Introduction

The quantitative and statistical dimensions of the Habsburg Empire’s external trade in the 18th century are still only scarcely researched. This is particularly true for the decades before 1776 and 1789 respectively, when official trade statistics set in – first for the western half of the Monarchy and then for the whole state. Statistics have only been systematically analyzed for trade passing through the Adriatic port city of Trieste, and only for earlier years, mainly for the 1760s (Erceg 1968; Kaltenstadler 1968/1969). This lack of data is due to administrative organization and the political structure of the Habsburg Monarchy, particularly the long-lasting internal customs frontiers between all its provinces (Komlosy 2003: 44-45).

But even for the decades following the 1770s only few works have so far made use of available statistical primary sources on both internal and external trade (Grossmann 1913; 1914; Otruba 1950; Hassinger 1964; Kaps 2008), indicating that the data issue is but one of the elements explaining the lack of research on the Habsburg Empire’s trade history. Another factor often mentioned is the Monarchy’s alleged low level of integration into the world market, but such statements are hardly based on quantitative numbers, leaving a considerable potential for further research (Gross 1973:25, 1985: 210).

Despite the unsatisfying amount of data on trade flows before the 1770s, this paper provides an overview of the development of customs and trade institutions as well as early attempts of collecting trade statistics in the decades prior to 1776. The aim here is not to show why trade data for this period of the 18th century is lacking, but rather to discuss whether and in what way the fragmentary material could be integrated into a database of 18th century trade in Europe. After that I am going to discuss trade statistics of the late 18th and early 19th century, leading to a discussion of their methodological shortcomings and possibilities to overcome them. I will close the paper by summing up possible further sources for data on trade flows and by reflecting on further research issues, which can be addressed with the available data.
Registering trade 1714-1775:
Early trade statistics and the difficulties of administrative structure

In the decades of the 18th century up to the formation of the customs union of 1775, tariff barriers existed not just along the external borders of the state, but also alongside internal administrative frontiers between individual provinces, so that the customs offices (Grenzzollämter) at the provincial borders registered trade flows both between the regions of the Empire and with foreign trading partners (Hassinger 1964: 61-62). During this time, the accounts of the single customs offices (Zollregister) were eventually compiled to provincial trade accounts. In the first half of the century this was done by the provincial trade offices (Kommerzkollegien), founded for Bohemia (1714/24) and Silesia (1716), which should serve as local advisory boards for fostering industry and trade.

Similar institutions were set up with the creation of the Inner Austrian Central Trade Commission (Innerösterreichische Kommerzienhauptkommission) for Styria, Carinthia, Carniola and the Litoral, the Trade Commissions (Kommerzkommissionen) for Lower and Upper Austria and the Trade Main Intendancy (Kommerzialhauptintendanza) in Trieste. In 1718 the Central Court Commission (Hauptaufkommision) was established in Vienna, coordinating these local advisory boards (Benedikt 1964: 55; Příbram 1907: 25; Dickson 1987/1: 263 Faber 1995: 67-71, 78).

Although nearly all provinces of the Western half of the Empire were thus provided with trade advisory boards in the first half of the 18th century, only few of them seem to have compiled provincial trade statistics from the customs accounts. In fact, trade statistics are only known from Bohemia covering the years 1720 and 1723 and listing the single commodities traded, without summing them up in general categories.

The products were registered sometimes by money value (Gulden, fl.), sometimes by weight (hundredweight), volume, or pieces, which makes further processing of the data a necessary prerequisite for analysis (Pribram 1898: 156-189). Further trade accounts for Bohemia are known for the period of 1732-35, as well as for Hungary for 1748 (Pribram 1898: 246-263; Hassinger 1964: 61, 66; Myška 1994: 184).

Parallel to the advisory trade boards, in 1714 a central customs commission (Mauthauptkommission) was created, which was subordinated to the Empire’s main financial institution, the court chamber (Hofkammer), which administered the customs income. The newly created central customs commission was responsible for internal
and external trade coordinating the local tariffs, although the actual day-to-day activities and duties of the commission at this stage of research remain as unclear as the question, whether it collected trade data or produced some kind of trade accounts (Faber 1995: 67; Weiss 1986: 63).

This lack of trade data and the interest in collecting it started to change only after reformist impulses came to bear during and after the War of the Austrian Succession. The loss of Silesia, the Empire’s most developed region and international trade centre, served as pretext for a new attempt of reinforcing economic and fiscal reforms. In this regard internal trade played a key role and the authorities aimed at fostering the establishment of an integrated internal market.

