Culture and Development in Venice:
from restoration to revitalization?

An international workshop organized by
UNESCO Venice Office and Ca’ Foscari University

20-21 June 2011. Palazzo Zorzi, Venice (Italy)
Background

The Venice Office started in 2010 a process of reflection and consultation to assist the Venetian authorities in developing, through a multi-stakeholders participatory approach, a shared vision for the protection of Venice and its Lagoon, inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1987. This process was launched to better promote the natural and cultural assets of a heritage site facing major global economic, social and cultural changes.

Four preparatory thematic workshops have been foreseen, with a view to the organization of an international conference on 13-15 November 2011 on “The future of Venice and its Lagoon in the context of Global Change”. These workshops organized in 2010-2011 by the Venice Office have dealt with the following topics: seal level rise scenarios, coastal area ecosystems and socio-economic development. This workshop is specifically dedicated to cultural issues, with an emphasis on the culture and development linkage.

These seminars are organized to discuss and evaluate the situation of Venice and the lagoon and develop a "shared vision" for its future. Such a vision is intended to help and guide sound decision making, help the sustainable management of the Venice World Heritage Site, and eventually become also a source of inspiration for other sites and cities, in particular World Heritage sites in the South-East European and the Mediterranean regions.

Acting as a neutral broker able to mobilize different fields of expertise, expertise in the interconnected fields of expertise, the UNESCO Office intends to contribute to a longer term effort leading to the establishment of a more permanent coordination, planning and monitoring platform for the management of Venice and its Lagoon.

Topics of discussion

The workshop intends to bring together a limited group of high-level experts and professionals to discuss scenarios, challenges and perspectives for the cultural development of the historic city of Venice.

The workshop, while addressing transversal global issues (tourism, governance, creativity, restoration, revitalization), would like to shed some light on the possible future (s) of the City of Venice. In this process, several questions arise: how to make the cultural sector a key factor for quality local development? How to understand and scale-up best practices in the field of creativity? How to sustain cultural dynamics? Can a city like Venice think of itself in terms of “creative transformation”?

Coincidentally, this seminar is taking place at the time of the preparation by Italian national authorities of a new Special Law for Venice, which aims, among other things, to identify prospective scenarios for the future of Venice and the related economic development of its surrounding territory.

Also, this seminar is being held at a moment when major urban renovation projects offer a new opportunity to question the main social and cultural purposes of historical preservation in a city like Venice.

Last, this seminar takes place in the context of a growing concern with regards to the ever declining resident population and the current trends of mass tourism (22 million per year), such as the day tripping phenomena (“excursionists”), often perceived by experts as increasingly ineffective for the sustainable development of Venice. This poses unprecedented range of questions for the evolution of cultural practices and of social and economic problems for urban planners and decisions-makers. In particular, are there any sustainable strategies for a "creative tourism" in Venice?
The workshop will discuss four main topics of general interest for the future development of Venice:

1. Restoring Venice: how to better impact economic, social and human development?
2. What is quality tourism in Venice? Promoting cultural assets and resources in a historic city
3. A living heritage? Sustaining the dynamics of intangible cultural heritage
4. The making of a Creative City? Prospects and challenges for Venice

Issues and Challenges

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

For over 40 years, in particular since the great flood of November 1966, and further to the launching by UNESCO of an international Campaign for the safeguarding of the City, much has been done to inventory, restore and valorize monuments, buildings and works of art in the City of Venice, a unique World Heritage Site.

Undoubtedly, there have been many success stories in a City that remains, along the founding principles of the “Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites” (1964), an exceptional laboratory of conservation, restoration, and valorization. Restoration remains however only one step in safeguarding, which also seeks to ensure that cultural heritage is considered as relevant and meaningful, providing communities with a sense of identity and cohesion. This poses the challenge of the political, economic and social relevance of restoration in historical cities, and of its sustainability.

Recently, ambitious restoration projects have led to the reinvention of public and social spaces, such as: conversion of the customs houses “Punta della Dogana” into a center for contemporary art; conversion of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, a former trading post and customs house, into a culturally-programmed department store; conversion of the “Magazzino del Sale” into an exhibit space for the works of Emilio Vedova; transformation of the historic Arsenal complex of Venice into an area dedicated to research and innovation, etc.

Yet, Venice remains much perceived as a “museum city”, a historical theme-park or a tourist resort. In the context of globalization, and the many social and economical changes affecting the City, this raises the question of the “social responsibility” entailed by heritage preservation and urban development projects.

This session intends to expand restoration/preservation strategies in Venice towards broader issues around culture and identity, as well as governance and sustainable development, and will address some of the following issues:

- How can restoration plans help Venice to regain its cultural and social role, and support its social revitalization and long term cohesion?
- How to connect safeguarding of the tangible cultural heritage to the revitalization of the city’s social and human fabric?
- Is the challenge to reconcile preservation with modernity, or with development?
- What are the good governance mechanisms and (public-private) synergies needed to ensure the financial sustainability of conservation and restoration efforts?

