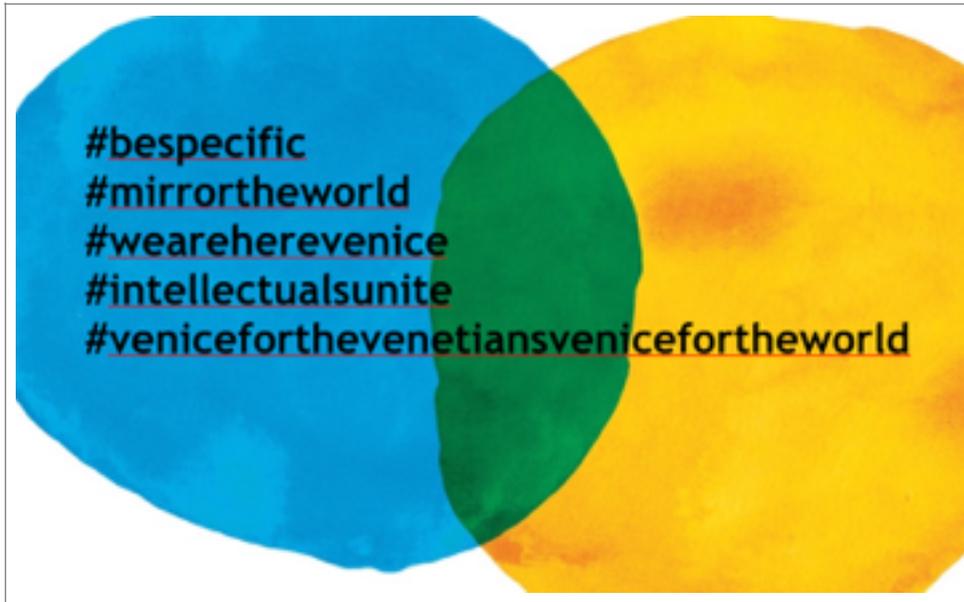


5X15 FOR UNDERSTANDING RISK 2015

THE THREATS TO VENICE

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weareherevenice.org



The threats to Venice are everywhere you look, and I have an insuppressible obsession with pointing them out. But this is mostly because I believe CHANGE is possible, and many of the issues here are also relevant to other places.

It is especially the way we can see things close-up and magnified that makes Venice unique.

Hence the wahv hashtags, developed with Vivienne Westwood, one of our main supporters:

Mirror the world. Venice for the Venetians Venice for the world.

If we can save Venice, we'll know better how to change the world...

And Venice *with the Venetians* is better equipped to save itself.



My husband, Francesco, is a real Venetian. I've just been living here for 20 odd years.

I was reminded of this difference coming home from a party very early one morning. We stopped at a bar near home, as the merry fishmongers were starting their day. Everyone was chatting, as Venetians like to do, and I overheard Francesco and the barman (who also happens to be our neighbour) confiding that their biggest regret is never having *the experience of seeing Venice for the first time*. They were both born here!

Venice. A paradoxical city built on water, right in the middle of a dynamic - constantly changing - and unstable coastal lagoon system. But Venice's greatest threats today are less connected with physical and environmental aspects than the issue of **STAYING ALIVE**.

I mean, retaining a resident population and all the features of a living city, rather than becoming an open air museum or theme park.

DEAR TOURIST, **WELCOME TO VENICE**

We hope you are going to have a blast here amongst all this *beauty* and **monuments**.

You are also **lucky** to be part of the last generation that will enjoy this culture that has thrived for more than 1.000 years surviving wars, famine, pestilence and natural disasters.

Why we say "the last generation that will enjoy this" ?

Well ... are you staying in a short term rental listed on AIRBNB or similar websites ?

if so, then

YOU

are **directly responsible** for helping displacing the last remaining long-time resident that were the heart and soul of this city before AirBnB and websites that allow tourist rental of whole houses all year long in city centers came along.

Your smiling landlord of these days has chosen to join the crowd of venetians that are helping the cultural desertification of this city.

