

The free port and Barcelona's factory

The ages of the Zona Franca



ENGLISH VERSION

On the Llobregat Delta's left bank between Montjuïc and the river, the heart of many of Barcelona and Catalonia's aspirations has been beating for over a century.

The free port plan was devised a hundred years ago as a port area for duty-free freight traffic but was never implemented as such. However, when turned into a large industrial estate it has been crucial for the conurbation of Barcelona and the history of Catalonia from economics with its large automotive industry to politics as the centre of militant anti-Francoism.

More recently, the Zona Franca between the port, airport, road networks and telecommunications is part of Barcelona's logistics antenna for the world and also a testing ground for ideas in economic innovation, metropolitan development and environmental sustainability which take into consideration its location in the Llobregat Delta and the need to preserve local natural assets.

GLOSSARY

FREE PORT: Special port where freight traffic is exempt from paying the tariffs which are usually mandatory in the rest of the country. In pre-industrial times often the entire city had exemptions, while modern free ports have well-defined tariff-free areas.

BONDED WAREHOUSE: Facility close to a customs office with tax exemptions and fitted out to store imported products and handle them in authorised ways. Most bonded warehouses have historically been located in port areas.

ZONA FRANCA: Enclosed area with tax benefits which is more complex and bigger than a bonded warehouse and has large facilities where goods can be stored, handled and processed.

LOGISTICS AREA: Area in which companies transport, store, pick, label and distribute goods.

ZONA FRANCA INDUSTRIAL ESTATE: A large 600-hectare area of industrial and now also logistics land on the left bank of the Llobregat. It hosts about 300 companies in addition to the ones in the Mercabarna complex.

ZONA FRANCA CONSORTIUM: Consortium for economic promotion jointly owned by the Spanish Government and Barcelona City Council. It manages and administers the land of the Zona Franca Industrial Estate, the Zona Franca Customs Authority and the Zona Franca Logistics Park along with other facilities in Barcelona and its metropolitan area. The mayor of Barcelona chairs the Consortium's plenary and the Spanish Government's special representative chairs its executive committee.

LLOBREGAT DELTA ECONOMIC PLATFORM: Industrial, logistics, commercial and services areas in the business parks between Barcelona's port and airport. It includes the Zona Franca, the Port's Logistics Activities Area, the industrial estates in El Prat del Llobregat, the Airport City and the Gran Via economic district in l'Hospitalet.

THE FORMATION OF A LANDSCAPE

2



The Llobregat Delta from Montjuïc Castle, 1917. Josep Brangulí, National Archive of Catalonia

The mouth of the Llobregat has a delta which formed in a recent geological age and had been a wetland area with livestock farms since ancient times. In the 16th century the wetlands began to be drained to extend the farmland, which on the left bank of the river could be irrigated with the Infanta Canal from 1820 onwards. Not far away fields for boiling, bleaching and drying cotton textiles spread and during the 19th century the first factories also emerged in the Marina de Sants, especially in el Prat Vermell. One of the groups of low-cost housing for the shanty dwellers evicted to make way for the International Exposition of 1929 was also built there.

Over the course of the 20th century the Delta's coastline became part of the metropolitan conurbation with the first aerodromes, El Prat airport, the port extensions, the Zona Franca Industrial Estate and the major communication routes. The harsh environmental impact of these infrastructures has been the subject of a significant number of critical studies and proposals for more sustainable kinds of land use.



Livestock landscape in the Llobregat Delta, 1910-1915. Josep Brangulí, National Archive of Catalonia



Mouth of the Llobregat, 1929. Josep Gaspar i Serra, Cartographic and Geological Institute of Catalonia



The SEAT plant, the main group of buildings in the Zona Franca until the Mercabarna complex was set up, during its expansion, late 1960s. Zona Franca Consortium Archive



Left half of the Llobregat Delta, 1961. Historic flights, Barcelona Metropolitan Area



Left half of the Llobregat Delta, 1970. Historic flights, Barcelona Metropolitan Area

THE AMBITION FOR A FREE PORT

3



Demonstration for the free port in Sant Jaume Square, 1915. Josep Brangulí, National Archive of Catalonia

Barcelona's guild elite called for a free port late in the 17th century as described by mercantilist Narcís Feliu de la Penya. At the request of the Consell de Cent (Barcelona's municipal authority), both Philip V and Charles of Austria granted one through the Spanish Parliament and there was a brief Free Port Warehouse which did not survive the War of the Spanish Succession.

