

The Free Port Debate: Economic Policies, International Equilibria and Mythologies (Eighteenth-Nineteenth Century)

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During the first half of the eighteenth century, a wide debate sparked, aiming at defining what were the salient features of a free port. The most fortunate definition, later taken up in all the major encyclopedic works from the *Cyclopaedia* to the *Encyclopédie*, was coined by Jacques de Savary, based on the 1669 edict for the establishment of the free port of Marseille. Once defined, the identity of the free ports began to be discussed and criticized, among others, by Melon, Broggia, Forbonnais, and Genovesi. Between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, the free ports had become a global phenomenon, which went beyond the Mediterranean basin in which they were born at the end of the sixteenth century. As noted in several entries in the *Encyclopédie méthodique*, free ports were seen not only as economic instruments, but also as tools to be used in the configuration of the international relations.

This markedly political character of the free ports would again emerge strongly during the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the Napoleonic administration designed (unsuccessfully) a system of *entrepôts* wishing to connect the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, to gain economic and political control of the seas and defeat the British. Until the 1860s, free ports continued to occupy the political and economic debate. For instance, in Britain, they were seen as a premise for a more comprehensive system of free trade. Conversely, in the French, Italian, Spanish, Habsburg, Russian and Latin-American areas, free ports were described alternatively as the best solution to revive trade, or as an institution

harmful to the internal equilibrium of the port cities and the nations that hosted them, and even as emblems of a despotic power.

This contribution examines the debate about free ports: how they were defined after their institutional creation, how they were then scrutinized and criticized, but also how they were transfigured in powerful, positive (even salvific) images and mythologies.¹ Ultimately, despite a discontinuous history (free ports were continuously reconfigured, created, and cancelled) at an institutional level, this contribution shows how the concept of a free port became a well-established one, creating a lasting image which played a primary role in economic and political debates, and even in cultural imaginaries.

The Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-century Debate: Free Ports between Definitions and Imaginaries

As is known, the first free ports were established in Genoa and Livorno in the early 1590s with different goals and different regulations but under the same image, namely that of a welcoming and blooming port. While the first one was a very contingent answer to the virtual crisis the Genoese Republic was experiencing because of the severe cooling of temperatures in the first phase of the Little Ice Age, the second was part of a largescale project envisaged by the Medici rulers to revitalize the Tuscan economy and to insert the Grand Duchy in the international arena.² By the eighteenth century, albeit with significant tariff and legislative differences, the free port model was to find application throughout the entire Mediterranean (Naples, Venice, Civitavecchia, Tangiers, Marseille, Fiume, Trieste, Messina, Ancona, Nizza-Villafranca), in Northern Europe (Dunkirk, Bayonne, L'Orient, Ostend, Althona, Hamburg, Marstrand) and in the Caribbean (Curaçao, Saint Thomas, Saint-Domingue, Martinique, Jamaica, and Dominica) (Tazzara 2017; Trampus 2021).

Around the mid-seventeenth century, inside the European debate on trade, the free port as a concept took on a positive connotation, espe-

1 The preliminary results presented in this text are part of an ongoing wider research project focused on new communication strategies in free ports in the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries in the Mediterranean and in the Atlantic.

2 The theoretical economic framework in which free ports are traditionally ascribed is that of mercantilism (Reinert 2011; Magnusson 2015): this aspect is more thoroughly discussed in the forthcoming volumes by G. Delogu (*L'emporio delle parole*) and G. Delogu, K. Stapelbroek, A. Trampus, eds. (*Free trade and free ports in the Mediterranean*. New York-London: Routledge).

cially thanks to the success of Livorno (Peri 1638, 3:141; Worsley 1652; Linda 1664, 40; Howell 1664, 3; Feliu de la Penya 1683, 111; Montanus and Dapper 1671, 489). Soon, Marseille also rose as a positive model to be imitated (Savinien d'Alquié 1670, 494; Marchetti 1671, 27; Passerone 1681, 88). In both cases it was emphasized that the new status of free port had given a decisive impulse to the development of international trade. Even the first critics of the free port, such as Francis Brewster, could not fail to acknowledge the success of the Tuscan experiment (Brewster 1695, 29).