For this purpose a Bureau of Trade (Universal-Kommerzien-Direktorium) was founded in 1746, to be completely re-established from scratch due to lack of success three years later and integrated into the Directorium in Publicis et cameralibus in 1753, the newly created central administrative institution for the Austrian and Bohemian lands. It was, however, maintained as a separate unit responsible for commercial matters. The Bureau’s competence was not limited to the Austrian and Bohemian lands, but reached out to the Hungarian parts of the monarchy as well. The founding of this institution is considered a starting point of the Habsburg Empire’s trade statistic (Dickson 1987/1: 237; Faber 1995: 78; Přibram 1907: 27-29, 34; Hassinger 1964: 61).

Although the first known trade accounts compiled after the creation of the new institution are again only provincial ones – an inventory of the most important goods traded for Carinthia from 1751 (Mikoletzky 1961), a statistic for Bohemia from 1755 (FHKA, SUS Patente 120.10) and for Lower and Upper Austria from 1762 via Trieste (ÖStA, FHKA, NHK, Kommerz Oberösterreich + Niederösterreich Akten, 143) – the Bureau of Trade was a key element in coordinating the compilation of trade statistics through the newly founded commercial councils (Kommerzienkonsesse) in the provinces. In Trieste data was collected by the port administration (Hafenkapitanat), in Lower Austria by the Trade Commission (Kommerzkommission) (Přibram 1907: 32-33, 41-42; Dickson 1987/1: 272).

Already in the early 1750s Empress Maria Theresia personally checked the trade accounts (Kommerztabellen) sent to the Bureau from the Adriatic port cities of Trieste and Rijeka and complained about their lacking quality. Here the Bureau of Commerce tried to implement common standards for collecting trade data by drawing up detailed
instructions, which should serve as a pattern for the local institutions (Kaltenstadler 1969: 1).

This administrative structure persisted even after the Bureau of Trade was once again separated from the Directorium in 1762 and re-established as an independent institution under the name of Council of Trade (Kommerzienrat), which was subordinated to the Court Chamber (Dickson 1987/1: 237, 251; Otruba 1986: 202). This reform was part of a reinforced mercantilist policy, which aimed at lowering internal customs barriers and imposing protectionist measures on external trade flows like raising import tariffs and introducing bans on the import and export of certain goods (Beer 1894: 14; Benedikt 1964: 55; Komlosy 2003: 44-45).

In this context the importance of trade statistics as an administrative tool for designing trade and industrial policies rose significantly, and it seems to be no coincidence that for the years 1763 to 1765 exist complete statistics for the external trade via Trieste for the first time, listing the individual goods in money value and breaking them down by the province of origin or destiny, and giving trade balances for the individual provinces’ trade via Trieste (ÖStA, FHKA, NHK Kommerz Litorale Akten 856).

Here, the uniformity of monetary values is guaranteed by the fact that all commodities were monetarized by Triestinian prices, allowing a profound analysis of commodity flows, geographical trade patterns even touching international trade flows, as there exist also statistics on transit trade via Trieste. On the other hand, it has to be stressed that external trade via Trieste only hold an allegedly small share of the Empire’s external trade – although we don’t dispose of trade data which could quantify the extent of the impact of Trieste’s foreign trade in comparison with the Habsburg Empire’s overall external trade.

Data for later years is, however, once again largely lacking and scattered, not only for Trieste but also for other provinces, as one can see by looking at the trade accounts for Carinthia (1771), which were originally given in quantity values and only later monetarized by Hassinger, and Silesia (1775). Partial trade data is available for Bohemia and Moravia for the late 1760s as part of their respective industrial statistics, for Styria (1771, 1775) and again for Carinthia, allegedly for 1751-1780 (Hassinger 1964: 69-72).

Additionally we possess data registering the trade flows of the Empire as well as of the individual provinces via Trieste for the years 1760-65, equally broken down by ports of dispatch and landing and giving in monetary value, whereas for the early 1770s only

At this point of research it remains unclear to what extent the different regional custom tariffs also meant varying prices, as in the case of Trieste, where the quantity of all traded goods was monetarized according to local prices until 1775 (Kaltenstadler 1969: 1-2). This would pose profound difficulties for the computation of a state-wide trade statistic for 1764/65, as they are only given by monetary value.