Modern free ports, conceived as enclosures outside the national government's customs area for handling, industrial processing and exporting freight in transit, were mainly inspired by Hamburg's *Freihafen* which began operating in 1888. In Barcelona, the loss of Spain's colonial markets in 1899 led to the Spanish Government being asked for the "concession of a free port or neutral zone". The *Report* presented in 1901, endorsed among others by employers' association Foment del Treball and the Port's Works Council, proposed extending the free port to Castelldefels.

In Madrid, debates in the Spanish Parliament about free ports were brought to a halt time and again by the fierce opposition of the cereal farmers in inland Spain until the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 meant the Spanish Government became more responsive to the idea. At that time the lobby was led by Barcelona City Council which favoured municipal management of the facility and had the backing of a broad-based movement of institutions, organisations and 499 Catalan towns, as shown by the Economic Assembly meeting in the Saló de Cent in 1915.



The influence of the mercantilist proposals came down to the 1929 International Exposition. At the suggestion of Agustí Duran i Sanpere, the Barcelona Pavilion exhibited a 3D model featuring an idealised view of the Free Port Warehouse. Francesc Estorch, MUHBA Archive



1934 cartoon by Ricardo García López, who signed with the pseudonym K-Hito, in which the political struggle around the free port is still evident even at such a late date. Newspaper *ABC*, 12 July 1934. Zona Franca Consortium Archive



Image of Sandtorhafen, Hamburg's free port, in the 1910s. Museum für Hamburgische Geschichte/SHMH

ADMINISTERING THE WAREHOUSE AND CREATING THE GREAT PORT

4



The Mayor of Barcelona, Antoni Martínez Domingo, and military authorities during the takeover of the Baix Llobregat land on behalf of Barcelona City Council, 1921. Josep Brangulí, National Archive of Catalonia

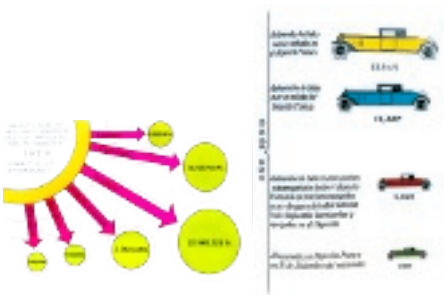
In October 1916 the Port of Barcelona was awarded a trade warehouse which in 1917 was recognised as a bonded warehouse like the one in Cadiz. The facility was to be run by a consortium made up of business representatives chaired by the city's mayor to which Primo de Rivera's dictatorship added a representative or royal commissioner in 1926 to ensure Spanish Government control.

While awaiting transfer to the Llobregat Delta, the first bonded warehouse facilities were set up on the Bosch i Alsina Dock and in other industrial units inside and outside the port area. Barcelona City Council played a major role in the process despite the reservations of the Port's Board and the Crédito y Docks facility manager about this municipal involvement.

Based on an initial design by Josep Cabestany, in 1920 some 900 hectares of l'Hospitalet and a strip of land in el Prat de Llobregat were added to the city of Barcelona while in 1927 an international competition was announced to design the free port on this land designated as being of public interest. The following year the Spanish Government approved the European gauge on the railway to France via Puigcerdà, which was seen as strategic for attracting freight in transit, and a motorway from Barcelona to Bilbao was proposed. The future was being planned at a fast pace.



The Bonded Warehouse facilities with the freight railway in the 1920s. Zona Franca Consortium Archive



The Free Port Consortium, renamed the Zona Franca Consortium in 1929, showcased the volume of operations carried out in the facility. The automobile industry stood out due to its special significance. *Zona Franca Consortium Yearbook*, 1929. Historical Archive of the City of Barcelona



The Barcelona Bonded Warehouse's facilities in the late 1920s. *Zona Franca Consortium Yearbook*, 1929. Historical Archive of the City of Barcelona



Plan drawn up by Spanish army surveyors of the area intended to be used for the free port, 1926. Cartographic and Geological Institute of Catalonia

THE PUBLIC EXPRESSION OF A DREAM

5



The free port model exhibited at the Barcelona Pavilion in 1929. Gabriel Casas, National Archive of Catalonia

The competition for preliminary plans for the port and the Zona Franca facilities announced in 1927 was launched as a large-scale international promotion campaign for Barcelona. The specifications stipulated that in addition to port – an internal canal – and railway infrastructures, the plans also had to include warehouse facilities and commercial and industrial areas.