This first phase of the public debate on free ports was mainly focused on the analysis of existing free ports, and on the opportunity to establish new ones in other countries, with a competitive function. The first results were in fact a series of discussions, under Charles II of England, about the possibility of establishing a free port in Bombay: 'Would Your Worship please, but for a few years, to make Bombay a free port [...] no doubt you would find it the readiest and best way for its establishment, as Leghorn, Genoa, etc. many at this day give evidence' (Fawcett 1936, 211). When this project was rejected, the British government decided to create a free port in Tangiers. The North-African one, however, was a brief and unsuccessful attempt (Sheeres 1680, 46–7).

The key moment for the theoretical elaboration, with the attempt to define precisely what a free port was, dates back to the early eighteenth century and to the elaboration of Jacques Savary's *Dictionnaire universel du commerce*, published posthumously in 1723 by his brother.³ In the *Dictionnaire universel du commerce*, starting from a text of a technical nature (the edict of Marseille of 1669), Savary described the free port in a very simple and concise way: 'Port franc en termes de commerce de mer. C'est un port où il est libre à tous Marchands, de quelque Nation qu'ils soient, de décharger leurs marchandises, et les en retirer lors qu'ils ne les ont pu vendre, sans payer aucun droit d'entrée ni de sortie' (*Dictionnaire universel du commerce* 1726, 2:1191). Savary's definition, translated throughout Europe and taken up literally both by the *Cyclopaedia* and by the *Encyclopédie*, became the text from which, around the middle of the century, a new debate on the free ports started. Montesquieu, Matthew Decker, and Adam Smith defended the insti-

3 A more comprehensive analysis of the eighteenth-century debate and definitory struggle around free ports is in Delogu (2019b).

tution, while Broggia, Forbonnais, Mirabeau, and Genovesi criticized it.⁴ The free port was mainly reckoned as an obstacle for internal development. Meanwhile, the *Encyclopédie méthodique* (1784), taking into account the contemporary debate and the political situation, renewed the definition of a free port, stressing for the first time its role not only from the economic point of view, but also from the political one, as an instrument within international relations. An example was the friendship treaty between France and the Thirteen American Colonies, which led to the establishment of two new free ports (Bayonne and L'Orient). To illustrate the question of the free ports, the *Encyclopédie méthodique* did not limit itself to the Mediterranean basin and continental Europe, but implicitly recognized the existence of an actual global dimension, referring also to similar institutions and projects in the Caribbean and the Pacific Ocean.

A few years later, during the French Revolution, the question of the free ports emerged again, with a markedly political character. In fact, by including them among the privileges of a feudal nature, the revolutionary government decreed their total abolition in 1789, precisely because they were contrary to the principles of equality and uniformity that had to regulate the nation. The measure raised a wide debate among the defenders of the free port. The one side emphasized the economic benefits of the free port and rediscovered their (mythical) origins in classical antiquity. The other side referred to Forbonnais and reaffirmed the economic disadvantages for the general prosperity and, at a political level, the incompatibility with the new egalitarian France. Such discussions produced different results in the various port cities under French dominion: if Bayonne and Dunkirk regained the possibility of practicing preferential duties as early as 1791, Nice saw similar requests rejected in 1794, and Marseille would also see its petitions rejected by Napoleon, until 1815.

Therefore, defining free ports was not a neutral operation. Being economic but also political institutions, since the seventeenth century and then with even greater intensity in the eighteenth century, free ports aroused intellectual debates. Above all they became the object of negotiation between centres and peripheries, and between the different social components that populated them, and therefore laboratories of concep-

4 Meanwhile, the free port also attracted criticism of a moral nature, being seen as a lawless space in which people of different religions and customs could freely mix (Lavenia 2009). Moreover, they were also considered immoral because they fostered excessive luxury, as foreshadowed by Fénelon in his well-known *Les aventures de Télémaque* (1699).

tual and institutional elaboration, theoretical reflection, and reformist practice. In addition to being topics of a 'technical' debate (both economic and political), free ports had gradually also become elements of the public imaginary, featuring in a vast production of travel and geographical description of a more popular nature. Thus, between the end of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, while they were being condemned as emblems of a despotic feudal past, a positive narrative recognizing them as factors of development and rebirth also continued to resist.⁵

The nineteenth-century debate about free ports: 'modern' solutions or 'old' problems?

