



# THE FUTURE OF VENICE

AND ITS LAGOON IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL CHANGE

3.

Workshop Report



**Culture and Development in Venice:  
From Restoration to Revitalization?**

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## Culture and Development in Venice: From Restoration to Revitalization?

Workshop organized by  
UNESCO Venice Office and Ca' Foscari University

20-21 June 2011. Venice (Italy)







# Contents

Foreword	6
Introduction	7
<b>Session 1: Restoring Venice</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Session 2: Quality Tourism</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Session 3: Living Heritage</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Session 4: Creativity</b>	<b>18</b>
Conclusions	21
Annex 1: Agenda	23
Annex 2: List of Invited Speakers	25

## Foreword

The urban ecosystem of Venice and its Lagoon is among the most studied urban and environmental systems in the world. Acting as neutral broker and facilitator, UNESCO Venice Office has mobilized expertise in the interdisciplinary fields of science and culture to identify and discuss the scientific, environmental, cultural and socio-economic challenges faced by the World Heritage site of Venice and its Lagoon in the context of global change.

This document in your hands presents a summary of the results and discussions from the third of four thematic workshops that were held to gather the necessary expert inputs needed to evaluate the current situation of Venice and its Lagoon and to contribute to a shared sustainable vision for its future. The Workshop on Culture and Development: From Restoration to Revitalization was held 20-21 June 2011 at Palazzo Zorzi in Venice, Italy and was organized in partnership with Ca' Foscari University. The results from this international workshop will form a basis to further address the safeguarding and enrichment of Venice's cultural heritage and identity, as culture plays a vital role in harnessing creativity for economic and social development, cultural innovation also contributes to a city's social fabric, and helps to strengthen a sense of shared identity.

The results of the thematic workshops will be used by UNESCO to facilitate the vision, strategy and management plan for Venice and its Lagoon, and to prepare in collaboration with the local authorities a follow-up report to the one already elaborated by UNESCO in 1969 after the devastating acqua alta of 1966. This new report is intended to help guide sound decision-making and further enable sustainable management of not just the World Heritage Site of Venice and its Lagoon, but of urban coastal and lagoon systems worldwide that are facing challenges stemming from global change phenomena, and in particular those in the South-East European and the Mediterranean regions.

While addressing transversal global issues such as tourism, governance, creativity, restoration and revitalization, this report also sheds some light on the possible future(s) for the City of Venice, in particular concerning the restoration of the city, the enhancement of sustainable and quality tourism, the revitalization of a living heritage and the making of a creative city.

Engelbert Ruoss  
Director, UNESCO Venice Office

## Introduction

The international workshop "Culture and Development in Venice: From Restoration to Revitalization", organized by the UNESCO Venice Office in collaboration with the Ca' Foscari University, focused on the safeguarding of cultural heritage and the promotion of culture as a tool for sustainable development and was structured around four complementary sessions, respectively on:

### 1. Restoring Venice: How to Better Impact Economic, Social and Human Development

Moderator: Anna Somers Cocks

Speakers: Claudio Menichelli, Franco Mancuso, Anna Scavezzone, Paolo Bornello

### 2. What Is Quality Tourism in Venice? Promoting Cultural Assets and Resources in a Historic City

Moderator: Jan van der Borg

Speakers: Nicolo Callegaro, Chiara Tagliaferro, Arrigo Cipriani

### 3. A Living Heritage? Sustaining the Dynamics of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Moderator: Vincenzo Casali

Speakers: Nelli-Elena Vanzan Marchini, Alberto Toso Fei, Anna Fornezza Girello, Brian Smith

### 4. The Making of a Creative City: Prospects and Challenges for Venice

Moderator: Martin Bethenod

Speakers: Walter Santagata, Shaul Bassi, Enrico Bettinello, Olivier Lexa

All sessions included presentations by selected speakers and an open space for discussion, open to all participants and observers. Participants in the workshop were about 50 practitioners and academics, mostly working in/on Venice, but including also experts from other parts of Italy and abroad.

The workshop thus presented a varied programme and offered a neutral platform for debate on how to contribute to the creative revitalization of Venice. As a unique cultural treasure and UNESCO World Heritage Site, Venice and its Lagoon requires a clear management strategy to secure its survival and to enable sustainable development of its resources. Venice cannot be reduced to a "Disneyland" or a museum-city: it is a place where residents and visitors should live together and experience a quality of life that is without parallel, helping Venice to become a more culturally dynamic and creative city. Flows of mass tourism and 'day trippers', an exodus of local residents, severe cut-backs in public funding, rising costs of urban maintenance, absence of integrated planning, building initiatives serving the interests of private investors rather than the Venetian population, all put this quality of life at risk.

The two-day workshop saw lively debate on these and further issues concerning Venice's cultural well-being. Apart from the concrete challenges the city faces, three overarching questions emerged early on and guided the participants' discussions: 'What do we want to do?', 'For whom are we doing it?', and 'Who decides?'. The following summary shows that, while these questions appear simple and straight-forward, their answers within the complex context of Venice and its Lagoon are not easy to be either defined or applied.

## Session 1

# Restoring Venice

The first session on Restoring Venice explored the link between restoration, valorization, and safeguarding of tangible cultural heritage. Being exposed to regularly occurring *acqua alta* and sometimes to extraordinary floods, as occurred in 1966, Venice's historic buildings have special maintenance and restoration needs, implying difficult decisions and strategic choices in terms of what to restore, how, and for whom.