Engineers from all over the world took part and 56 proposals were submitted but there was no winner in the competition. The design by Bjørn Petersen from Denmark was awarded the first runner-up prize which came with 40,000 pesetas. A while later engineer Blas Sorribas was commissioned to draft the final design.

Petersen's entry was the basis for creating a spectacular model featuring light and water which was installed in the area set aside for the port in the Barcelona Pavilion at the 1929 International Exposition. While the rally in Plaça de Sant Jaume in 1915 had gathered the support of civil society, now the ambition to have a free port became a grassroots issue: the model was one of the Exposition's main attractions.

“The plans for the current Free Port are displayed on the left side of the room. A large scale model gives us a view of the Zona Franca with its docks and canals, its cranes in operation and where the lights are turned on and off depending on whether it is night or day. The water is real and has a certain movement which causes some small boats to sink.

“Large frames contain the preliminary plans for the free port awarded in the international competition won by a Danish engineer...”

Newspaper *La Publicitat*, 7 March 1930



Items hosted by the Barcelona Pavilion at the 1929 International Exposition included a Zona Franca Consortium exhibit. It presented the historical background of this ambition and the proposals to set up the Zona Franca. 1929-1930. Carles Fargas i Bonell, Hiking Centre of Catalonia Photographic Archive



Plan of the free port design by Danish engineer Bjørn Petersen. Zona Franca Consortium Yearbook, 1928. Architects' Association of Catalonia Historical Archive

REDIRECTION: FROM FREE PORT TO INDUSTRIAL ZONE

6



Contemporary view of the Zona Franca. Zona Franca Consortium Archive

The plan that Blas Sorribas delivered to the Consortium in 1930 showed the free port in all its splendour featuring fishbone-pattern docks surrounded by warehouses and factories in an enclosure covering more than 1,000 hectares. His design was even included in the 1953 County Plan but by then everything had been pointing in another direction for some time.

The 1929 Free Zones Act had approved a dual area featuring a bonded warehouse and a free zone where industries that did not exist in Spain or needed export support were authorised. The Act reduced Barcelona's chances of having a large enclosed free port like the one in Hamburg, yet it was consistent with the limitations and trends that were already evident in the 1930s. The small quantity of freight in transit, low exports (except in the automobile industry) and meagre investment in the infrastructures required hindered a project of the scale of the free port while by contrast a free zone designed to be a large industrial estate was much needed.

The Spanish Civil War and Franco's autarchy policy brought all operations to a halt, and the plots expropriated by the Consortium were still cultivated under lease by their former owners until the opening of the large SEAT complex in 1953 reaffirmed the intention to set up a large factory area.



The 1929 decree specified the functions of free ports, bonded warehouses and Zona Franca. Industrial operations were only allowed in the latter. *Gaceta de Madrid*, 13 June 1929. Official State Gazette Agency



The Group of Catalan Architects and Engineers for the Progress of Contemporary Architecture (GATCPAC) included the Zona Franca design with navigable canals in the Macià Plan, which sought to rationalise and extend the metropolitan area, 1932. Architects' Association of Catalonia Historical Archive



Against a backdrop of civil war and revolutionary social change, in 1937 the CNT, an anarcho-syndicalist labour union confederation, argued that the Free Zone should be set up to promote trade and production. *Workers' Solidarity*, 22 June 22 1937. CEDALL documentation centre.



Flooding of Zona Franca Consortium land which was still agricultural. 26 February 1944. Pérez de Rozas, Barcelona Photographic Archive



Even though the Barcelona Urban Development County Plan approved in 1953 formally envisaged a Zona Franca with navigable canals, the Zona Franca design as an enclosed facility with navigable canals had already been reworked towards a separation between a port area on the waterfront and an open industrial estate inland. *Urban Development Plan for Barcelona and its Hinterland*, 1954. MUHBA Archive

BARCELONA'S FACTORY

7



Antonio de la Rosa (holding the pointer), the Secretary General of the Consortium, shows the Zona Franca design to the authorities including from left to right Santiago Cruïlles Peratallada, Director General of Land Transport; Josep Maria Porcioles, Mayor of Barcelona; the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Works, Santiago Udina Martorell, and the Commissioner of the Development Plan, Laureà López Rodó, c. 1966. Zona Franca Consortium Archive

The decision to site SEAT in the Zona Franca as a result of its nearness to the port facilities and the exemption system together with the existence of skilled labour in Barcelona was crucial in launching it as a large industrial area. A more flexible interpretation of the restrictions on setting up facilities extended the range of possibilities.

