

Eli Heckscher Today: A Bibliometric Picture

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Abstract: The citations of Heckscher (1879-1952) in journals included in the Social Sciences Citation Index and the Arts and Humanities Citation Index do not, of course, give a complete picture of his significance as a scholar and in public debate. For reasons linked to the selection process, there is a tendency for his English-language scholarly works to be overrepresented in the databases at the expense of his Swedish writings and political contributions. Nevertheless, it is not uninteresting to get an idea of the quantity and pattern of citations of Heckscher in mainly English-language scholarly journals. In the period 1986-2002 he was cited less than Myrdal and Wicksell but approximately as much as Ohlin, and more than Cassel and Lindahl. Though his list of publications includes more than 1100 items, about 80 per cent of the citations pertain to different versions of just four works: *Mercantilism*, the large but untranslated *Sveriges ekonomiska historia från Gustav Vasa*, the shorter *An Economic History of Sweden*, and his article "The Effect of Foreign Trade on the Distribution of Income".

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Since the natural sciences provided a model for economics more than a century ago, measurement has been an important element in economists' thinking. These days the activities of economists themselves have also become an object of measurement. Since the establishment of the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) in the USA in 1961, it has become easier to measure publications and citations in scholarly journals. In this paper we will concentrate on citations of Eli F. Heckscher in journals included in the ISI databases Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI). The SSCI contains information on articles in about 1700 social science journals, while the A&HCI is based on about 1130 arts and humanities journals.²

The citations of Heckscher in the SSCI and A&HCI do not, of course, give a complete picture of his significance as a scholar and in public debate. For reasons linked to the selection process and discussed below, there is a tendency for his English-language scholarly works to be overrepresented in the databases at the expense of his Swedish writings and political contributions. Nevertheless, it is not uninteresting to get an idea of the quantity and pattern of citations of Heckscher in mainly English-language scholarly journals.

We will find that in the period 1986-2002 he was cited less than Myrdal and Wicksell but approximately as much as Ohlin, and more than Cassel and Lindahl. Though his list of publications includes more than 1100 items, about 80 per cent of the citations pertain to different versions of just four works: *Mercantilism*, the large but untranslated *Sveriges ekonomiska historia från Gustav Vasa*, the shorter *An Economic History of Sweden*, and his article "The Effect of Foreign Trade on the Distribution of Income".

Heckscher and his contemporaries

Eli Heckscher (1879-1952) was partly contemporary with a number of Swedish economists who are still internationally cited. He was younger than Knut Wicksell

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² In addition, the SSCI includes selected articles from about 3300 science and technology journals, and the A&HCI includes selected articles from about 7000 science and social science journals. We will not repeat this information later when talking about SSCI and A&HCI journals. Information about the journals included and the selection process is given at <http://www.isinet.com>.

(1851-1926) and Gustav Cassel (1866-1944), but older than Erik Lindahl (1891-1960), Gunnar Myrdal (1898-1987) and Bertil Ohlin (1899-1979).

Table 1. Number of citations in SSCI and A&HCI journals 1986-2002

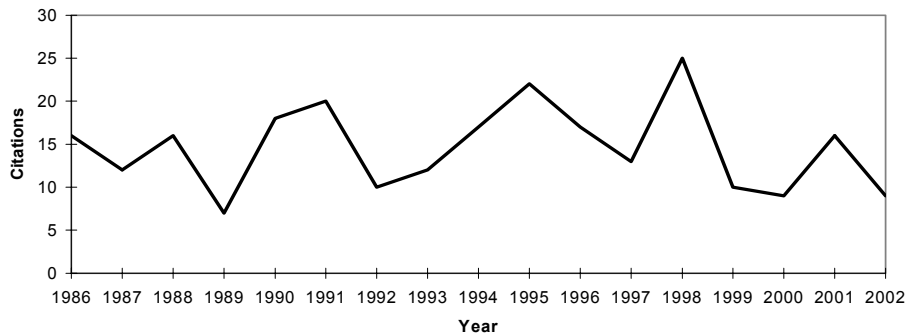
	1986-1991	1992-1997	1998-2002	Total
Gunnar Myrdal	785	781	653	2219
Knut Wicksell	167	147	96	410
Eli Heckscher	89	91	69	249
Bertil Ohlin	104	74	61	239
Gustav Cassel	57	41	44	142
Erik Lindahl	49	33	29	111