Another question relevant for the current stage of my research is, whether varying local price levels used in the trade statistics reflect real divergences of market prices, or rather reflect a failing estimation on behalf of the local authorities. In the first case, the reliability of statistics would be further augmented, as they reflect the economic differences within the Habsburg Empire’s economy. In the second case, however, one would have to deal with considerable bias when trying to reconstruct a state-wide trade statistic from the regional accounts.

Administrative Centralization and economic integration:
State-wide trade statistics 1776/1790 - 1828

A decisive step towards a systematic state-wide trade statistic was made by lifting all internal customs between the Austrian and Bohemian lands in 1775, with the exception of Tyrol, the Adriatic ports and the Hungarian provinces. In 1784, the province of Galicia, conquered in the First Partition of Poland-Lithuania in 1772, was incorporated into this customs union (Hassinger 1964: 64; Komlosy 2003: 44-45).

The new spatial arrangement of customs borders went along with centralization of the customs and trade administration: The Council of Trade was separated from the Court Chamber and merged into the Austrian and Bohemian Court Chancellery, which was united with the Court Chamber in 1782. A separate custom administration (Zollregie) was created and in 1786 renamed Bank Charge Administration (Bankalgefällenadministration), which was responsible for most indirect taxes.

The provincial branch offices of the Bank Administration replaced the council of commerce and the Triestinian Intendanza as institutions, which supervised the collection of trade data by the individual customs offices and sent the provincial trade
accounts to the central office in Vienna (Beer 1894: 300; Dickson 1987/1: 251; Otruba 1986: 211; Zizius 1811: 170).

Centralizing the commercial and fiscal administration became the prerequisite for establishing state-wide trade statistics. Starting in 1776 trade flows were registered at the new tariff borders and, thus, trade flows between the customs union and foreign trading partners, Tyrol, Hungary and up until 1784 also Galicia were registered. The money value was computed on the base of Viennese prices. The first two accounts for the Customs Union’s external trade covering the years 1776-1777 registered the commodities traded in monetary values and quantity, but omitted trading partners, for which reason internal trade flows cannot be separated from external ones (Hassinger 1964: 78; ÖStA. FHKA NHK, Kommerz 143: General Mercantil Tabella über alle Waaren Ein: Aus: und Durchfuhr von sämtl. Erbländern de a[nn]o 1776 et 1777).

Only the custom union’s statistics for 1783-1785, which register commodities according to their monetary value only, give information about the geographical dimension of trade flow, registering foreign countries without further specification, Hungary, Transylvania, Galicia, Tyrol and the external trade via Trieste separately (HHStA, Kabinettasarchiv, Nachlass Zinzendorf, Handschrift Band 118; Hofrechenkammer C38; ÖStA, FHKA, NHK, Kommerz Oberösterreich + Niederösterreich Akten, 144). Besides registering the individual commodities, the statistics also summed up these goods into more general categories, the so called 21 main articles (Haupt-Artikel) or Capi, applied also to later statistics (Zizius 1811: 173-174; Otruba 1950:5).

Although we possess parallel trade data for Hungary covering the same years (HHStA, Kabinettasarchiv, Nachlass Zinzendorf, Handschrift Band 118; ÖStA, FHKA NHK Bankale Akten Bankaldirektion 2977; Hassinger 1964: 75), the higher prices used for computing the monetary value impede a comparison with the accounts of the customs union. The same is true for the Tyrolian and the Galician statistics (ÖStA, FHKA, NHK, Kommerz 144, 49 ex Julio 1786, Nota vom 21. April 1786; Hassinger 1964: 76).

Gradually, the central administration successfully implemented the standards of the customs union onto the Hungarian regions including Transylvania (1788) and apparently also on Galicia in the early 1790s, which means, that monetary value was now universally computed according to Viennese prices. Paradoxically, the Galician authorities continued registering trade data according to local prices until 1791, although this region had already been part of the customs union since 1785. However, the biases deriving from this fact seems to be rather small, but before stating this
definitely, a comparative analysis of base prices has to be conducted (ÖStA, FHKA NHK Bankale Akten Bankaldirektion 2977, No 6783/717, 1791 Gall. M. 2 316; Kommerz Oberösterreich + Niederösterreich Akten, 144, 77 ex Aprili 1793). Therefore, a homogeneous state-wide trade statistic exists from 1789 (or at least 1792) onwards, from which only Tyrol was excluded until 1825, separately registering external and internal trade flows and classifying the individual goods, but summing them up in the 21 main articles mentioned before, which remained stable until the reorganization of the trade statistic in 1827/28. Having discovered statistics for several years, which were thought to be lacking (Otruba 1950: 16) a data series can be constructed at least from 1792 until 1827, with eventual gaps for some years, however.