The 1965 Act completed the specification and marking out of land by allocating 400 of the expropriated hectares to expanding the Port of Barcelona while also zoning the entire interior as an industrial estate including some special customs system areas. Three years later the Zona Franca Industrial Estate Site Plan confirmed the industrial approach and also kept back some land for a large public facility, the Municipal Food Unit (what would become Mercabarna).

Between 1967 and 1972 companies moved in at a fast pace. The Zona Franca took shape as an automotive industry district in Barcelona (metal sector) and as a food distribution and industry hub along with other sectors. A fair number of companies came from more central areas in the city such as Poble Nou. The Zona Franca was Barcelona's great factory not only in technical and economic terms but also socially and politically as a centre of the city's worker and anti-Franco movement.



The Zona Franca became the great industrial area for Barcelona and its metropolitan area, with a prominent presence of the metal sector. Its workers were especially active in the trade union and political struggles in the late Franco period and the first years of democracy. SEAT welder in the 1950s. Pérez de Rozas, Barcelona Photographic Archive



Aerial view of land for Motor Ibérica in the 1960s, with the SEAT plant in the background. Zona Franca Consortium Archive



Urban Zoning Site Plan approved on 16 February 1968 for an area covering 728 hectares. Register of Urban Planning of Catalonia



SEAT workers' demonstration, 1979. Pérez de Rozas, Barcelona Photographic Archive



Collective bargaining agreement of two companies connected with the group in the Zona Franca, 1981. Automotive Industry Historical Studies Archive

Automotive district

7a



The Ford Motor Ibérica facilities in Poblenou, 1935. Foto Ferran. National Archive of Catalonia

The automotive industry has historically been a cornerstone of the bonded warehouse and the Zona Franca. In 1923 Ford moved from Cadiz's bonded warehouse to Icària Avenue in Poblenou and joined the exemption system in 1928; these facilities assembled 6,904 cars and 5,123 trucks in 1929. General Motors followed the same path. Operating first in Malaga and then in Madrid, in 1932 it moved to an exemption workshop near the Sagrada Família. Both companies had the Zona Franca in their sights. In 1935 Ford decided to build a large factory there and in the same year General Motors planned a plant for 20,000 vehicles per year. However, everything was brought to a halt by the Civil War and Franco's autarchy policy.

In 1948 and after much reluctance, Spain's National Institute of Industry authorised SEAT to set up in Barcelona. The skilled workforce, a powerful supplier industry and the port tipped the balance in the decision, and the company was sited in the Zona Franca where it could count on customs exemption and land. It opened its doors in 1953. In 1957 it began to produce the Seat 600 and by the 1970s it had over 25,000 workers. Not far away were the two large heavy-goods vehicle factories: Motor Ibérica, which came from Poblenou in 1967, and ENASA-Pegaso, heir to Hispano Suiza and which moved from Sant Andreu in 1971.



Front page of *La Vanguardia*, 16 October 1952. Historical Archive of the City of Barcelona



Loading SEAT cars for export to Yugoslavia, 1969. Pérez de Rozas, Barcelona Photographic Archive



Making the SEAT 600, 1969. Pérez de Rozas, Barcelona Photographic Archive



Operations at Mercabarna on the day it was officially opened by Mayor Porcioles in 1971. Pérez de Rozas (detail), Barcelona Photographic Archive

Mercabarna opened in the Zona Franca in 1971 with the transfer of the Central Fruit and Vegetable Market, which since 1921 had been in el Born. It was followed by the Slaughterhouse in 1979, the Central Fish Market in 1973 and the Central Flower Market the following year. The facility is also home to the Complementary Activities Zone which in 2017 hosted over four hundred companies. In total the complex covers 90 hectares, houses some 700 companies and exports a third of the products that go through it.