More houses every day are bought by heartless speculators to use them on the touristic market and doing this the **prices of the houses and rents has become unsustainable for residents** forcing them to move away from their town.

Until there is a law that will force landlords of Venice to rent whole flats to tourists only for a maximum of few weeks every year the market will drive residents away from this city leaving only an empty shell for the next generations to visit.

And that, dear Tourist, is a

GODDAMN SHAME

Enjoy your stay in our former homes.

credits to the great people of New Orleans for the idea and the format

Yesterday these posters suddenly appeared everywhere. It says "We hope you are going to have a blast here amongst all this beauty and monuments. You are lucky to be part of the last generation that will enjoy this culture that has thrived for more than 1000 years".

Then comes vitriol against the exploding supply of tourist accommodation that has been making it impossible for ordinary people with normal jobs to stay living in Venice, and for non tourism-related economic activities to survive in Venice. Rents and property prices are too high.

The inflow of speculative property investment MIRRORS the crowds - this is not a photo from some special event. St Mark's is like this throughout the summer, at Carnival, Easter-time etc. There is no respite.





TOTAL MUNICIPALITY
 Mainland (Mestre+Marghera)
 Lagoon+Venice
 Venice *centro storico*
 Lagoon islands

Look at the demographics: **Venice municipality** is very heterogeneous:

Mestre on the mainland, Marghera, the other mainland settlement, and also the 'Historic Centre' or, just, Venice. Plus the islands in the 550km² of lagoon. The total population peaked in the early 1970s at 360,000. This was thanks to the growth in petrochemicals at Marghera.

But this economic development was not without its costs: serious pollution of the land and lagoon plus subsidence due to the extraction of groundwater - not good for a city at sea level.

Furthermore, dredging of the industrial shipping channel caused widespread erosion in the central lagoon. Where there were saltmarshes and mudflats the water is now uniformly 1-2m deep and deepening... (More on that below)

The green line below the grey one is the combined population of Venice and the other islands. The black line is just Venice. The lagoon population has been plummeting since the 1950s from above 200,000 to under 80,000, including places like the Lido.



This is the area I've been talking about as seen from space.

Venice is the fish-shaped bit in the middle, hooked by a bridge to the Italian Peninsula. With almost three-quarters of the municipality population spread across the mainland, where lifestyles and homes are completely different, how can we even expect local politicians to find time or space to accommodate the priorities of a few amphibious dinosaurs still living on a bunch of islands in a lagoon?

A referendum to divide the municipality is scheduled for October. Relative autonomy will bring the viewpoint of decision makers more in line with the populations they govern: Venice and the Lagoon on the one hand; mainland Mestre and Marghera on the other.

Every day, as many as 40,000 commuters from the hinterland swarm into Venice to work and then go straight home again. The current mayor is among them, he lives in another municipality altogether.

The connection between the economic stakeholders and everyday life in Venice has been lost.

Basic data (like commuter numbers) is unreliable due to the amount of undeclared jobs and incomes.



Cruise ships are emblematic of this **BROKEN LINK** between who gets the benefits and who feels the costs. Venice's Cruise Terminal is one of the few passenger ports in the Mediterranean that is **INSIDE** the historic city. The passengers and crew far outnumber Venetian citizens.

In total, Venice gets 30 million tourists each year, which is a ratio of 400:1 with residents. Cruise passengers are 6.5% of the total but not all come into the city, and of those that do, some might stay for a couple of nights in a hotel and have a good dinner, while many have just a few hours to tick some boxes and grab a cheap souvenir.

Please don't get me wrong, Venice needs tourists. Venice has always been devoted to its visitors. The issue is what visitors are provided with by the city, what the city gets from visitors, how they come here, and what they come here for – a profound and unforgettable cultural experience?

This current situation, characterised by unmanaged, uncontrolled, grab & run tourism, is going to kill the goose that lays the golden egg.



This is what it looks like from the ground. Local residents in Via Garibaldi are getting on with their lives, trying to pretend that nothing's wrong.

