

Zone

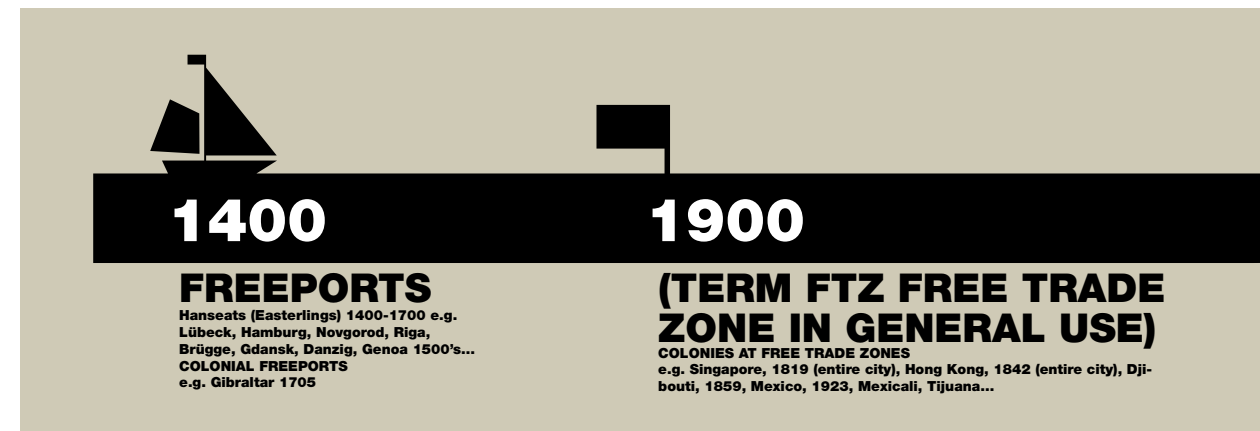
Keller Easterling

Some of the most radical changes to the globalizing world are not expressed in the language of law and diplomacy but rather in the language of architecture and urbanism. Indeed, the notion that there is a proper realm of forthright political negotiation usually acts as the perfect camouflage for this *extrastatecraft* that resides in the unofficial currents of cultural and market persuasion. Capricious, hilarious, and illogical, here is the rich medium of subterfuge, hoax, and hyperbole that finally rules the world. From this medium both epidemics of belief and prolonged stalemates have emerged. As global powers juggle national and international sovereignties or allegiances to citizens or shareholders, their behavior is, by necessity, discrepant. Theories of globalization that concoct epic binary wars between these powers (e.g., national/transnational or global/local) are nowhere near sneaky enough. It is much more likely that the *multiple* realms of influence are kept in play to lubricate the obfuscation so important to the maintenance of power. The nation state is not dying in the face of the increased power of transnational forces. State and non-state forces are rather deciding *together* how to release, shelter, and launder their identity. Crucial then might be a working knowledge of the logics of duplicity rather than the practices of righteousness. While architecture and urbanism are clearly delineating some of these realms of *extrastatecraft*, the profession often claims to be excluded from political decision-making or claims to be *not at the table* when policy is determined. Yet the good news is that the most influential policies are controlled by discrepant characters like butlers, *go-betweens*, skills, and confidence men. And architects, as the classic facilitators of power, have long been seated at that particular table. Perhaps the most vivid urban organs of architectural *extrastatecraft*, the technique of contemporary space-making – most hidden in plain sight – is the zone.

The Zone Is Ancient and New

A zone may be one of any number of variants including the Foreign Trade Zone, Export Processing Zone, Special Economic Zone, Free Trade Zone or Free Economic Zone among many others. Each zone type provides its own cocktail of exemptions that might include tax exemptions, foreign ownership of property, streamlined customs and deregulation of labor or environmental regulations. Heir to ancient pirate enclaves, the free ports of the Genoese, or the ports of the Hanseatic trade, the zone is the perfect legal habitat of the corporation. The earliest historical urges to incorporate express a desire for freedom and exclusivity. If it is the corporation's legal duty to banish any obstacle to profit, and the zone is the spatial adjunct of this externalizing – a mechanism of political quarantine designed for corporate protection.

In 1934, emulating free port laws in Hamburg and elsewhere of the late 19th century, the United States established Foreign Trade



Zone status for port and warehousing areas related to trade. As the zone merged with manufacturing, Export Processing Zones appeared in the late 1950s and 60s. China's Special Economic Zones, allowing for an even broader range of market activity, emerged in the 1970s. Since then special zones of various types have grown exponentially, from a few hundred in the 1980s to between three and four thousand operating in 130 countries in 2006.¹ Moreover, special zones handle over a third of the world's trade. Some zones consist of a few hectares; some have grown into conurbations that are hundreds of kilometers in size.²

The Zone Is Breeding

Breeding more promiscuously with other *parks* or enclave formats, the zone now merges with tourist compounds, knowledge villages, IT campuses, museums, and universities that may complement the corporate headquarters or offshore facility. The zone has become a new primordial civilization and a warm pool for the latest cocktail

¹ Michael Engman, Osamu Onoder and Enrico Pinali. "Export Processing Zones: Past and Future Development," *OECD Trade Policy Working Paper No. 53*, May 22, 2007 <http://www.oecd.org/>

² Xiangming Chen, "The Evolution of Free Economic Zones and the Recent Development of Cross-National Growth Zones," in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 19, no. 4 (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 593-621.