The first topic to be discussed was the need for a long-term strategy for the preservation of Venice's tangible heritage. The creation of such a strategy relies on a clear perspective on what constitutes 'culture' and 'the public'. The term culture often seems to imply an orientation towards 'higher' forms of culture, presupposing intellectual involvement and connoisseurship. It tends to conceal that culture is a whole way of life encompassing many different forms of collective activity and tradition. Therefore, restoring Venice also means preserving Venetian everyday culture. This insight relates to a key-question: for whom is Venice restored? The acknowledgement of diverse stakeholders includes Venice's population of approximately 60,000 inhabitants, its 15,200 second-home owners, its 4,000 resident students, as well as the approximately 4 million visitors who stay in the city throughout the year. Venice, in a sense, is an international open city, whose local heritage is world heritage, too. All these different stakeholders are, at different levels, consumers of culture and contributors to the social and cultural fabric of the city.

While restoration and preservation activities need to be aligned with the needs of social revitalization and social cohesion, as well as with the priorities of the local community, they should also serve the interests of an international community that values the city's beauty and uniqueness. With an endless number of challenges ahead, Venice risks to become just an open air museum and will always be a 'work in progress', but to continue with the conservation and restoration of its tangible heritage is an imperative. In other words, "If we cannot save the buildings, every other battle is lost". In this context, four key issues need to be addressed: Can restoration plans help Venice to regain its cultural and social role and support its social revitalization and long term cohesion? Would it be possible to connect the safeguarding of its tangible heritage to the revitalization of its social and human fabric? How should we reconcile preservation with the modern use of buildings and with economic development? What mechanisms of good governance and collaboration between the public and private sectors would help make sure that there is enough regular, long term funding for the conservation and restoration of the city?



© tiseb - Aerial view of the Punta della Dogana

Presentations offered a review of selected restoration projects that involved renewed public and private commitments towards the preservation and enhancement of the city's cultural heritage. These included: extensive restoration campaigns of the popular area of San Marco, the Arsenale complex and the Grandi Gallerie dell'Accademia; the opening of three new museums, thanks to renovations financed by private foundations (Punta della Dogana by the Pinault Foundation, the Magazzini del Sale with the help of the Vedova Foundation, and the Cà Corner della Regina financed by the Prada Foundation); significant large-scale recuperation works among which the requalification of the old Manifattura dei Tabacchi to house the Cittadella



della Giustizia, the revitalisation of the Certosa island, the M9 project for the creation of a Museum at Mestre and the establishment of CNR Research Laboratories at the Arsenale; as well as various successful valorizations by public and private initiatives including the new Manica Lunga Library of the Cini Foundation on the island of San Giorgio, the Olivetti shop on St. Mark's Square, the functional restoration of the Torre di Porta Nuova at the Arsenale, and the re-opening of Palazzo Grimani.

While the large and diversified range of restoration projects supervised by the Superintendency constitute an important step towards the ongoing preservation and revalorization of Venice, yet more restoration work needs to be addressed especially to counter the water-inflicted damage to the foundations of the city's fabric. Future efforts should focus on the requalification of the industrial cultural heritage (e.g. lagoon islands and Porto Marghera).



© Alena Sobotova - Advertising on the restoration worksite of the Ala Napoleonica facade in St. Mark's Square

It was pointed out that public-private collaborations, while offering opportunities for quick and efficient conservation interventions, may give rise to conflicts - where the particular interests of private sponsors may be in contrast with those of the local population. The rising practice of mega-advertising on historic buildings in the framework of private-sponsored restoration work - the most extreme case being the almost entire masking of the Ponte dei Sospiri - was raised as having a negative impact on the image of Venice: "a thorn in the side of every citizen and visitor", reducing the image of Venice to a showcase for global luxury brands.

Two recently completed transformation projects in the Castello district and on the Giudecca Island, were presented to illustrate how - in the presence of a profusion of abandoned or partially-used buildings and estates - restoration and requalification are an opportunity to create new quality spaces responding to contemporary social needs (as opposed to restorations only aimed at serving the tourism industry). Thus, citizens unwilling to abandon the city, or wishing to come back, can re-appropriate their own city, regenerating the social fabric with their active, daily presence. The main question addressed was: 'for whom do we restore?'. The answer given by the two mentioned cases is clearly in the sense of targeting the needs and social requirements of the residents.

In the district of Castello, a historic palace on Campo San Lorenzo was transformed into a home for elderly people. Not only were the existing premises enhanced and adapted to the needs of its future residents, but beautiful underlying structures that shed new light on the building's history were discovered. Some of these findings have now been given a central place within the renovated palace. On Giudecca island, an extensive pocket of land once housing an orphanage including a vineyard and artichoke field, was transformed into quality housing for resident families and elderly people. Its beautiful green spaces were preserved for the benefit of its residents in accordance with the original plans, spirit and public vocation of the site.

Both examples demonstrate that, even in Venice, it is possible to interact productively within rigid legal and conservationist constraints, and to implement complex restoration works intended to meet the social needs of the local population. Appreciating the significance of these projects, the public administration demonstrated sensitivity to dialogue and negotiation, while on the other hand the availability of funds from charity foundations also played a key role in making these projects feasible.



© Elitsa Syarova - View of St. Mark's Square with the recently restored façade of the Procuratorie Vecchie

The function of Venice as a unique practice laboratory for conservation activities, providing excellent learning opportunities where in-depth knowledge of materials and techniques are key prerequisites for successful restoration, was highlighted. The need for sound organization and good planning, which strongly influence the success of a project, was emphasized; in particular technicians should be well informed about the intended use of historical buildings before restoration work is begun.

The restoration of the Caffè Quadri on San Marco Square was illustrated as an example of a challenging restoration. The project for the renovation of this 17th century café needed to combine a historic, theatrical setting with a comfortable and spacious venue for modern visitors. Projects such as

these, where the restored architectural structures try to convey a sense of history and community, deal very directly with the question of Venetian identity. In this context, architects have a great responsibility in defining the appearance and use of particular buildings, and eventually the image of the city as a whole.