THE ARRIVAL OF LARGE LOGISTICS ESTABLISHMENTS

8



The railway branch line in 4 Street in the Zona Franca, crucial for the rail transport of goods to or from the port. The viaduct running across the photo is part of the underground's future L10 South line, 2015. Francisco Urrutia. Zona Franca Consortium Archive

The Zona Franca's accessibility and appearance have been altered by technological change and economic globalisation including relocations together with the ambition to create a large intermodal connections hub with the port and the airport, land communications and telecommunications.

The decline in industrial activity over recent decades cleared areas which have been taken over by logistics operations. Examples include the land that SEAT gave back to the Consortium and was assigned to the Zona Franca Logistics Park, and more recently the land released next to A Street which the Consortium has leased to the public-private partnership which runs the Port's Logistics Activities Area.

Nevertheless, industry still takes up over a quarter of the industrial estate including Nissan Motor Ibérica as an integrated factory and a SEAT bodywork plant which has been kept in the Zona Franca and connected by rail with Martorell. In recent times innovative reindustrialisation options featuring small and medium-sized enterprises have been studied. Mercabarna in turn benefits from the new logistics facilities when it comes to supplying the city and enhancing its role as a distribution hub for local produce.



Loading freight. Logistics has taken over some areas previously used by industry, 2000's. Zona Franca Consortium Archive



Contemporary image of the main entrance to the Zona Franca Logistics Park. Zona Franca Consortium Archive



Contemporary view of Barcelona's container terminal, one of the Mediterranean's leading logistics hubs. Port of Barcelona Archive

SUSTAINABLE METROPOLITAN CROSSROADS

9



The future challenges for the area include reducing adverse environmental impact, the new mobility and promoting inclusive business activities. Zona Franca Consortium Archive

The future challenges facing the Zona Franca and the delta are in line with the search for a new, more liveable city model. In partnership with el Prat de Llobregat and l'Hospitalet de Llobregat town councils, Barcelona City Council is sponsoring a Strategic Master Plan for the Llobregat Delta Economic Platform.

Firstly, the plan addresses reindustrialisation and driving innovative economic activities that generate inclusive jobs on the industrial land available. Secondly, it seeks to lessen the impact of factories and the implementation of large communication infrastructures to move towards environmental sustainability and greater urban development and integration of the area in the city as a whole, made easier by the construction of the Barcelona underground link.



Contemporary image of the Cal Tet lagoon in the Llobregat Delta. Llobregat Delta Natural Areas Consortium Archive



Barcelona Metro Line 9 South now comes to the Logistics Park and Mercabarna. In the future the planned Line 10 will connect the Coastal Zona Franca with the Pratenc Industrial Estate. Guillem Riera, Zona Franca Consortium Archive

FREE PORT AND BARCELONA'S FACTORY

THE OLD MERCANTILIST DREAM

1681

Narcís Feliu de la Peña's *Político discurso* describes how Barcelona's guild elites push to achieve textile protectionism, a free port and a trading company following the Dutch mercantilist model.

1701

The Consell de Cent (Barcelona's municipal authority) decides to submit the request for the free port to the Corts Catalanes (the Catalan parliament).

1702

In the 1701-1702 Spanish Parliament Philip V grants the Free Port Warehouse along with the establishment of a mercantile company and free trade with the Americas. Charles III of Austria confirms it in the 1705-1706 Parliament during the War of the Spanish Succession.

1711

The Free Port Warehouse is built next to the dock in the area which is now Barceloneta. It only lasted a short while due to the War and the defeat of 1714.

THE COLONIAL PRODUCTS BONDED WAREHOUSE [1872-1898]

1872

In the 1810s the Board of Trade first proposed a bonded warehouse for storing colonial products. The issue came up repeatedly and finally in 1872 the General Bonded Warehouses Company is established in Barcelona.

1873

The Government of the First Republic approves the port's bonded warehouse similar to French *entrepôts* and British docks and awards it to the General Bonded Warehouses Company.

1876

Italian unification had abolished Genoa's exemption but in 1876 its port gained a modern customs-free area. Barcelona's other competitor, Marseille, had a large bonded warehouse.

1881

Hamburg's Senate adds the city to the German customs union with the exception of part of its port. This marks the start of Hamburg's modern *Freihafen* which soon becomes a benchmark. Copenhagen sets up its own in 1891.

1888

The General Bonded Warehouses Company is authorised to carry out some processing operations on stored products.

1898

The colonies of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines are lost.