Later on, during the Napoleonic era, free ports became again an object of economic and political interest. The first to claim their usefulness, after the debates of the revolutionary age, was Simonde de Sismondi in his treatise *De la richesse commerciale* (Sismondi de Sismondi 1803, 2:419–41). Starting from the now canonical definition of Savary, and the example of Livorno, Sismondi reconstructed how, thanks to free port status, cities such as Bayonne, Dunkirk, Marseille, Genoa, Ancona, and Trieste had become the 'entrepot de tout commerce de la Méditerranée' (p. 426). Although in the general layout of the work he referred preferably to the theories of Adam Smith, for the specific point of the free ports, he developed his own original vision, destined to have a wide influence. Sismondi started his analysis by quoting Jean Herrenschwand who, referring to Smith, considered free ports as a possible intermediate step towards free trade. After this initial phase of national development, however, he considered them as an obstacle, if not a danger, to the growth of internal economy (Herrenschwand 1786, 94). Instead, Sismondi asserted that free ports, not ensuring any monopoly, did not necessarily favour the 'commerce de transport' to the detriment of internal manufacturing and agriculture, as also demonstrated by Marseille itself (p. 428). Another of the main objections made to free ports, of favouring smuggling, was also re-

5 As an example, see Dodsley, J. 1787, celebrating the extraordinary development of Trieste, which, thanks to its status of free port, was able to revive the glories of its Roman past. Moreover, see Carpaccio 1805; *Dictionnaire de la conversation et de la lecture* 1836; Balbi 1841, I, no. 24. More generally, on the free port as a vector of prosperity, see Antonelli 1839, in particular the entry 'free port' which offers a global panorama of the question (Vanzon 1842) in particular the entries 'Genoa', 'Gibraltar', 'Livorno', 'Trieste'.

jected (Magnien 1804, 30; Launay 1792). Indeed, he came to the conclusion that:

Il y a peu de pays en effet, auquel il convienne aujourd'hui plus qu'à la France, de multiplier ses ports francs, elle a besoin, non point e faire elle-même le commerce de transport, mais qu'on le fasse pour elle. [...] C'est notre intérêt encore d'attirer les capitalistes étrangers dans nos port. [...] Bientôt les marchands qui se domicilieraient dans nos ports, compareraient les profits de leur commerce, avec ceux qu'on pourrait attendre du perfectionnement de nos manufactures ou de notre agriculture [...] les capitaux des Anglais seraient bientôt destinés à mettre en mouvement une industrie toute française. (pp. 439–41)

In short, Sismondi proposed to create a system of free ports (Antwerp, Dunkirk, L'Orient, La Rochelle, Bayonne, and Marseille), considering it one of the few effective (and therefore justified) governmental interventions in the economic field. In the same year, Jean-Baptiste Say published his *Traité d'économie politique* in which, in contrast, he defended the absolute principle of free trade without privileges and rejected, as useless and illegitimate, any government action aimed at regulating trade. In May-June 1803, Say arrived at a real confrontation with Napoleon, following the failure of the peace of Amiens. Napoleon, in fact, was laying the foundations of the continental blockade (Tarlé 1928; 1931; Crouzet 1964; Dufraisie 1966; Woolf 1990, 167; De Francesco 2011, 89–90; Grab 2015), with the well-known letters to the courts of Madrid, Naples, and Florence requesting the closure of all ports to British products and ships. With his reflections, although distant from pro-Napoleonic positions and circles, Sismondi seems to have provided important theoretical bases to Napoleon and his entourage (Chaptal, Collin de Sussy, Coquebert de Montbret, Montgaillard) for the development of an economic policy. In addition to measures dictated by the exceptionality of the moment (such as the continental blockade of 1806), Napoleon and his entourage imagined the creation of a series of free ports (or rather *entrepôts*) at a global level, to ensure that France had stable control over seas and trade, even in peacetime. The model that Napoleon had in mind, however, was not that of the free port tout court (such as Livorno or Trieste, in which the privileges were extended to the whole city), but of the *entrepôt* or 'free point' as in Genoa, in which only one specific area of the port enjoyed customs privileges. In this spirit, the free port of Genoa was preserved and a new one was created in Venice, limited to the island of San Giorgio (Delogu

2019a). However, at the same time, Marseille's request to regain the pre-1789 status of a free port was rejected. The loss of the Caribbean colonies (which were to be a central point of the system), the continuing state of war, and the failure of the blockade meant that the Napoleonic project never fully saw the light. However, Sismondi's thought and Napoleon's actions were destined to have a lasting influence in other contexts, thanks to the revival and reinterpretation by Melchiorre Gioia (Delogu 2020a).