The above-presented arguments and examples sparked lively discussion. Participants argued that the afterlife of restored buildings deserved more attention than it had been given in the past, so as to avoid situations in which beautiful buildings are restored but then serve no specific function connecting them to the Venetian public. The link between restoration and society was emphasized again as participants felt that the social, economic, or cultural purposes for which restoration is carried out need to relate to local needs. Cultural heritage is not intended to be put behind a wall of glass, disconnected from the people.

Some participants argued that the tourism industry, unlike cultural restoration, does not participate in the 'cultural value production' chain. Others recalled that restoration processes were becoming immensely costly, and that economic and financial production was key to the future of Venice. Still others emphasized the urgent need for a systematic knowledge-based system on tourism and the tourist population in Venice.

Restoration should always be both backward- and forward-looking. By restoring cultural heritage, we try to preserve its beauty and uniqueness for future generations, but this restoration of the past needs to be married with the production of a new culture for the future. Restoration should be seen as an anchor for this new culture and its distribution.

**Participants unanimously agreed that Venice was in great need of good legislation, governance and administration, to effectively and sustainably manage the restoration of its cultural heritage. Several speakers underlined the insufficient strategic thinking, planning and leadership. In addition, there appears to be a severe lack of dialogue between policy-makers and local community, where the latter should be more involved in the relevant decision-making processes. On the contrary, government agencies often favor grand infrastructural projects, such as the MOSE, the Quadrante di Tessera or the subway under the lagoon, instead of focusing on the people's present needs and preserving the historic, artistic, and architectural heritage that needs attention now.**

## Session 2

# Quality Tourism

Venice is in clear and urgent need of a rich, diversified and sustainable cultural tourism policy and better tourism management that considers, first and foremost, the wellbeing of the local community. Every year, Venice is visited by approximately 22 million tourists, of whom just four million stay in Venice over night, and only two million visit one or more cultural attractions, such as museums or art exhibitions. It was thus pointed out that tourism in Venice is not to be considered as 'cultural' at all: in fact, tourism in Venice could be better described as "free-riding on the city's cultural beauty".



© Alena Sobotova - The crowded area of Rialto

In all art cities, tourism is a key economic factor, but it needs to be dealt with wisely to avoid the devastating effects of mass tourism, which include, among others, pollution, congestion, gentrification and the crowding out of residents and non-touristic activities. With the rise in 'do-it-yourself' tourism, facilitated by varied accommodation offers and low-cost flights, and coupled with the lack of proper planning and management of tourism flows, Venice is attracting an unsustainable quantity of visitors that harms the city's wellbeing. During ten days of the year, total demand amounts to more than 100,000 visitors per day. Peaks of 200,000 visitors on special occasions are no exception. In fact, during two-thirds of the year the number of visitors easily surpasses the social-economic carrying capacity of the city.

Modeling analysis shows that instead of an ideal weight of 60%, tourists represent slightly more than 30% of the actual total tourism demand. In the absence of fluctuations in demand, the total carrying capacity of Venice is slightly less than 11 million visitors, while the city is yearly visited by 22 million people. The development of effective planning and administrative instruments, as well as of suitable governance mechanisms and strategic policies for managing tourism, should thus be considered as top priority for the future of Venice. One-day visitors,

who constitute the vast majority of total visitors, pose a particular problem because they do not use any central services and consequently do not bring any revenue into the city. Furthermore, their arrival is hardly predictable and therefore very difficult to manage. To address this issue, the new Special Law for Venice under preparation introduces a new tax for visitors. Moreover, authorities are considering a new tax for each night visitors spend in a hotel. Such a tax system, however, may prove to be counterproductive as it would discourage visitors to stay in Venice and explore the city over several days.

Various efforts of the Municipality to address tourist management were illustrated during this session. To deal with low-budget and short-term tourism inflicting high costs on the municipality, new visitor management systems were introduced, but have so far been only moderately successful. A particular issue is the seasonal nature of visitor flows to Venice, experiencing in certain days of the year mass tourism that by far exceeds the city's carrying capacity. One way forward could be to make Venice more attractive during non-peak seasons, e.g. by making special offers and lowering prices. In this context reference was made to a new internet-based pre-booking system for certain cultural magnets of the city, such



© Unofeld781 / Dredging of a canal with repair of the embankment walls

as the Palazzo Ducale, in order to achieve a more balanced number of visitors throughout the year. Moreover, the municipality is trying to attract tourists from different regions and emerging countries, and encourage them to consider travel in off-peak seasons. This initiative could for instance include cooperation with travel businesses in Asia, from where large numbers of tourists come to Venice every year.

The undertakings of the Chamber of Commerce to promote sustainable tourism were presented. Their commitments focus on support to the local economy, especially through collaboration with small and micro- enterprises, promotion of cultural and creative industries, and endorsement of local food and wine production. Besides promoting worldwide 'a Venetian way of life', the Chamber of Commerce also seeks to encourage tourists to explore the mainland, as implied in their campaign "Venice is not an island". This initiative is in line with the hoped-for reduction of one-day 'touch-and-go' tourism. By bringing tourists in closer contact with local communities and enterprises, the Chamber of Commerce seeks a deeper interaction between tourists and visitors and the city, and works towards a major sustainability of their activities.