Visitors to Venice cannot believe their eyes when they see the ships coming through. It's inexplicable also for me. "Vogliamo Venezia" (<https://vogliamovenezia.wordpress.com>) was a community-based initiative coordinated by wahv to show how the main victims (residents) perceive the cruiseships in Venice.

A recent press release from the Comitato No Grandi Navi, a coalition of NGOs and community groups, said: *Political Action to find an alternative to the current situation has reached a state of TOTAL CHAOS.*



It would take too long to describe what has been going on. Following the 2012 Costa Concordia shipwreck, attention promptly turned to the vulnerability of Venice. (I wonder if they'd have even tried to change the status quo otherwise?).

A series of alternative options to bringing the larger cruiseships and/or just their passengers into Venice have been examined with varying degrees of seriousness by Government agencies and ministries.

Legal appeals have also been made against limitations to the size of ship coming through Venice. No consultation has been carried out with the local population, except for lobby groups.

The effect of Venice's port activities on AIR QUALITY is getting increasing attention, exacerbated also by intense local water traffic which is accentuated by the growing demands of the tourist economy.

The Blue Flag scheme for cleaner fuels and Cold Ironing are more hypothetical than real in Venice. Furthermore, monitoring of fine particulates is insufficient (this issue is currently being investigated by the European Parliament).

Cargo Re-engineering

Current System- Delivery by Product



Proposed System- Delivery by Destination



**86% Reduction
in Cargo Traffic**

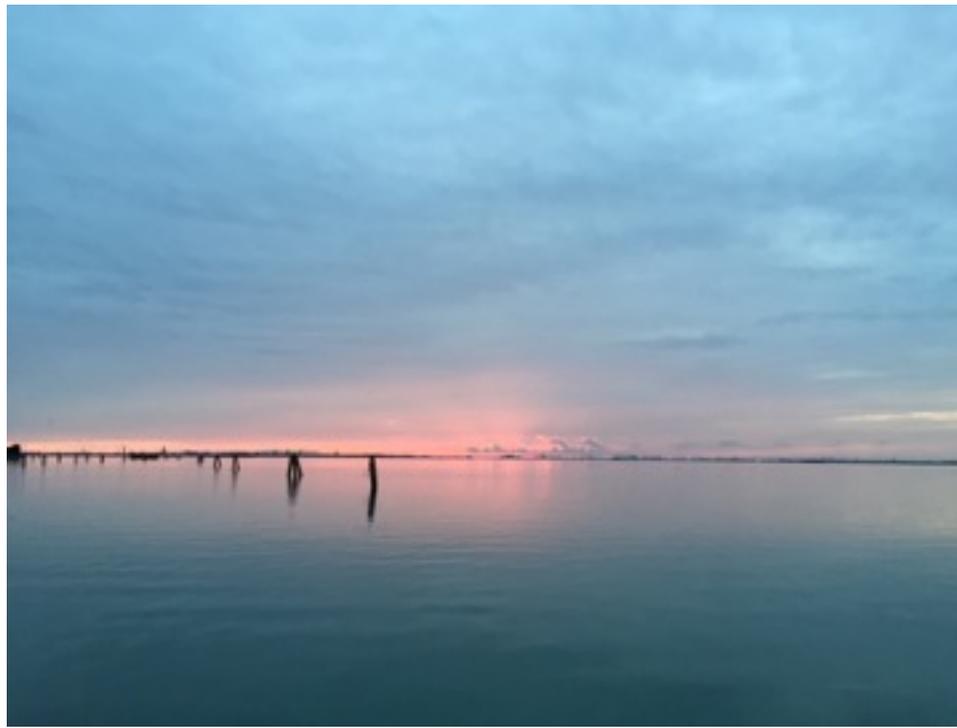
**28% Reduction
in Overall Moto Ondoso**

The issue here is SCALE. Cruiseships are like articulated Lorries on the cobbled streets of medieval villages. Human traffic is smothering the city. The intense traffic on the Grand Canal already caused a fatal accident involving a gondola and a vaporetto 2 years ago.

