



Call for Papers

The construction of free ports: political communication, commercial development and administrative control

(Costruire il porto franco: comunicazione politica, sviluppo commerciale e controllo amministrativo)

Venice Ca' Foscari University, Monday-Tuesday 29-30 April 2019

The free port is a curious phenomenon. It developed historically in Italy during the waning years of the Renaissance, when competition to attract trade from the burgeoning Atlantic sphere prompted some states to open their ports to foreign merchants and their goods. In time, the free port came to be defined as a territorial exclave endowed with its own economic policies, often of a liberal (or even libertine) cast; that is, as a place where merchants could do business with minimal interference from state authorities. From Italy, the free port spread to the rest of Europe; in the eighteenth century to the Caribbean; and, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to the rest of the world. But though the free port is a curious institution, it is not a marginal one. Many of the most famous ports in history—from Genoa and Hamburg to Singapore and Hong Kong—were free ports. Such ports were central to the trading systems in which they were situated, whether in brokering commerce between distant localities, plugging a host state into the circuits of international exchange, or servicing a network of more regional ports. And ultimately, the free port is one of the ancestors of the modern special economic zone, of which there are more than six thousand in the world today. The history of the free port is global and deserves to be told as such.

Exactly how free ports arose in early-modern Europe is still subject to debate. Livorno, Genoa and other Italian cities became famous as major examples of a particular way of attracting trade. This conference aims to explore in greater detail how free ports were established, how their functions were constructed, and how the ambition to wield administrative and political control over free ports played out in actual fact. Scholars are invited to propose papers that engage with various acts of construction, administration, and political negotiation of the commerce of a free port. These may include a range of dimensions, from the diplomatic, institutional, economic and legal to the cultural, spatial, communicational, and architectural. Rather than papers that focus on one single aspect or context, we prefer broadly thematic or comparative analyses that are of interest to a wider academic audience.

Abstracts (of ca. 500 words) and titles may be sent by email to koen.stapelbroek@helsinki.fi and ctazzara@scrippscollege.edu by **31 October 2018**. Invited speakers are subsequently requested to provide short papers that will be pre-circulated among participants. A selection of revised papers will be included in a book publication, based on this and related academic conferences.