Supporting public policies for a renewed sustainable tourism, with a refreshed emphasis on the 'culture-based economy' will be decisive for investing in art and creativity. The Arsenal of Venice represents a 'best practice' for exportation, where more than 50.000 square meters of the southeast area of the Arsenal complex have become the permanent basis for the Biennale activities. Furthermore, among the instruments to promote competitiveness of the 'Venice City System', particular impulse should be given to infrastructural development, such as the Port of Chioggia, constituting a strategic gateway between Italy and the Venice lagoon. Another particular interest which deserves attention is the original high-quality craftsmanship, which has a strong tradition in Venice and could attract more foreign interest.

A critical approach towards the current state of Venice was argued by participants in that the progressive decrease of the Venetian population in the second half of the 19th Century resulted in an exodus of local commercial activities. With tourism remaining the one and only major industry in the city, visitors have little chance to interact with the local community or to admire and purchase original Venetian products. The MOSE flood defense system left little money for the general maintenance of the city, including the regular cleaning of the canals required for the proper functioning of the specialized sewer system. Before completing the MOSE, this sewer system needs modernizing, yet none of this work has been achieved. The planned subway under the lagoon (sublagunare) to connect Venice with the mainland has been primarily conceived for tourist transportation, but may in fact become a means of transport for the local population who can no longer afford housing in Venice. However, the danger of these large-scale urban works is that Venice might become a "monumental cemetery of incomplete infrastructures". On the other hand, there is an urgent need to invest in creativity and to facilitate the residence of students and young couples for attracting younger generations. To counter the mass tourism processes of alienation and "Disneylandification", Venice should also promote genuine artisan shops, theatres and small family-run hotels.

The topic of quality tourism in Venice generated animated discussions, which demonstrated the relevance and complexity of the issue. Educational tourism demands emerged as one of the key factors to create quality tourism in Venice. Visitors should be sensitized to quality products made in Venice and buy originality instead of kitsch. Venice should offer its visitors opportunities to engage more closely with the city and its residents. Innovative digital technology could be employed to help visitors discover the more hidden and interesting sites of the city.

The participants agreed that Venice needs better tourism policies and integrated visitor management tools to cope with tourist flows throughout the year and make them sustainable. The ideal number of visitors per day is estimated around 30.000 while the daily 'carrying capacity' should not exceed the number of residents.

It was also noted that strengthening activities of cultural interest in the winter period, e.g. in the period from December to February, could help to reduce peak tourism during the summer. The question of how revenues could be collected to cover the costs of mass tourism was left open. Some participants argued in favor of a generic 'entry ticket' of €10 to visit the city, as opposed to the criticized "soggiorno tax" that only targets overnight tourists. Yet it would be precisely initiatives like this one that could reinforce the image of "Veniceland", of a historic theme park that closes after nightfall. Throughout the discussions of the second session, participants concluded that while tourism certainly was the city's main source of economic income, Venice needed to primarily address the needs of its citizens and to attract young people.

## Session 3

# Living Heritage

In the 2003 Convention, UNESCO provides a definition of intangible cultural heritage:

*The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.*

The main concern expressed, is that the Venetian population is being literally "eradicated". With its population steadily decreasing, Venice is in danger of large-scale gentrification and losing its collective identity, which has been built up through the centuries. Because the city is so clearly organized around tourism activities, residents find themselves deprived of public services and experience high costs for living and housing. As a consequence, many inhabitants decide to leave the island for the mainland, thus drastically changing the social, cultural and economical texture of the city.

The needs and priorities of the Venetian inhabitants (be they originally from Venice or having chosen Venice as their home) have to be addressed. In-depth discussions between free, well informed citizens and policy actors need to be enhanced. 'Safeguarding Venice' does not only mean the restoration of its architectural structures, it also means the preservation of its intangible cultural heritage and identity. Residents should therefore have a more important stake in policy-making to actively shape the future of their city. In the past years, residents have become increasingly involved and mobilized, especially by several civil society organizations, but there is still scope for a more active citizens' role to influence decision-making processes in a more direct way. The destination/use of the Fontego dei Tedeschi, an iconic Venetian building, and the future work for its re-qualification is a project which may provide a new opportunity to test this reciprocity and enhance the "cultural and heritage chain" to the benefit of everyone: Residents and neighbors, intellectuals and tourists.

A speaker defined the Venetian population as an "amphibious civilization". What makes the city's population so extraordinary is their symbolic relationship with nature and the elements, particularly that of water, which shapes Venetian life. Venice possesses a unique culture - composed of strictly interrelated tangible and intangible expressions - that needs to be defended and protected from mass tourism. Venice's special status needs to be considered separately from the rest of the Province, as the city (intended as Venice's historical core and neighboring islands, as opposed to the broader administrative unit including Mestre on the mainland) and its inhabitants have specific needs that must be considered and tackled on an ad-hoc basis.

A number of areas in which policy and administration had failed to benefit the population were highlighted. The reason for this is mostly related to a short-sighted approach only focused on tourism (putting an unsustainable pressure on Venice's delicate social and cultural equilibrium) and large-scale infrastructural projects. For the new "Calatrava" bridge, over €20 million was spent, yet the geological particularity of the soil, the economic impact of the deviation of touristic and local flows and the citizens' needs were not considered. Enormous cruise ships are allowed to enter the lagoon and anchor near the island, though the waves and pollution they bring are said to damage the city's buildings.

The administration of Venice seems to have succumbed to economic interest, as evidenced in the proliferation of advertising



© Alena Sobotova - Cruise ship crossing St. Mark's Basin

posters covering some of the most important buildings and monuments of Venice, and in the significant increase of light and water pollution caused by commercial activities. Infrastructure is not improved for Venetian citizens, but for tourists. Islands in the lagoon are sold to private companies. The name of Venice is extended and misused to improve infrastructure in Mestre, Treviso, and Padua. The plan to build a subway connecting Venice to the mainland is only the next step in a long history of policy-making that has in mind primarily short-term economic gain.