In table 1 we see how Heckscher compares with his Swedish colleagues in terms of citations in SSCI and A&HCI journals. Myrdal is clearly by far the most cited in every period, with about five times as many citations as Wicksell. As a broad social scientist, Myrdal differs from the others in receiving many citations in journals other than economics or economic history journals (Sarafoglou and Sandelin, 1992). Heckscher and Ohlin come after Wicksell, though clearly ahead of Cassel and Lindahl. With one exception (the relative positions of Heckscher and Ohlin in 1986-1991), the order is the same for all periods. Recalculated as citations per year, there would also be an astonishing stability between the periods in the number of citations for each individual. This indicates that there is a certain constancy in the significance of these old economists, at any rate over such a limited time span as we embrace here.

It is a well-known fact that when a concept is sufficiently widespread and has become the common property of every economist, it often appears in an economic text without reference to the original book or article; Pareto optimum, Keynesianism, IS-LM-analysis, and the Phillips Curve are examples. The Heckscher-Ohlin theorem in international trade theory is another example. This means that the numbers for Heckscher and Ohlin in table 1 may underestimate their relative influence.

As mentioned above, the numbers of citations calculated as an annual average for each of the three periods are quite stable. For Heckscher we would get 15, 15 and 14 for 1986-1991, 1992-1997, and 1998-2002, respectively. However, when the averages are such low numbers, they may be composed of figures for individual years that differ relatively widely from each other. This is confirmed in diagram 1, which shows the citations of Heckscher each individual year in 1986-2002. The number oscillates between a low of 7 citations in 1989 and a high of 25 in 1998.

Diagram 1. Number of citations of Heckscher according to SSCI and A&HCI



Which of Heckscher's publications are most cited?

Heckscher was an extremely prolific writer in more than one genre. Besides his great scholarly books he contributed scholarly articles, especially to the *Ekonomisk Tidskrift*, and he contributed books and articles to the general public debate; in the daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* he published about 300 articles (Carlson, 1994, p. 3). Henriksson (1991, p. 141) asserts that of the more than thousand entries in Heckscher's bibliography, "his economic theoretical and historical writings, in number at least, constitute only a minor part. Most of these writings were comments on and analyses of current problems where he applied his historical knowledge and theoretical acumen with such distinction and brilliance that he became a leading personality in the political and cultural life of his day." Uhr (1987) provides some details: Heckscher's bibliography, published in 1950, "contains 1148 entries for his 36 books, 174 articles in professional journals, his chapters in government reports, and the more than 700 short articles he wrote for the weekend issues of Stockholm's leading newspapers. Only a few of his books and articles have been translated ..."

Selection criteria

Of course, the distribution of citations in the SSCI and A&HCI does not accurately represent the proportions of Heckscher's work as a scholar and a committed citizen. First, as these journals have the status of scholarly journals, there is in all likelihood a tendency for scholarly works to be overrepresented among the works cited in them, too.

Secondly, not all scholarly journals are included. For possible inclusion in these databases, "ISI's editorial staff reviews nearly 2000 new journal titles annually, but only 10-12% of the journals evaluated is selected."³ One of the criteria for including a journal is that basic information is provided in English. The following is printed in bold letters: "**English language article titles, abstracts, and keywords are essential**". Besides, "English language cited references are also recommended" for those journals that wish to be included. In addition to highly international journals, "ISI seeks to cover the best regional journals as well". However, even then "English language bibliographic elements remain essential".

Against this background it seems reasonable to assume that there is a higher probability that an English language journal will be included than a French, or German, or other-language journal of the same quality. In consequence, it also seems very likely that the references in the journals included will be biased towards publications available in English. Thus, of all citations of Heckscher's publications in different genres, citations of his scholarly works, especially those in English, are likely to be overrepresented in the SSCI and A&HCI databases.⁴

With this in mind, we may look at table 2, where the proportion of citations of Heckscher's different publications is shown, and where we see that different versions of just four works account for about 80 per cent of the citations.

