historical issues that can be addressed is strongly constrained by the dataset available. To take one extreme example, the State of Milan, for which we have only a few years (1762, 1766-7, 1769, 1778 and 1790) with quite different characteristics (e.g. only 1766-7 data have descriptions of countries of origin/destination); it is difficult to think of economically meaningful issues that could be constructed on such a narrow and unsatisfactory set of data only.
- Some points came to the fore several times in the surveys and are worth emphasizing. One set of issues seems quite promising, because it can be done without national data, is that of geographical economics. This is specially relevant for datasets constructed by ports of trade (e. g. Norway).
- At the national level, bilateral comparisons may be one of the most interesting issues – here I think in particular of France/England, but other couples are potentially interesting. By this token, and possibly by using maritime trade data it may be possible to evaluate much more clearly the extent of smuggling and whether or not it is impacted by political events (war, trade treaty).
- When the golden trio of characteristics is present (indications of destination/origin, price, long series) it would be quite interesting to compute indicators of trade specialisation (like relative contribution to trade balance). This could provide a link to the theme of economic development.

Programmatic issues

- What can be done from here?
- I do believe that the first move to enable meaningful bilateral and/or multilateral comparisons would be to create some sort of database that will allow the different local/regional/national dataset of goods names, unit of physical measures and monetary measures (the last one being simpler than the other two) to « communicate with each other ».
- Two approaches are possible:
- A comprehensive approach. Create a database that include all the individual goods' names, their description and translations in other European languages, do the same for units of physical/monetary measures. The advantage is obvious (possibility of coordinating the program with maritime history/projects) but I doubt the feasibility of this approach in the short term: too difficult, too long, a lot of coordination problems.
- A more limited approach. More focused on economic issues, meaning that rather than individual goods, the database will comprise categories and will not feature individual prices but value of trade per category expressed in a common currency. In this approach, the issue of constituting categories (classifying individual goods, pricing them) will be delegated to « national teams », the international team will focus on the task of defining the categories and coordinating the work linked to it. I must add that the two approaches are not mutually exclusive, but that the former should be considered as a long term goal framed by a network of different national teams.