However, Venice aspires to be a living city not an amusement park. Therefore, investment and innovation are needed, which have as a goal the improvement of living conditions for the inhabitants. Policy-makers need to develop a new sense of collective responsibility and to encourage tourism of quality, not quantity.

An artistic perspective on safeguarding Venetian identity, where oral tradition is a specific important component of a place's history and memory, was offered. Stories are relevant tools for education and identity-building. Through stories, children learn to see themselves with respect to others and to give value to social structures. Therefore, stories represent an excellent medium to revitalize Venetian identity.

Not only can stories contribute to the maintenance of Venetian history and support the residents' memory of the past: they can also teach visitors, tourists and newcomers how to better appreciate, understand, and even love the city. It should not be forgotten that the first defenders of the city are often those visitors or 'non-Venetians' who are accused of exploiting it. Through a good communication, an international community can better connect to this extraordinary place and better understand its current situation. The Venetian stories and voices - such as the special voice of the ancient Saint Mark's bell, reaching us unchanged through millennia of history - can help to "educate" the tourists, and to some extent "Venetian-ize" them, thus preventing some of the problems related to mass tourism and reinforcing the side of those committed to protect this very special place.



© Wknight94 - Glass blowing at a Murano workshop

It was noted that artistic approaches to safeguarding living heritage are among the most promising and subtle. They certainly tackle contemporary problems from an innovative angle and stimulate creative thinking on intangible cultural heritage and the future of Venice, for as noted by one participant, "Stories and places, if we are listening to them, have a lot to tell us".

The value of craftsmanship was also underscored as an important resource for the city. However, traditional Venetian arts and crafts have significantly decreased over the past years, a sign that Venice is losing part of its creative heritage. This process needs to be reversed, because arts and crafts lie at the heart of Venetian cultural industries, are part of the city's collective identity, and have a long and illustrious tradition.

Venice is a unique city that was created by the people for the people. Tourists need to be sensitized to the historic, environmental, and cultural factors that shape this uniqueness to better understand why things in Venice are the way they are. When tourists comprehend the broader context in which Venice is embedded, there are chances that they will appreciate its distinctiveness even more and take part in the collective enjoyment of the city, rather than the collective exploitation of it.

However, Venice could do more to invite interested visitors from all over the world and give them deeper insights into the functioning and the very soul of the city. The problem is the lack of information about the existence of activities that allow interaction among people. Elaborating on the example of "Welcome to my workshop!", a successful initiative realized by ArtSystem bringing schools to visit the Venetian craftsmen workshops, could be a way forward for the public administration in devising similar programmes to safeguard this rich intangible heritage and reinforce relations between citizens and tourists.

Reflections were further made on best practices in historic cities that seek to achieve a socially, culturally and economically sustainable development. One of the central problems identified were the vested interests which steer and bias development processes in Venice. Again, a call was made to improve administrative structures and management policies and to develop a healthier connection between culture and economy. When the overall challenges are complex and extensive, the first step has to be to break the problem down into smaller units, which can be addressed one after the other.



© Abxbay - Water shapes Venetian life (view of the canal of San Barnaba)

While historic cities like Venice certainly need to invest in preservation, they should not forget that contemporary development and change are unavoidable and can be positive. However, in order to maximize the positive effects and minimize the negative repercussions, the process of change needs to be managed. Good planning, management and governance mechanisms, as well as strong civic participation, are indispensable and the magic ingredient to achieve them is quality leadership. Cities like Santiago de Compostella, Barcelona and Amsterdam, offer interesting models for Venice to consider.

Venice has a great chance to embrace the creative industries and to form part of European knowledge economy, clearly an EU priority. It should seek to offer residents and visitors an authentic 'quality experience' and use its competitive advantage for the benefit of the greatest number of people, with shared values and aspirations that set out what Venice stands for and where it is going. One of the key questions is which systems of change should be reversed and which should be respected and tolerated. The concept of 'heritage heroes', individuals who act to enable living historic cities, was introduced with reference to a recent BBC World television series on heritage preservation across Europe. The promotion of innovation and excellence in Venice could be replicated.

Picking up on the above-arguments, participants debated how to communicate to local authorities and decision-making levels their deep and shared dissatisfaction with the current situation. Several speakers advocated the creation of a strong civil forum to better inter-link with policy-makers, and find common grounds for the expression of private and public interests. It was noted that Venice had already witnessed the emergence of strong social forums and citizen associations, a unique case in Italy, with strong and well-organized diversified grassroots participation.

Part of the discussion revolved around the question of knowledge transfer and how historical cities across Europe and the Mediterranean (Alger and Marseille, for example) can learn from each other and share best practices. To some degree, Venice's situation is unique, but a cross-national dialogue (a "Venice forum") could nevertheless bring new ideas and move development forward.



It was remarked that, to the detriment of its population, Venice lives too much in the past and too little in the present. The city needs new strategies to revitalize itself and transmit its unique cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, to new generations. Property prices must be brought down to a reasonable level so that creative people and young families have a chance to settle here. For too long, Venice's development has been only dictated by the interests of mass tourism. As shown by the dramatic and continuous decrease in the resident population, it is now evident that this approach has impoverished this city and that, consequently, new priorities focusing on quality of living must emerge. Intangible cultural heritage can only remain alive when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, embody and transmit it.

## Session 4

# Creativity

Venice aspires to be an international capital of culture and arts. Its range of creative industries, spanning from glass-making to textiles, decoration to performing arts, contemporary art to music, is indeed impressive. Yet more could and should be done to harness the creative potential of this city, particularly with respect to Venice's application to become European Capital of Culture in 2019. Various perspectives and examples were offered.