³ This and the next quotations are from <http://www.isinet.com>, 13 December 2002.

⁴ Another effect of the journal selection criteria in the ISI databases seems to be that when those databases are used to compare different countries with respect to scientific output, there is a bias not only in favour of English-language countries but also in favour of small-language countries (whose scholars write largely in English) in relation to non-English-large-language countries (whose scholars write largely in their domestic language). Cf. Sandelin, Sarafoglou and Veiderpass (2000) and, in greater detail and for another period, Sandelin and Sarafoglou (2004).

Table 2. Citations of Heckscher in SSCI and A&HCI journals broken down by publications. (Citations by Swedish authors in parentheses.) Per cent.

Publication	1986-91	1992-97	1998-02	Published
<i>Mercantilism</i>	39 (0)	42 (1)	35 (1)	1935
<i>Der Merkantilismus</i>	2 (0)	2 (0)	3 (0)	1932
<i>Merkantilismen</i>	2 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1931
<u><i>La Época Mercantilista</i></u>	<u>1 (0)</u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	1943
Subtotal	44 (1)	45 (2)	39 (2)	
<u><i>Sveriges ekonomiska historia</i></u>	<u>12 (4)</u>	<u>11 (9)</u>	<u>3 (2)</u>	<u>1935</u>
Subtotal	12 (4)	11 (9)	3 (2)	1935
<i>An Economic History of Sweden</i>	16 (3)	4 (0)	10 (3)	1954
<u><i>Svenskt arbete och liv</i></u>	<u>2 (2)</u>	<u>5 (4)</u>	<u>3 (3)</u>	1941
Subtotal	18 (5)	9 (4)	13 (6)	
Utrikeshandelns verkan	9 (1)	8 (0)	7 (0)	1919
The effect of foreign trade	2 (0)	7 (0)	1 (0)	1949
<u><i>Heckscher-Ohlin Trade Theory</i></u>	<u> </u>	<u>7 (0)</u>	<u>13 (1)</u>	1991
Subtotal	11 (1)	22 (0)	21 (1)	
<u>Other</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>24</u>	
Total	100	100	100	

Mercantilism

Heckscher's most cited work is *Mercantilism*, which together with the Swedish, German, and Spanish editions gets around 45 per cent of the citations of Heckscher in 1986-1997, and slightly less after that. No citation is registered for the Italian edition *Il Mercantilismo* (1936). The work appeared in two volumes in Swedish in 1931, and in a revised second edition in 1953, but it is mainly citations of the English editions that are included in the database. As a classic in its field, several English editions have been published after the first one in 1935: a revised edition appeared in 1955, reissued with a new introduction by Lars Magnusson in 1994, and there have been reprints in between.

Its preeminent role is confirmed by many prominent authors. Henry Spiegel (1952, p. 31) concludes that "Eli F. Heckscher (1879-) is an outstanding economic historian and the highest authority on the mercantilist period". Joseph Schumpeter (1954, p. 149), discussing the literature on the period, says that he "shall mention but two well-known standard works which in any case are, or ought to be, in every student's

hand: E. F. Heckscher's *Mercantilism ...* and P. Mantoux's *The Industrial Revolution of the Eighteenth Century*". D. C. Coleman (1957, p. 25) concluded in a review of the second English edition that as "a contribution to the history of economic thought, there can be no doubt whatsoever that Heckscher's work remains outstanding, still invaluable to the student of the period" (but at the same time he found it "curiously unrealistic" as Heckscher "shunned particular contexts and particular problems"). To Bob Coats (1957, p. 187) *Mercantilism* "represented a pioneering effort to delineate the major themes of economic ideas and policy in Western Europe during some four or five centuries" (but "this undertaking was necessarily bound to fail; indeed, few scholars have the learning or breadth of imagination even to contemplate such an enterprise"). Mark Blaug (1986, p. 31) states: "The outstanding historical study of mercantilism in all its phases is E. F. Heckscher, *Mercantilism*." Carl Uhr (1987) declares that "one of [Heckscher's] major and most widely known treatises was *Mercantilism*". Lars Magnusson (1994, p. 33, 32) designates the book Heckscher's *magnum opus*, and states that "almost instantaneously it made this liberal Swedish economist and economic historian famous for a wide international audience".

