

SWEDEN AND FINLAND c.1700-1809, FINLAND 1809-c.1850

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1. Coverage

This questionnaire discusses trade statistics for both Sweden and Finland (1700–1809) and Finland (c. 1809–1850). After that period, official state statistical compilations are available for both Sweden and Finland.

2. Documents

The local custom offices reported exports and imports to the capital, Stockholm, since the 1630s. National summaries based on these reports were compiled rather sporadically, and from the 1720s onwards the Swedish Board of Trade (Kommercekollegium, Kammarkontoret) compiled more precise annual reports on foreign trade. The local customs office reports were also standardized during the early eighteenth century; thus, the data from then onwards is more reliable. Annual statistics on foreign trade were compiled from 1739. Statistics on shipping were compiled more accurately from the 1760s onwards. The shipping data, however, include only ships carrying export and import goods and those laying at home port during the winter time. Thus, these statistics do not include “tramp” shipping between third countries. These series became more accurate during the course of eighteenth century. The data are provided on exports and imports and shipping, summarized from all towns in the Swedish realm (including Finland up to 1809).

The published Swedish Historical Statistics (1972) include a summary of the data. Data can also be found in Vallerö (1969),

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Högberg (1969), and Heckscher (1936–1949) and on the Swedish statistics website.

Additional data on trade and shipping can also be found in the local archives. Namely, the data compiled by the governmental authorities was first collected in each town, then sent over to the provincial level, and finally to the national government. Thus, more detailed data on foreign trade – and also details about domestic trade (which is rarely reported in statistical compilations) may be found from the local magistrate archives.

Furthermore, the Seamen's House institution was introduced in Sweden in the 1740s. From that period on, towns established Seamen's Houses that kept records of seamen and shipping. This data, however, gains in accuracy, both in Sweden and in Finland only from the early nineteenth century onwards. This Seamen's House data has also partially been made into a database (Arkion) and can be found via the Swedish National Archives website.

Finland was annexed to imperial Russia in 1809. However, Finland was an autonomous part of the empire, and thus the Russian type of administration was not imposed on the region. The information about trade and shipping was compiled much as it had been during the Swedish period. This time, though, the Finnish Senate gathered the data and the original documents are kept in the Finnish National Archives.

The original documents are in the Swedish and Finnish National Archives as well as provincial archives. The 18th century Swedish data covering certain Finnish towns can also be found on microfilm in the Finnish National Archives and also in certain provincial archives.

A balance of trade was produced in Sweden from the early eighteenth century on (to a certain extent also before). It is available in archives and also in published format in Swedish historical statistics.

3. Institutions

The data were first compiled by local authorities at the town level, then sent to the provincial level, and finally to the national government. The data were compiled annually (basically, at the beginning of each year, accounting for the trade and shipping during the previous year) by the Swedish Board of Trade, and in Finland from 1809 onward the Finnish Senate.

4. Motivations

For some, the system was established in a rather mercantilist way so that the state could “organize” the trade. The state, however, was interested in this type of data for a variety of reasons, including military considerations.

5. Methods

As far as it is possible to tell, the data were based purely on declarations. It is not clear whether the officials actively checked them or had a strategy for doing so, but there were obvious mistakes time and again suggesting that any checking did not work properly.

Many studies that have utilized these data, however, suggest that they are reasonably accurate. Moreover, this is confirmed by our research that cross-checked the data against the Sound Toll Registers online compilation (<http://www.soundtoll.nl/index.php/en/over-het-project/str-online>).

6. Information

Quite detailed data were collected on the volume and value of trade in each commodity, the location the goods were shipped to and from, customs duties, etc. The number and tonnage of ships in each town, the number of seamen and number of ships abroad at the end of the year, and other similar details were recorded. However, there is no information on where exactly the ships visited, nor about tramp shipping between third countries.

Trade flows were measured in values and quantities. The value was determined by the local custom houses (which then sent the data to local town magistrates). C.i.f was not included. There are some sources that might enable prices to be checked, although such checking would be difficult to implement. One might also consult the website <http://www.historia.se/> for further information. The monetary units were typically Swedish and later either Russian or Finnish monetary units.

Dozens of different quantity units were used and dozens of different goods are mentioned in the sources. The language used was Swedish (even in Finland in 1809–1850 as neither Finnish nor Russian was used). When Finland was annexed to Russia in 1809, and Finland gained autonomous status, the lists of trade and shipping were compiled by the Board of Trade or Finnish Senate. At the local level, though, the same procedures continued as during the Swedish era.

The data are available at the partner country level, again using dozens of different entities.

7. Availability

Swedish data can be found at a summary level in the Swedish historical statistics.

The Seaman's House data has been compiled into a database (only from selected towns). <<http://sok.riksarkivet.se/sjomanshus>>

See also data compiled by Rodney Edvinsson, Johan Söderberg, Bo Franzen, Daniel Waldenström, and others on macro-economic data on prices, wages, exchange rates, monetary values, consumer price indexes, etc. (available at <http://www.historia.se/>).

8. Research questions

These data have been used to answer basic questions pertaining to shipping, trade, and economic history, such as what was transported, where, when, how, etc. Potentially, they could also be used to look into why the goods were transported to specific countries? What was the extent of bilateral trade flows? What about multilateral trade flows, i.e. did a "system" of trade exist between Sweden/Finland and other similar sized nations (or Great Powers)?

9. Bibliography

9.1. Primary sources

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