The question 'What makes a creative city?' was first conceptualized by highlighting concepts such as fabric, density, platform, and balance. It is often said that creativity is facilitated by the specific social fabric of a city that encourages artistic and creative activities. In Europe, Berlin is one of the prime examples of a creative city, where cheap rents and beautiful spaces attract artists from all over the world. Berlin offers both inexpensive living and an exceptional density of cultural activity, whereas a city like Paris lacks the former and many Eastern European capitals lack the latter.



© Asy arch · The Biennale Architecture Exhibition

Creativity is also connected to the idea of a platform, where creative people meet, interact, and start new projects: a place where opportunities are created and seized. Such a platform requires a certain density of creative activity as well as a diversity of protagonists to work and produce synergies.

Finally, creativity appears to rely on a balance between public and private investment and ownership. It is a balance that has to be adjusted to every country's specific environment. Perhaps most importantly, creative cities require a strong image that attracts creative people to come and work in them. As artists move freely within the globalized world, competition to attract creative people has become much stronger in recent years.

An overview of cultural and creative industries theory was provided with the proposal to use the conceptual framework of "Creative Atmosphere", as a potential city agenda for Venice articulated in four layers: Local networks of cultural creativity, Culture factories, Micro-services and Meta-clusters. Cultural and creative industries refer to a range of economic activities which are concerned with the generation or exploitation of knowledge and information. Creativity, in the words of Herbert Simon, is the capacity to solve problems. It is important in business contexts to spark innovation and new product development and it is equally important in social contexts, where creativity can help to improve the quality of living together. It is this latter dimension that should be considered as a priority for Venice.

Via network analysis a map of creative clusters can be generated, that show where cultural events exist. With its unique cultural heritage and material culture, Venice possesses distinctive creative knowledge that needs to be passed on from generation to generation. Because of its density provided by the limitations of physical space, Venice's creative micro-activities should be able to cluster and generate ideas for new development. Policy-makers should particularly invest in forward-looking creative activities that bear potential to impact substantially on social quality.

The organization of the literary festival *Incroci di Civiltà* was illustrated for its positive externalities for the city. The festival's concept is to invite prominent intellectuals from all over the world to speak and present their works in Venice, but also to live and work in Venice for an extended period of time as writers-in-residence. The festival thereby seeks to encourage new writing on or inspired by Venice that can make a contribution to the creative revitalization of the city. Literature becomes a way to move people. Writers explore Venice from a variety of angles and, as already argued earlier, produce new stories that shape Venetian identity. Initiatives such as the *Incroci di Civiltà* can bring an international artistic community in touch with Venice, and therefore prove to be very positive in terms of revitalizing the city's cultural and creative atmosphere.

The example of the new theater *Teatro Fondamenta Nuove* was presented to illustrate another way in which new initiatives can contribute to processes of creative revitalization in Venice. This theater for emerging artists and new artistic expressions, with a focus on contemporary performing arts, is a place geared towards residents rather than tourists. It is a private theater running on a modest budget, but it nevertheless tries to craft a diverse and balanced programme that caters to different tastes and involves young people from Venice. This way, the theater not only covers a previously empty niche of the cultural offer in Venice, but also stimulates the local community – especially youth, be they involved as the audience or as prospective artists and performers – by offering the opportunity to familiarize with some of the most valuable international trends in the fields of music, dance, theater and performing arts. Some of the programming and production strategies also include the use of residency both to support artists as well as to create a stronger sense of community for different audiences.



© exibart.com - Teatro Fondamenta Nuove

Subsidies for such innovative cultural activities – which also create job opportunities and have an economic dimension – are unfortunately very scarce, whereas costly opera productions are often co-financed for huge amounts without hesitation.

It was argued that Venice, and Italy as a whole, is facing a severe cultural crisis. Public subsidies for cultural activities are being cut in the aftermath of the financial crisis and many young people leave for study or job opportunities elsewhere, thus compromising the very future of this city and country. Cultural organizations are expected to deliver the same results with less money and have to rethink their fundraising strategies. In the case of the Venetian Centre for Baroque Music, activities are largely financed by international companies and charitable individuals who

love Baroque music and recognize Venice as a place where significant musical innovation took place. This represents an alternative mode of operation in the absence of public support and public cultural policies, but it certainly does not offer the possibility of long-term planning, management or security.

Participants agreed that Venice needs to become more active in attracting national and international artists as well as young and creative people. A first step into this direction could be to offer more support to students and creators, encouraging them to live and work in Venice through adequate policies for housing, social and cultural services, etc. The need for a better cultural policy emerged as a central issue of debate as participants argued that the grand cultural institutions such as landmark museums and opera houses surely deserved funding, but that the micro-activities in contemporary and creative fields must not be forgotten either.



© Louis Eduardo P Tavares - The Biennale Art Exhibition

Certainly, Italy is currently a very difficult country for cultural organizations to operate in. It is often forgotten that cultural activities have a cost, even though they in turn offer considerable direct, indirect and induced revenues. More importantly, cultural activities and innovation have a positive impact not only on economic terms, but also in improving the quality of life and the capacities of communities to manage change.

Old and new cultural centers should extend their collaboration to create greater externalities and impact on all segments of society. In the domain of performing arts, a proposal was made to re-conceptualize the Venetian Carnevale from a low-brow artificial event for the masses into a high-quality theater festival closer to its creative roots in the 1980s.