Nobody can deny that the book has influenced writing on mercantilism immensely, and few deny that it is a great book. This does not mean that criticism is lacking, but it is beyond the purpose of this paper to go into the details.⁵

Sweden's Economic History

Heckscher's second major work is *Sveriges ekonomiska historia från Gustav Vasa* (Sweden's economic history from the reign of Gustav Vasa), of which volumes 1 and 2 were published in 1935 and 1936, respectively, and volumes 3 and 4 not until 1949. Both this work and *Mercantilism* have their roots in Heckscher's licentiate thesis *Produktplakatet och dess förutsättningar*,⁶ presented in 1903 but not published until 1908 (Henriksson, 1991).

Sveriges ekonomiska historia från Gustav Vasa accounts for 11-12 per cent of Heckscher's citations during the first two periods in table 2, and for only 3 per cent in 1998-2002. This is considerably less than the figures for *Mercantilism*. There are probably two reasons. First, none of the four volumes has been translated, so only those who know Swedish can read them. As a result, a large share of the citations is made by Swedes, while Swedes played a tiny role in the citations of the English version of *Mercantilism*.

Secondly, *Sveriges ekonomiska historia från Gustav Vasa* focuses on Sweden, and is consequently less international in contents, and less important for an international

⁵ Uhr (1979) and Magnusson (1994, pp. 32-33) give accounts of how *Mercantilism* was received by reviewers.

⁶ "Produktplakatet" of 1724 was a Swedish version of the Navigation Act.

audience, than *Mercantilism*. But as a scholarly achievement *Sveriges ekonomiska historia från Gustav Vasa*, too, is outstanding, and it is not evident which of the two should be ranked first. In Söderlund's (1953, p. 139) opinion, *Sveriges ekonomiska historia från Gustav Vasa* "is probably the best work Heckscher ever produced". Montgomery (1953), Uhr (1987) and Henriksson (1991) do not try to rank the two and seem to place them on an approximately equal footing.

An Economic History of Sweden

The next work, *Svenskt arbete och liv* (1941) was translated by Göran Ohlin under Heckscher's own supervision as *An Economic History of Sweden* (1954). The translation was provided with a supplement by Gunnar Heckscher and a preface by Alexander Gerschenkron. When the translation was published it was praised in a review by T. S. Ashton (1957) as "an antidote to many so-called introductions to economic history, clogged as these are with metaphysical rubbish and restrictionist doctrine. It offers a narrative disciplined by economic logic and informed by the wisdom that comes of contact with affairs" (p. 82). The first half of the concluding sentence may come as a surprise: "The book has already had a salutary influence on the teaching of economic history in British universities, and as time goes on the circle of Heckscher's disciples in the English-speaking world will widen."

The book begins with an earlier epoch (the Middle Ages) than *Sveriges ekonomiska historia från Gustav Vasa* but can otherwise be regarded as a summary of the latter. We should not be astonished that the Swedish version is cited almost only by Swedes. Nor should we be surprised - taking into account the composition of the SSCI and A&HCI databases - that the English version is cited more in total than the Swedish.

The Effect of Foreign Trade

So far, we have looked at works on economic history. Heckscher's work in pure economic theory is much less extensive. Nevertheless, among economists in general, Heckscher is probably known mainly for his contribution to the theory of international trade - the foundation of the so-called Heckscher-Ohlin Theorem - originally presented in his article "Utrikeshandelns verkan på inkomstfördelningen" in a special volume of the *Ekonomisk Tidskrift* dedicated to David Davidson in 1919. Flam and Flanders (1991, p. 3) hold that this article (and one on intermittently free goods) "constitute [Heckscher's] whole output in economic theory". It was translated in slightly abridged form as "The effect of foreign trade on the distribution of income" and published in *Readings in the Theory of International Trade* (1949). This translation was revised, corrected and completed, adding parts that were omitted in the first translation, in a new book, *Heckscher-Ohlin Trade Theory* (1991), edited by Harry Flam and M. June Flanders.