Gioia (Sofia 1988; 1990; 2017) appeared on the public scene at the beginning of the Napoleonic age in Italy, winning the famous competition *Quale dei governi liberi meglio convenga alla felicità d'Italia* with his essay. Since this first work, printed in 1798, Gioia had emphasized the positive and pacifying role of (free) trade. Then in 1802 he published *Sul commercio dei commestibili*, a treatise in which he presented a straightforward defence of free trade in grains. The rapidly evolving international situation, however, prompted him, in 1806, to give voice to a very different position in *Cenni morali e politici sull'Inghilterra* (Delogu 2020b). Here, fully embracing the Napoleonic blockade, Gioia pronounced himself in favour of government intervention in the economic field, to safeguard national interests and freedoms. Meanwhile, since 1807, Gioia had been elaborating a more comprehensive treatise on 'public and private administration', which would later come to light between 1815 and 1817, under the title *Nuovo prospetto delle scienze economiche*. This treatise was the point of arrival for his political-economic thought. Internal liberalization and the overcoming of a feudal system based on hierarchical orders had to coexist with the regulatory action of the 'administration' in the economic field. By regulatory action Gioia meant customs protections, with the aim of safeguarding internal manufacturing and workers, and stimulating productivity and attracting capital. Napoleon had already made an attempt in this direction: in fact, the free port seemed to Gioia one of the most suitable tools. In the fifth volume of the *Nuovo Prospetto*, Gioia therefore addressed the question of the free ports, quoting Sismondi as the authority supporting his positions (Gioia 1817, 5:219–22). Gioia reiterated that free ports had a positive role both for international trade and for the internal markets. Always attentive to the political and institutional side, he underlined their role for the management of public health and for the control of epidemics, a task of fundamental importance inside the framework of an efficient administration.

During the 1810s–1820s, in the British arena, the debate on free ports continued to be intertwined with the more general one about free trade, remaining at a theoretical level, without practical applications. Following the eighteenth-century interpretations by Decker and Adam Smith, free ports were assigned a positive but transitory and intermediate role in increasing the trade volume: ‘We know that wherever a port is declared free in any part of the world, trade accumulates in it in a remarkable manner (e.g. Leghorn, Genoa, Cadiz, Trieste, Singapore).’ Consequently, harmony and prosperity increased, and the opportunities for war decreased in the same proportion: ‘Free Trade has a tendency to promote pacific and friendly relations among the nations of the world’ and ‘to diffuse the light of civilization and true religion over the whole earth’ (Baines 1830, 30–1).

Elsewhere (from Cadiz to Odessa, Venice, Marseille, Naples, and Angostura), in places where the Napoleonic impact had been more incisive, due to direct domination or cultural penetration through the dissemination of the *Civil Code* or through networks of contact with former Napoleonic officials, the debate on free ports generated more heated discussions of a political nature and plans for institutional reform.⁶ In 1818, in Veracruz (Mexico) a heated debate sparked on free ports and free trade. The debate intertwined economic reasoning with political agendas: in the crumbling Spanish Empire, talking about free ports was anything but neutral. The loyalists strongly opposed the project of creating a free port in Veracruz, advocated by the local commercial elites, claiming that it could be like a ‘contagion’, affecting not only all Mexico and the rest of the Empire, but also Europe (Arillaga 1818), and a prelude to independentist claims.⁷ The Mexican case does not stand out as something exceptional in the Latin American context. In fact, it is part of a wider network. The very same request for a free port in Veracruz, addressed to the Real Tribunal del Consulado de Mexico, had been printed in La Habana and then had originated a debate on the two sides of the Atlantic, reaching Cadiz and Seville. Meanwhile, in addition, in Cadiz petitions for

6 More diffusely on Napoleon: ‘Free Ports, Free Trade, Freedom: Napoleon’s Manifold Legacy in Institutions and Images’, in T. Dodman, A. Lignereux eds., *From the Napoleonic Empire to the Age of Empire. Empire after the Emperor*. Cham: Palgrave [forthcoming].