In spite of all the cultural beauty Venice has to offer, participants felt that Venice was a "creative desert", too focused on the past to allow for contemporary development. Since 1932 Venice has hosted the Venice International Film Festival but the cinema offer throughout the year is extremely poor. Tourists are kept within a reduced monoculture, only based on what they see and often fail to understand, because information on other cultural activities is poor and the interaction with the local communities very limited. This is a severe deficiency and should be changed as soon as possible.

**In sum, Venice offers a fantastic setting for creative activities and holds great promise for development within the coming years, provided that the administration and decision-makers can lead the right way.**

## Conclusions

The workshop on culture and development in Venice brought together many different participants, approaches and perspectives. It showed that there is a great interest in the safeguarding, development, and enrichment of Venice's cultural heritage – both tangible and intangible – and that there unfortunately exists no easy solution for the many challenges ahead. Three basic questions have been the background of the discussions underlying all issues raised during the workshop: 'What do we want to do?', 'For whom are we doing it?', 'Who decides?'

The term 'cultural heritage' has considerably changed content in recent decades, partially owing to the instruments developed by UNESCO. Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.

The brand of Venice is of inestimable value all over the world. Venice has a touristic vocation, yet most of this tourism is a mass tourism from which the city does not benefit as it could be able to do.

Venice is seen as a metropolis and as an international city. It is a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1987 and is running to become European Capital of Culture in 2019. It attracts intellectuals, researchers, artists and students. These personalities should interact and become part of the city to turn it into a laboratory for new kind of practices.



© Nikater - Tourist flows on the Ponte della Paglia near St. Mark's Square

As the cultural system of Venice is changing, there is a definite need for administrative guidance, sound administration, and strategic planning. One of the central challenges for the future clearly is the improvement of relations between the local community and policy-makers so as to avoid legislation that caters to the interests of a chosen few, instead of the many. All policy decision making should consider the needs of various stakeholders.

As written in the *Codice dei Beni Culturali e del Paesaggio*, *Decreto Legislativo 22 gennaio 2004, n. 42*, cooperation is fundamental to ensure the preservation of cultural heritage:

*La tutela e la valorizzazione del patrimonio culturale concorrono a preservare la memoria della comunità nazionale e del suo territorio e a promuovere lo sviluppo della cultura.*

*E' compito dello Stato, delle regioni, delle città metropolitane, delle province e dei comuni assicurare e sostenere la conservazione del patrimonio culturale e favorirne la pubblica fruizione e la valorizzazione.*

*La valorizzazione consiste nell'esercizio delle funzioni e nella disciplina delle attività dirette a promuovere la conoscenza del patrimonio culturale e ad assicurare le migliori condizioni di utilizzazione e fruizione pubblica del patrimonio stesso, anche da parte delle persone diversamente abili, al fine di promuovere lo sviluppo della cultura.*

Recalling the recognition of Venice and its Lagoon as of outstanding universal value and its related inscription in 1987 on the World Heritage list, the local authorities, led by the Municipality and supported by the UNESCO Venice Office, are working on the preparation of a Management Plan for the site: this could be the ideal opportunity to agree on a joint and shared programme of activities, involving all relevant stakeholders in the management of this complex site, and helping to shape and introduce a new strategic, sustainable vision for the future of Venice.

Restoration activities, which will continue throughout the next decades, need to be carried out with a broader vision of what the function of restored buildings should be, shifting the inhabitants and their quality of life back to the center of the scene. Tourist flows need to be managed better for the benefit of both tourists and residents and the asymmetry between tourists, the inhabitants and workers needs to be solved. Venice's unique amphibious civilization must be protected and given opportunities for social renewal.

Last but not least, Venice should become a magnet for creative people who together craft a new and exciting chapter of Venetian identity. The main challenge is to let Venetians - especially youth - come back and live in their city. Different organizations and individuals have visions of and aspirations for a better Venice. Yet fragmented as these actors are, they are unlikely to make a long-term impact on the city's administration. A civil forum can be created to unite ideas for improvement and give residents a stronger voice in decision-making processes.

The strengths and weaknesses of Venice are the uniqueness and variety of its cultural and natural heritage, but the lack of a strategy, good governance and management skills are endangering this heritage, as well as the quality of life - and eventually the very existence - of the local communities. In this sense, the question was raised about the appropriateness of keeping Venice on the World Heritage list because of the serious threats menacing the future of this site.

## Annex 1: Agenda

### Sunday 19 June 2011

Arrival of participants

### Day 1 - Monday 20 June 2011

09:00 Registration of participants

09:00 - 09:30 Opening remarks:  
Engelbert Ruoss, Director, UNESCO Venice Office  
Jan van der Borg, Professor, Dipartimento di Economia Università Cà Foscari, Venezia  
Anthony Krause, Head of Culture Unit, UNESCO Venice Office

### Session 1. Restoring Venice: how to better impact economic, social and human development

09:30 - 09:45 Introduction, by Anna Somers Cocks, Chairman, The Venice in Peril Fund (moderator)

09:45 - 11:15 Presentations:  
- Claudio Menichelli, Soprintendenza per i Beni Ambientali e Architettonici di Venezia  
- Franco Mancuso, Professor, Facoltà di Architettura, Università IUAV di Venezia  
- Anna Scavezzone, Consultant, former Technical Director (Restoration) of SACAIM  
- Paolo Bornello, Architect, W.A.V.E. 2001

11:15 - 11:30 *Coffee break*

11:30 - 13:00 Session 1 Discussion

13:00 - 14:00 *Lunch break*

### Session 2. What is quality tourism in Venice? Promoting cultural assets and resources in a historic city

14:00 - 14:15 Introduction, by Jan van der Borg, Professor, Dipartimento di Economia, Università Ca' Foscari (moderator)