The face of the President of one of America's biggest cruise companies turned white when I enquired if his company had done a risk assessment of an episode like a bomb scare in Venice. It would cause a stampede, and people would inevitably get crushed! Venice has so many bottlenecks - all the beautiful squares are connected by narrow alleys and little bridges.

Shops, bars and restaurants constantly need fresh stocks to keep up with demand. Stones on the bridges are breaking due to TROLLEY traffic. A study by WPI compared the way things are transported by barges now, according to PRODUCT (drinks, laundry, white goods) to a system based on final DESTINATION with a centralised sorting depot. If you stretch out the distance travelled by all cargo boats, the difference between the two systems works out as the difference between travelling from Venice to Reykjavik OR just Venice to Milan!





It should be evident by now that the main threats to Venice derive from WEAK GOVERNANCE.

You name it, we've got it: corruption, institutional weakness, vested interests, overlaps and conflicting remits among the institutions, arbitrarily applied regulations, under-staffed authorities... In a nutshell: a syndication of responsibility.

There is no long-term plan for Venice, nor is there any institution in a position to draft one. No independent watchdogs. No expert committees with sufficient objectivity or rigour, let alone resources, to carry out articulated comparative analyses or conduct policy scenarios.



In September 2014, 50 palaces on the Grand Canal unfurled these flags (supplied by me) on the day of the Regata Storica. In this way, Venice showed that it is united and vigilant, ready to be a protagonist in all decisions determining its future.

The fact that the Port Authority proposes dredging another deep, wide navigation channel for cruise ships and that the Italian government has come close to approving the plan is evidence that awareness of the **existential link between Venice and the lagoon** is at risk.

The lagoon system is already compromised by erosive processes, new dredging would exacerbate this and cause water circulation problems.

We must protect the lagoon to save Venice: They are inseparable elements of a single system.



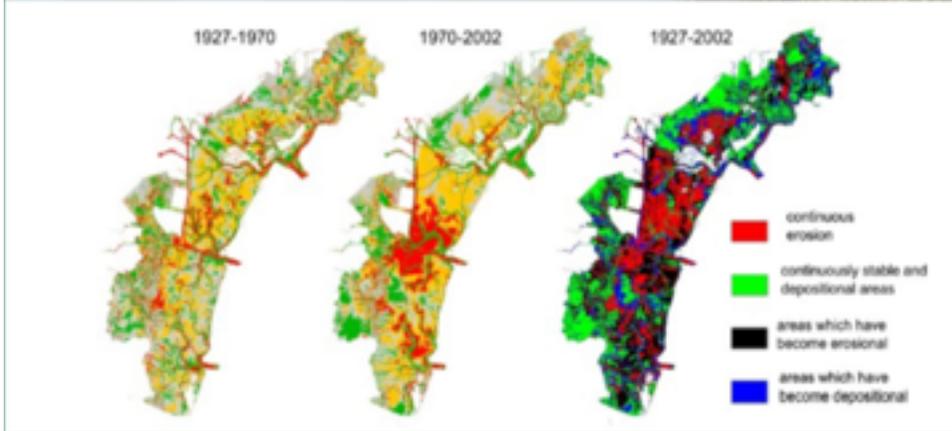
The health of the city depends on an ecologically functional lagoon. This is the view from the north. The bottom image shows erosion rates over time. Erosion means loss of sediment or mud. The rate of erosion has increased dramatically since the industrial shipping channel was excavated.