7 A more in-depth analysis of the Latin American case will be provided in Giulia De-logu, “‘It is like a contagion’: the debate on free ports in Latin America between (18th and 19th centuries)”, *Global Intellectual History* [forthcoming].

and against a free port had started appearing from the 1810s (Torrejón Chaves 2002).⁸

Eventually, Napoleon's own project would be re-read as the will of the 'founder la liberté des mers'.⁹ Napoleon - a cumbersome figure, not explicitly quotable in all contexts - was somehow recognized as the political father of modern free ports, or in any case as the deviser of a vision of free trade alternative to the English one. At the same time, in the Italian, French, Spanish, and South American area the intellectual paternity belonged to Melchiorre Gioia (Sandelin 1847, 423). The Italian economist had a vast, albeit indirect, influence: his masterpiece *Nuovo prospetto delle scienze economiche* was in fact plagiarized by Mariano Torrente, a governmental official, and published under the title *Revista general de economía política* (1835) in La Habana, becoming a successful textbook of economics in all Spanish-speaking nations. In the 1830s discussions within the Italian peninsula, from Venice to Naples, the passages on free ports taken from the *Nuovo Prospetto* became an essential starting point, both for the supporters of the free ports and for the critics. The main supporters of the free port in Habsburg Venice were – and it seems not to be a coincidence – the cousins Giuseppe and Defendente Sacchi and Francesco Foramiti, who shared an apprenticeship in Napoleonic Milan and Pavia (Foramiti 1829; Sacchi and Sacchi 1830; Delogu 2019a, Delogu 2020a). At that time, the Sacchi cousins gravitated around the milieu of the journal savant 'Annali di Statistica' of which Gioia himself was also part.

The case of Venice appears to be of considerable interest because it reveals other aspects, useful for a more comprehensive understanding of the question of free ports between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Delogu and Farella 2020). In fact, in addition to confirming the centrality of the Napoleonic experience and the theoretical elaboration started by Savary and later led by Gioia, the Venetian debate also highlights, on the one hand, the involvement of the various social components of the city, and on the other the role played by communication strategies and the creation of suggestive and powerful images. As for the first point, the sources of the time reveal the involvement not only of intellectuals such as Sacchi and Foramiti, but also of lagoon fishermen, glassmakers, dyers,

8 See the documentation kept at the AGI, C, 61A and 61B, 1651, 1652, 1653, 1671, L.1012.

9 Battur 1845, with the note that: 'L'Editeur de cet ouvrage en a fait distribuer gratuitement 500 exemplaires à MM les Membres de la Chambre des Pairs et de la Chambre des Députés.'

and soap producers (Naccarini 1827).¹⁰ Then, the sources reveal the local Chamber of Commerce's protagonism, when it was capable of becoming a place of mediation between the various instances, successfully conveying to the Imperial court in Vienna its own project to establish a free port.¹¹ As for the second aspect, those who fought for the creation of the free port in Venice often resorted to the example of Trieste. In fact, the Habsburg city actually had a well-rooted image of progress due precisely to its status of free port, which had favoured trade development, population growth, urban redesign, and the foundation of cultural institutions (Foramiti 1829, 18). Trieste had also been able to convey a triumphant image by promoting the constant publication of the *Portate*, namely the lists of ships arriving and departing, to display the growing amount of its traffic.¹² The success of Trieste and the decline of Venice had become a veritable *topos*: 'Venise, qui n'avait pas fait plier à temps des anciennes règles exclusives, avait perdu presque tout ce qui lui était resté de commerce depuis que, dans son voisinage, le gouvernement autrichien avait fait de Trieste un port franc sur le plan le plus libéral; institution qui avait repeuplé et recréé cette ville' (Vincens 1834, 3:413).

Meanwhile, in 1832, Carlo Afan de Rivera (1832) launched a debate on the opportunity of having a free port in the areas surrounding Naples. The past Napoleonic domination had revived a debate that had actually erupted several times in the Neapolitan area, where, since the sixteenth century, the question of creating free ports or entrepôts had been discussed. In the Napoleonic era, to counterbalance the continental blockade, as already happened in Venice, Naples had been declared a free scale (Ciccolella 2019). This status was initially maintained upon the return of the Bourbons, and new reflections on the possibility of extending the

10 ASVE, ACC, b. 13, t. 1, n. 30: *L'arte dei tintori alla Camera di Commercio Arti e Manifatture; I Fabbricatori di Vetro di Murano alla Camera di Commercio Arti e Manifatture*, 29 gennaio 1816; *Notificazione di Giacomo Pasini Fabbricatore di Saponi*, 15 ottobre 1816.