14:15 - 16:00 Presentations:  
- Nicola Callegaro, Responsabile Servizio Turismo Sostenibile - Venice Connected, Comune di Venezia  
- Chiara Tagliaferro, Ufficio Promozione Interna, Camera di Commercio di Venezia  
- Arrigo Cipriani, Gruppo Cipriani

16:00 - 16:15 *Coffee break*

16:15 - 18.00 Session 2 Discussion

20:00 Social Dinner

**Day 2 - Tuesday 21 June 2011**

**Session 3. A living heritage? Sustaining the dynamics of intangible cultural heritage**

- 09:00 - 09:15 Introduction, by Vincenzo Casali, Vice-President, 40xVenezia (moderator)
- 09:15 - 11:00 Presentations:  
- Nelli-Elena Vanzan Marchini, President, Venezia Civiltà Anfibia  
- Alberto Toso Fei, writer and journalist  
- Anna Fornezza Girello, President, ArtSystem  
- Brian Smith, Secretary-General, European Association of Historic Towns and Regions
- 11:00 - 11:15 *Coffee break*
- 11:15 - 13:00 Session 3 Discussion
- 13:00 - 14:00 *Lunch break*

**Session 4. The making of a Creative City? Prospects and challenges for Venice**

- 14:00 - 14:15 Introduction, by Martin Bethenod, Director, Palazzo Grassi-Punta della Dogana (moderator)
- 14:15 - 16:00 Presentations:  
- Walter Santagata, Professor, Dipartimento di Economia, Università di Torino  
- Shaul Bassi, Associate Professor, Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Culturali Comparati, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia / Incroci di Civiltà  
- Enrico Bettinello, Director, Teatro Fondamente Nuove  
- Olivier Lexa, Artistic Director, Venetian Center for Baroque Music
- 16:00 - 16:15 *Coffee break*
- 16:15 - 17:30 Session 4 Discussion
- 17:30 - 18:30 Wrap-ups by Moderators and Conclusion of the Workshop
- 20:00 *Social Dinner*



## Annex 2: List of Invited Speakers

<b>Shaul BASSI</b>	Associate Professor, Language Department, Ca' Foscari University, Venice; Director, International Literary Festival Crossings of Civilizations
<b>Martin BETHENOD</b>	Director, Palazzo Grassi and Punta della Dogana Museums, Venice
<b>Enrico BETTINELLO</b>	Director, Teatro Fondamente Nuove, Venice
<b>Paolo BORNELLO</b>	Architect - W.A.VE. 2001 & IUAV University, Venice
<b>Nicola CALLEGARO</b>	Head, Department Sustainable Tourism - Venice Connected, Municipality of Venice
<b>Vincenzo CASALI</b>	Architect and Vice-President, 40x Venezia
<b>Arrigo CIPRIANI</b>	Entrepreneur and Founder of the Cipriani Group, Venice
<b>Anna FORNEZZA GIRELLO</b>	President, ArtSystem
<b>Olivier LEXA</b>	Artistic Director, Venetian Centre for Baroque Music
<b>Franco MANCUSO</b>	Professor of Urban Development, IUAV University, Venice
<b>Claudio MENICHELLI</b>	Chief Architect Coordinator, Superintendency for Architectural Heritage and Landscape of Venice and Lagoon
<b>Walter SANTAGATA</b>	Professor of Cultural Economics, Faculty of Political Science, University of Turin
<b>Anna SCAVEZZON</b>	Consultant and former Technical Director, SACAIM
<b>Brian SMITH</b>	Secretary-General, European Association of Historic Towns and Regions
<b>Anna SOMERS COCKS</b>	Chairman, The Venice in Peril Fund
<b>Chiara TAGLIAFERRO</b>	Representative, Venice Chamber of Commerce
<b>Alberto TOSO FEI</b>	Venetian Writer and Journalist
<b>Jan VAN DER BORG</b>	Associated Professor of Economics of Tourism, Ca' Foscari University, Venice
<b>Nelli-Elena VANZAN MARCHINI</b>	Historian and President of the Association Venezia Civiltà Anfibia



# THE FUTURE OF VENICE

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AND ITS LAGOON IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL CHANGE

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United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Venice Office

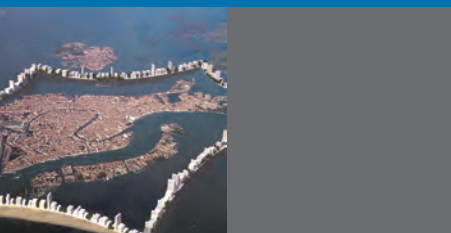


Università  
Ca' Foscari  
Venezia

The urban ecosystem of Venice and its Lagoon is among the most studied urban and environmental systems in the world. Acting as neutral broker and facilitator, UNESCO Venice Office has mobilized expertise in the interdisciplinary fields of science and culture to identify and discuss the scientific, environmental, cultural and socio-economic challenges faced by the World Heritage site of Venice and its Lagoon in the context of global change.

This report presents a summary of the results and discussions from the third in a series of four workshops that were held to gather the necessary expert inputs needed to evaluate the current situation of Venice and its Lagoon and to contribute to a shared sustainable vision for its future. While addressing transversal global issues such as tourism, governance, creativity, restoration and revitalization, the workshop report *Culture and Development: From Restoration to Revitalization* also sheds some light on the possible future(s) for the City of Venice, in particular concerning the restoration of the city, the enhancement of sustainable and quality tourism, the revitalization of a living heritage and the making of a creative city.

The results of the thematic workshops will be used by UNESCO to facilitate the vision, strategy and management plan for Venice and its Lagoon, and to prepare in collaboration with the local authorities a follow-up report to the one already elaborated by UNESCO in 1969 after the devastating acqua alta of 1966.



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