BATTLES FOR THE FREE PORT OR THE NEUTRAL ZONE [1899-1915]

1899

The end of the colonial markets, phylloxera and the trade crisis with France encouraged employers' association Foment del Treball Nacional to ask the Government to grant a free port or neutral zone to drive exports. In 1900 the Port's Board adds its weight to the request.

1899

In his *Plan for the Unification of Barcelona with the Towns on its Plain* (a number of towns had been incorporated into Barcelona in 1897) Ricard Alsina proposes a new enclosed port facility at the foot of Montjuïc based on Hamburg's *Freihafen*.

1901

The Free Port Boundary Commission suggests setting up a neutral zone stretching over 40 km² along the Llobregat Delta's entire coastline, excavating its port on the left bank of the river and adjacent to the existing one as in Hamburg and Copenhagen.

1903 and 1911

The bills to create neutral zones are blocked again and again by the fierce opposition of Castilian and Aragonese cereal interests. A number of free ports are put forward but the intense attack mainly focuses on Barcelona and Catalonia.

1914

The stagnation of European ports due to the First World War encourages the Spanish Government to be more responsive to the demand for free ports. Barcelona City Council is now at the forefront of the lobby and clearly committed to municipal port management.

1914-1915

Farming interests oppose the plan again, presenting it as a conflict between Spain's coastal and inland areas: "*Spain's main future is in the soil*". The law is blocked again.

1915

On 10 October the Economic Assembly of institutions and organisations meets in the Saló de Cent with the backing of 499 Catalan towns to advocate the Barcelona Neutral Zone.

RUNNING A BONDED WAREHOUSE AND BUILDING THE NEW PORT [1916-1929]

1916

The Government announces the "Alba Decree" to break the stalemate but it only grants a trade warehouse. The City Council leads the process to get it going and the following year it is given equal rights with Cadiz's bonded warehouse.

1917

The Barcelona Bonded Warehouse Consortium is set up, the forerunner of today's management body. It is headed by Barcelona City Council and includes Foment del Treball, the Port's Board, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Agricultural Institute and port worker associations.

1918

Engineer Josep Cabestany designs the Bonded Warehouse facilities between the port and the Llobregat.

1920

900 hectares of l'Hospitalet's seafront are added to the city of Barcelona as the site for the future free port after an Act of 11 May 1920 allows the land to be expropriated.

1921

In July the interim bonded warehouse is opened and leased to Crédito y Docks, the successor to the General Bonded Warehouses Company.

1925

The Consortium is granted exclusive rights to extract sand from the beaches as a means of financing.

1926

Primo de Rivera alters the Consortium's composition to ensure the Spanish Government can control it. The royal commissioner introduced in the previous year becomes the chairman at the expense of the mayor and oversees municipal action.

1927

Start of expropriations in the Llobregat Delta and a decree is passed to expand authorised movements and goods in the Bonded Warehouse.

1927

The Consortium announces an international competition for preliminary plans for the free port. 56 designs are submitted. The competition is declared void and Danish engineer Bjørn Petersen is given a runner-up prize.

1928

The Ford factory in Poblenou joins the bonded warehouse system. The company had moved from Cadiz's free port in 1923, attracted by the skilled labour and array of components manufacturers in Barcelona.

1928

A royal decree approves a European gauge branch railway, except not on the Barcelona to Porbou line as the Consortium had wanted but rather on the Puigcerdà route across the Pyrenees. In lockstep a motorway is planned between Barcelona and Bilbao to connect with the ports and industrial areas in Cantabria.

1929

The promotion of the free port, presented as Barcelona's great dream, culminates in the International Exposition. The model shown has a great impact on the public.

SETTING UP AN INDUSTRIAL AREA [1929-1953]

1929

The Decree Act of 11 June on ports, warehouses and Zona Franca clarifies the situation. Unlike Hamburg's comprehensive *Freihafen* model, the decree specifies a dual system for Barcelona and Cadiz consisting of a bonded warehouse and a Zona Franca, the latter designed to be an industrial estate for business operations that did not exist in Spain or alternatively did not export or were having difficulties in doing so. The consortium changes its name to the Barcelona Zona Franca Consortium.

1930

Blas Sorribas submits the final design of the Zona Franca port which had been commissioned from him after the competition by the Consortium but would never actually be built.

1932

General Motors Peninsular sites its factory in an industrial unit covered by the port exemption in Mallorca Street near the Sagrada Familia.