We see in table 2 that citations of different versions of this article appear to constitute a fifth of the citations of Heckscher since the beginning of the 1990s. There is, however, a problem here. When it comes to the last version, included in the book *Heckscher-Ohlin Trade Theory*, it is impossible to determine from the database whether a citation originally refers only to Heckscher's article, or the translation of Ohlin's doctoral thesis in the same volume, or the introduction by Flam and Flanders, or even the foreword by Paul A. Samuelson. So the numbers for this book may include not only citations of Heckscher's article.

Scattered citations

The above-mentioned four works receive about 80 per cent of Heckscher's citations in the SSCI and A&HCI journals. The rest of his more than 30 books, 174 articles in scholarly journals, and nearly 1000 other items get zero or merely a few stray citations each. One exception is the short article "Växelkursens grundval vid pappersmyntfot" (The foundations of the exchange rate on the paper standard) in the *Ekonomisk Tidskrift* (1916). This article is not cited at all in the first two periods, but suddenly in 1998-2002 it is cited 8 times. The names and affiliations of those who have cited it make it hard to believe that any of them understand Swedish; consequently, it seems likely that none of them has read the article. Thus, these citations may indicate something about the principles of the journals or the authors when compiling the list of references, but hardly anything about how much the article has been read.⁷

There is no citation of the Swedish book *Kontinentalsystemet* (1918) but 4 citations of the English version *The Continental System* (1922). A few citations are also found for the collection *Bidrag till Sveriges ekonomiska och sociala historia under och efter världskriget* (1926) (Contributions to Sweden's economic and social history during and after the World War), and one or two occur for Heckscher's doctoral thesis *Till belysning av järnvägarnas betydelse för Sveriges ekonomiska utveckling* (1907) (The role of the railways in Sweden's economic development), the essay collection *Svenska produktionsproblem* (1918) (Swedish production problems), the booklet *Gammal och ny ekonomisk liberalism* (1921) (Old and new economic liberalism), the collection *Ekonomi och historia* (1922) (Economics and history), the multi-edition book *Industrialismen* (1931), and a number of other titles. No citations are recorded for "Intermittent fria nyttigheter" (Intermittently free goods) in the *Ekonomisk Tidskrift* 1924, nor for many other pieces.

⁷ It seems to me that editors have become more demanding in the last few decades and often require that any title mentioned or even intimated in the text should be included in the reference list, even if the author has never seen the work. Combined with the requirement that authors demonstrate familiarity with the literature in the area of research - and excessive willingness on the part of authors to try to do so - this results in huge lists of references.

Conclusion

Heckscher was extremely studious, and his bibliography includes more than a thousand items, of which some are very comprehensive works. His citations according to SSCI and A&HCI are concentrated to the latter, and to his theoretical article about the effect of foreign trade on the distribution of income. The distribution of the citations is partly a consequence of the selection criteria of SSCI and A&HCI and does not necessarily give a true picture of his overall importance in public life. Had citations in books been included, his works as an economic historian would probably have been even more accentuated, as economic historians seem to be more inclined to write books than economists. Had preference not been given to citations in English-language journals, his untranslated publications would probably receive more citations. His extensive writings on current political and economic questions attracted much attention in Sweden at the time, but are hardly cited in international scholarly journals.⁸

The citations reflect one aspect of Heckscher's significance: they simply indicate how much attention his works attract on the part of later authors of articles in selected, mainly English-language, scholarly journals. Even if incomplete, this information is not uninteresting.

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⁸ It is interesting to note that in Carlson's (1994) detailed study *The State as a Monster: Gustav Cassel and Eli Heckscher on the Role and Growth of the State*, none of Heckscher's four most cited works according to SSCI and A&HCI are included in the list of "Sources and literature".

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