Methodological remarks: Price changes, trading partners

The above mentioned problems of heterogeneous price levels when compiling a state-wide trade statistic seem to have been resolved by the start of the state-wide trade statistic. Before addressing further elements of its methodological shortcomings, it is necessary to reflect on the credibility of data. Existing literature (e.g. Otruba 1950: 4; Hassinger 1964: 74-77) assumes reliability of the state-wide trade statistic to be superior to the elder provincial ones, as only the state-wide trade statistics were compiled according to unified standards avoiding regional bias when assessing trade flows. Even if one agrees with this view, a homogeneous flow of statistical data adhering to these terms starts only in 1792, and not in 1790 as has been maintained by the elder literature (Otruba 1950: 4).

However, there are reasons to question this belief, which rests on the premise of an integrated national economy, where price differences do not really matter and, thus, allow the measuring of state-wide external trade flows by applying one general price standard. However, this view hardly can be applied to the 18th century Habsburg Monarchy, where administrative differences hindered market integration until well into the 1760s and 1770s. Hassinger (1964: 76) demonstrates this difficulty when comparing Tyrol’s trade statistics with those of the customs union for 1778/79. Hassinger argues that the different prices applied by the authorities of both customs entities imply a pronounced bias in that way that Tyrol’s external trade flows are overestimated. However, as the author himself had to acknowledge, Tyrol’s prices for colonial goods reflect market prices far better than those from the customs union, whereas the
difference in wheat and rye prices simply reflect market price divergences between the two entities.

Here one can clearly see that standardization on the state level following administrative centralization does not necessarily improve the quality and reliability of data. This question is of great importance, because it has implications on the reliability of earlier provincial trade statistics. Lacking information on these issues, this point requires further research and systematic analysis of price levels applied by the regional trade councils before 1775 on the one hand, and the ones applied by the Customs and Bank Administration between 1776 and 1827.

Apart from different regional price levels changing prices over time have to been taken into account as well. Here the problem is not that the statistics were quantified according to current or fixed prices, but rather that the authorities mixed both methods. This had to do with the practice of fixing customs, so that every time new custom tariffs were fixed, new prices were adopted, causing severe distortions in the data series over time. Therefore, new prices were fixed when establishing the customs union in 1775, again when introducing the protective tariffs in 1784 und 1788, and also during the period of state-wide statistics in 1803 and 1810, but only for those goods for which custom tolls were adopted (Zizius 1811: 170; ÖStA, FHKA, NHK, Kommerz, 144, 39 ex Aug. 1786, folio 739.).

As the data gained from comparing the customs base export prices with the average market prices between 1782 and 1784 indicates (Graph 1), the difference between the two price levels for a wide range of goods was rather limited, with the notable exception of woollen goods, seeds and linen. Hence, the impact of introducing new prices on cumulative trade values seems to be rather small in the short run, but considerably influenced the value of individual goods. This preliminary finding conforms with the assumed low level of inflation in the course of the 18th century, what changed in the 1780s and 1790s, thus also augmenting the impact of adapted customs base prices.

The problem is further accentuated by the fact that prices for import and export were adapted separately, thus producing a bias when measuring import and export values. This bias is further reinforced by the greater emphasis the authorities dedicated to registering imports than exports, what is also due to customs exemptions for several goods when exported abroad. The difference in import value deriving from these distortions was estimated as amounting to 5,503,803. fl 11 kr in the year 1803 in numbers or 12% (Zizius 1811: 170-171).
Graph 1: Official calculation for adaptation of export prices in 1784

Graph 2: External trade volume of the Habsburg Monarchy in money value (1789-1828)
Taking these shortcomings into account, one sees that Otruba’s (1950) compilation of the official trade statistic is of only limited use, because the series ignores changing prices and continues until 1839, and therefore does not take into account the parallel, contradictory data from the reorganized trade statistics compiled by the Commission for Statistics starting in 1831. A glance at the total trade volume in monetary values (Graph 2) clearly demonstrates the impact of adopted prices on the development of the Habsburg Monarchy’s external trade, putting the pronounced rise of imports in 1804 and their sharp decline in 1811 into context – both movements seem to be influenced by changed prices. So far, there is no information about further price adaptations available, so in order to construct a coherent time series, the Bank administration files’ have to been systematically researched.