1935

There is a plan to set up the Ford factory in the Zona Franca and similar schemes for General Motors, but they would be brought to a halt by the Civil War.

1937

The ambition for revolutionary social change does not alter the approach: “Undoubtedly the area allocated to the Barcelona Free Port is the future of the industrial zone” and “if perhaps the opportunity to set up a free port has gone, a neutral zone might be useful, taking advantage of the geographical situation” (the Consortium’s Single Committee).

1950

SEAT is established and work starts on building a large vehicle factory right in the middle of the expropriated land in the Zona Franca.

1953

The County Plan is approved which retains the provision for a port for the Zona Franca on the left bank of the Llobregat Delta.

BARCELONA’S GREAT FACTORY [1953-1977]

1953

SEAT opens its factory with the Seat 1400 and its viability is confirmed in 1957 when the Seat 600 rolls off its production line.

1965

Act 102/1965 makes the Zona Franca’s inner port into part of the Port of Barcelona and refers to the General Port Plan for the specification of its service area and the land that will continue to be run by the Consortium.

1967

The Bayer Hispania and Motor Ibérica plants are set up in the Zona Franca.

1967

In July, the 60 companies which have applied to move into the Zona Franca take up 1,289,485 m².

1968

The Zona Franca Industrial Estate Site Plan is approved which sets its boundaries and organisation. The Consortium seeks to drive industrial growth, alleviate the lack of industrial land in the municipality and host factories relocated from the city’s more central areas such as Poblenou.

1971

The ENASA (Pegaso) vehicle complex, which until then had been in Sant Andreu, and Mercabarna, which replaces el Born central market, are set up.

1971

The Zona Franca’s large companies, and in particular SEAT, take centre stage in intense worker and anti-Franco struggles. On 18 October 1971 Antonio Ruiz dies when the police clear the factory.

1971

In December, 149 companies employ about 40,000 workers and take up 3,904,040 m².

1972

In December, the 157 companies in the Zona Franca employ 46,710 people, three quarters of them working in companies with over 500 jobs and mainly in the automotive industry.

1975

Most of the industrial estate's land is already occupied and the Consortium approves the development of land and operations in other places.

CRISIS AND UNCERTAINTY [1977-1994]

1977

Purchase of land for the Integrated Transport and Storage Centre in el Vallès ends in 1977-1979 in a fraud perpetrated by the Spanish Government representative and the General Secretary of the Consortium, whose role as an economic development agency is called into question.

1980

The Consortium sells 120 hectares to the Port where the ZAL (Logistics Activities Area) is subsequently set up. Four years later it sells 90 hectares to Mercabarna. The industrial crisis had put a brake on occupation of the industrial estate.

1987

After a decade of industrial recession and with its finances restored after the corruption debacle, the Consortium resumes its economic development operations by helping to set up the Vallès Technology Park.

1994

The industrial estate is redirected towards logistics in the Llobregat Delta Plan, an agreement for cooperation in infrastructures, entrances and the environment between the Ministry of Public Works and local councils.

LOGISTICS AREAS AND NEW AWARENESS [1994-2017]

1994

The Port of Barcelona builds the ZAL (Logistics Activities Area).

1995

SEAT returns a package of 40 hectares of land it had leased which the Consortium assigns to setting up the Zona Franca Logistics Park.

2001

The Zona Franca Logistics Park Special Plan is approved.

2004

SEAT completes the transfer of its assembly lines to Martorell while keeping part of its output in the Zona Franca.

2011

IVECO, the successor to Pegaso and Hispano Suiza, closes. The automotive industry is still present in the Zona Franca with the supplier park, part of SEAT's production and Nissan Motor Ibérica.

2014

The Cooperativa Consum supermarket group builds a 92,000 m² logistics hub.

2015

29% of the Zona Franca (not including Mercabarna and the Logistics Park) is still used for industrial purposes. Other business models are put forward and the City Council suggests a new park for small and medium-sized industrial enterprises to the Consortium.

2016

First direct link by underground as Line 9 is opened.

2017

FedEx announces it is to set up a 16,900 m² operations centre in the Zona Franca.

2017

Barcelona City Council announces a new Strategic Master Plan for the Llobregat Delta Economic Platform which puts fresh emphasis on environmental values, employment, synergies between operations, urban quality and the connectivity of this zone which is crucial for the whole metropolitan area.