11 ASVE, ACC, b. 59, t. 1, n. 10; b. 68, t. 1, nn. 10 e 28; b. 81, t. 1, nn. 10 e 11; b. 89, t. 2, n. 35; b. 103, t. 6, n. 14.

12 The *Portate* had been circulating from 1776 (in handwritten form) by the will of the governor Karl von Zinzendorf and then were inserted in the appendix to the city gazettes ('Triester Welt-Korrespondent', 'Triester politische und Handlungs-Zeitung' and, from 1784, 'Osservatore Triestino'). From 1805 to 1858, annual collections were published under the title of *Portata de' Bastimenti del porto-franco di Trieste*. Once it became a free port, Venice too, from 1835 to 1847, had proceeded to print the same publication format (Delogu 2019c).

free port began. These project, however, had been stopped by the uprisings of 1820–1821. Afan de Rivera proposed the creation of a free port in Nisida, to be placed side by side with a series of storage warehouses in Pozzuoli and a lazaret in Capo Miseno. A strong emphasis – as in Gioia’s thought – was placed on the importance of the free port as an institution capable of promoting both development and state control over matters such as public health and epidemics. However, Afan de Rivera’s proposal on free ports aroused many critical responses between 1833 and 1836, of which the most significant were those by Lodovico Bianchini, Mario Luigi Rotondo, and Matteo de Augustinis (Di Salvia 2000, 87–114). De Augustinis (1833, 11) acknowledged Gioia and Sismondi as the theoreticians of the modern concept of the free port. At the same time, he attributed the political paternity ‘to the prestige of two great authorities, Colbert and Napoleon’ (Augustinis 1836, 238). In conclusion, however, he condemned free ports as protectionist and monopolistic measures. In his reasoning, there were only two specific cases in which the establishment of a free port could be a positive measure. The first case was when the nation suffered a serious natural disaster and could therefore exceptionally resort to the free port, although, according to Augustinis, the very example of Messina, declared a free port in 1728 and then again in 1783 after the earthquake, had not been particularly successful. The second exception was when a nation was in conditions of backwardness and scarcity of population; then the free port could become an engine for not only economic, but also cultural development: such had been the case of Odessa. According to Augustinis, Naples in the 1830s was not in either of the two situations: the free port, therefore, was not the solution to be adopted for reviving the kingdom’s economy.

However, the positive image of the free port as spring of development not only for the economy, but also for the society and the urban fabric, largely persisted and continued to be an important element in the political and economic debates. The prospective of establishing a free port remained a sort of recipe for revitalize cities in crisis. Only later, in the changed climate of the 1860s, free ports come widely under attack: for instance, inside the Italian public discourse, even Trieste would have been seen in a quite different light. It transitioned from the paradigm of the successful and thriving city to a model not to be imitated. Within the Risorgimento context, it became the symbol of ‘a politically despotic or economically ill-advised government’ itself (Boccardo 1861, 4:127; Biundi

1864, 35–6). The Italian post-unitarian situation had many similarities with what had happened in France during the Revolution: the newborn Italian Kingdom, in fact, ended up abolishing all its free ports, following a European trend that also led to the abolishment of the free port in Odessa and in the French ports. When Trieste became part of the Italian State, after World War I, its status of free port would also be cancelled.

Between the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, free ports as institutions would be eradicated from the Mediterranean basin in which they were born. Nevertheless, they maintained a longer vitality at a global level, for instance in Singapore (Wong 1978). They showed an even longer persistence as concepts and images on which to build ever-new solutions (Trampus 1999; Finardi and Moroni 2001; Moberg 2017), resurfacing periodically in public debates as recently illustrated by the post-Brexit *Freeports consultation* launched by the British government in 2020 about the possibility of creating a series of free ports in the United Kingdom. Similarly, again in 2020, a series of proposals of instituting special economic zones within the ports of Trieste, Taranto, and Venice started to be discussed. The special economic zones, albeit in a totally mutated context, still resemble an attempt of resuscitating the Mediterranean free port tradition.

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