An eventual attempt to correct these distortions has to be twofold, taking into account both the temporal discontinuity of price adaptations and its selective scope. The first issue is quite difficult to address due to lacking price series for a wide range of products, which has so far also impeded the calculation of inflation rates for the 18th century. The only price index available starts in 1800 and runs to 1913 for a few Austrian cities (Vienna, Innsbruck, Linz, Salzburg, Graz) (Mühlpeck et al 1979). For the 18th century sources are scarce, as the official price statistics only list grain prices starting with 5 years averages in 1775 and yearly values from 1796. Price series for other foodstuffs started being registered only in 1828. There are, however, editions of prices for the cities of Vienna (Pribram 1938) and Lviv (Hoszowski 1934) with a wider temporal coverage, but they also only list the prices for a limited range of products.

Summing up these points it can be stated that the prices for those products, the prices of which were adopted at a certain point of time, could be done by calculating a yearly average growth rate starting in the year of the last price adaptation and, thus, deflating the money values over time. Those products, the prices of which were not adapted, and which are registered in official price series or in the mentioned source editions (Hoszowski 1934; Pribram 1938), can be even better adopted by taking the real price index from these series. For these products, however, additional information has to be found, e.g. in international price statistics from border regions and states. Thus, the bias apparent in the official trade statistic could be corrected, but it is a very time-intensive approach, as import and export price adaptations have to be calculated separately. As my knowledge of refined quantitative methods is rather limited, I would be thankful for further help in this direction.
These adaptations have also to be applied in my research results concerning the analysis of the Habsburg Empire’s external trade structure, where I explicitly did not take into account the base price adaptations due to these methodological problems. Thus, the results for the late 18th century, displayed in Graph 3, have to be reconsidered mainly for 1807, whereas between 1791 and 1800 no price adaptations are known to be made, and the statistic is quite credible, even if one may consider the Galician statistic’s compilation by regional prices an element of bias.

**Graph 3: External Trade Structure of the Habsburg Empire in 1791, 1800, 1807**

![Graph 3: External Trade Structure of the Habsburg Empire in 1791, 1800, 1807](source: Kaps 2008: 109)

Further shortcomings of the statistics like the omission of trading partners and transit trade should be mentioned here, although they do not question the reliability of the quantitative material, but limit the scope of analysis. Trading partners were registered starting in 1820, but the data mainly reflects the borders crossed by commodities leaving and entering the territory and therefore not always identify the real trade partners. Nevertheless, this information is valuable, as it indicates a rough geographical pattern of external trade and the Monarchy’s spatial position in the division of labour.

**Database and further research potential**

Due to the scattered and heterogeneous nature of trade statistics in the Habsburg Empire, one can say that in the context of constructing a European-wide database on external trade in the 18th century, data for the Habsburg Empire is available for a
timeframe from 1792 to 1828 (or even further into the 19th century). For earlier years, provincial or partial trade statistics should be taken account as well, as they give important information on external trade of various regions of the empire – especially the statistics from the 1760s, 1776 and 1777 and the 1780s could be worth considering here. As I discovered various new statistical documents during my own research in the Viennese State Archive, it is not unlikely that further accounts may be found by researching the financial archive yet more thoroughly. The lack of state-wide statistics before 1790/92 can on the other hand be used as an asset, as it offers the possibility to shift the focus to the regional level, gaining valuable information on regional trade and the interregional division of labour. Studies like the ones on Hungarian-Polish trade relations in 1764 (Lech/Stepkowski 1988) and on Polish-Austrian Trade (Kazusek 2007) indicate the potential offered by following an international approach, cross-checking trade data from the trading partner’s statistics. Furthermore, international, comparative studies, so far largely lacking and suggested by Kazusek for Polish-Austrian trade could be a first step towards an integrated European trade history. In the case of the Habsburg Monarchy trade with the Ottoman Empire, Italy, Poland, but also the integration in overseas trade via Hamburg, Gdańsk and the Italian ports could be promising research topics.

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