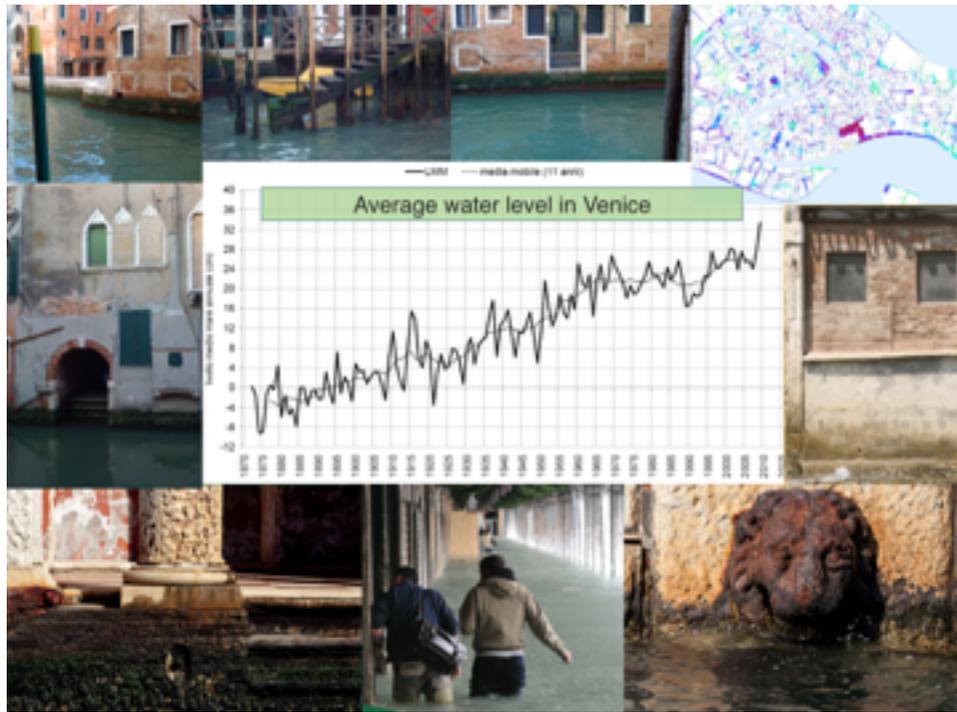
The tides and biological processes determine water quality – that includes the local equivalent of sewage treatment and street cleaning for Venice.

The structural elements of the lagoon – saltmarshes, shallows, creeks and meandering channels – have an important role in attenuating storm surges. In the USA, post Hurricane Sandy, \$40m is being spent on studying how to restore New York’s natural coastal defences, while in Venice this component of the lagoon system is increasingly at risk.

Our lagoon biodiversity is also very special as this is the largest coastal wetland in Italy and one of only two tidal lagoons in the Mediterranean Region. Hundreds and thousands of birds breed here, spend the winter here, or just stop to rest on their migration route.

The saltmarsh has also been found to be four times more efficient at absorbing and storing carbon dioxide than the tropical rainforests. What a shame that the Venice lagoon only has one third of the area of saltmarsh it had about a century ago (and the reconstructed saltmarsh is very different from primary saltmarsh).





Now a quick word about water levels. Without getting into the latest on climate change and forecasts of sea level rise, subsidence and higher water level have together caused Venice to lose 30cm relative to average water level in the past 100 years.

The mobile barriers will limit major flooding from 2018 but this depends on the project reaching completion, how the system is managed, and whether enough money can be found for the system's maintenance and operation.

Venice has always experienced periodic flooding. The real threat is what I call chronic water levels. Look at the pictures around the graph. Greater tidal excursion (the range between minimum and maximum) and stronger currents, due to the breakdown of the lagoon system, are compromising the fabric of buildings.

All buildings in Venice require increasing and continuous so-called "ordinary" maintenance. Only people who are permanent occupants, rather than holiday guests in an apartment rented out by someone in Panama or Padua, can give buildings the attention they need.

And given the specificity of Venetian architecture and building materials, the craftsmen, carpenters, builders, metal workers and other professions must have expert local knowledge and an understating of traditions in order to adequately look after the buildings and monuments.



So we've come full circle and are back to where I started talking about **Venetians as the key to looking after, as well as saving, Venice.**

In December last year local branches of national and international NGOs Italia Nostra, FAI and WWF as well as other community groups and independent experts, coordinated by wahv, jointly produced a report for the UNESCO World Heritage Commission urging them to put Venice and its Lagoon on the list of Endangered Sites.

We hope that this will happen when they meet in Istanbul in July. Not because it will automatically resolve anything, but because we believe that acknowledging one's illness is an important step towards trying to get better.

IT IS NOT TOO LATE!