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

Venice is visited yearly by approximately 22 million people. Only about 5 million of them sleep in Venice. An even smaller amount, that is less than 2 million people per year, explicitly visits one or more cultural attraction in Venice. The Dogal Palace is Venice’s cultural-touristic hotspot. This
leads us to the suggestion that, notwithstanding the fact that Venice is undoubtly one of the most characteristic cities of art, most tourism in Venice is not cultural at all.

This immediatly raises the question of the quality of the flow of visitors that the historical center of Venice has to live with. The impact of massive, low quality tourism is indeed devastating. Not only are pollution and congestion generated by the excessive pressure of tourism on the delicate urban texture, it also fuels a process of the crowding out of residential and non-touristic economic activities. Moreover, not enough added value is produced and or passed on to the local society by the tourism industry to compensate these huge social and economic costs. What is true for the city as such is also true for its cultural heritage. Tourism is free riding o the cultural beauty: it is using it but the mechanisms that allow or in some cases force the tourism industry to contribute to its maintenance are either absent or very weak.

Being not sustainable, tourism development has turned into a burden rather than a treasure for the city. Sustainability can only be guaranteed if the Venice's tourism carrying capacity is respected by all the stakeholders, the tourism industry in primis.

The issues that follow from this quick scan and that might be at the center of the discussion during the workshop are:

- What sort of (cultural) tourism does Venice need to help it maintain its cultural heritage, both as far as the material and immaterial dimension is concerned?
- What level of tourism development is compatible with Venice's social, economic and physical integrity in the long run?
- What (fiscal) mechanisms can be imposed to make tourism contribute to the maintenance of Venice's cultural heritage more consistently?
- What institutions ought to play a leading role in managing Venice's tourism flows?

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

Faced with a constantly increasing inflow of visitors, the historical city of Venice lost more than 2/3 of its population over the last 60 years: from 180,000 inhabitants registered in 1951, to less than 60,000 in 2011. This constant erosion proceeded over the last decade at the pace of minus 500 persons per year, and shows no sign of arrest.

Such dramatic decrease determined profound changes in the social and cultural texture of the city, threatening to irreparably cancel parts of a collective identity built over centuries of Venetian history.

Phenomena known to most historical cores of European cities, generally gathered under the concept of “gentrification”, are scaled up in Venice to an unprecedented dimension.

In front of the massive pressure of tourism and its consequences, such as the increased cost of living and housing, and the reduction of public services for the residents, the local population is literally eradicated from Venice and induced to move into the several cities, villages and new towns of the mainland. While the so-called living heritage is naturally exposed to a gradual evolution, along with the transformations affecting its social, natural and economic environment, in the case of Venice the pace and scale of change risk to be too extreme to ensure the transmission and viability of the traditional knowledge and practices.

Yet, while the public debate on the future of Venice mostly focus on the conservation of its immovable cultural heritage and natural environment, very scarce attention is still paid to its intangible cultural heritage and to the bearers of this unique legacy. Far from being the priority of any of the main players engaged in local governance, safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage and of the very Venetian identity only makes it into the agenda to the extent of its being potentially profitable and functional to the tourism industry.
This Panel 3, bringing together key stakeholders from the local government agencies and civil society, shall discuss over the safeguarding of the Venetian intangible cultural heritage and cultural identity, in the light of questions such as:

- What are the main governance issues underlying the afore-mentioned transformations, and how can these issues be effectively tackled?
- What are the main needs and priorities of the resident community, with respect to the safeguarding of its traditional knowledge and practices?
- Which safeguarding and preventive measures are being currently implemented in order to steer and mitigate the impact of the above-mentioned phenomena, and how effective these measures are?
- How can these measures be improved and strengthened, and made more adequate to meet the requests of the local population?

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

Cities play a vital role in harnessing creativity for economic and social development. Policy makers are increasingly taking account of the role of cultural creativity when planning economic policy and of the role culture can play in urban renewal, ranging from world-wide mega-events (sport events, flagships projects, Expos), international cultural development programs (Cultural Capitals; recovery programs) to urban marketing promotion at a local level. Thus, cultural creativity contributes to a city's social fabric, cultural diversity and enhances the quality of life. It also strengthens a sense of community and helps define a shared identity.

Interestingly, Venice, after a lost bidding for the 2020 Olympic Games, is now running to be European Capital of Culture in 2019. Beyond, in preparing a new Special Law for Venice, Italian national authorities intend to foresee innovative strategies that can ensure a longer term sustainability of the economy of the city and its hinterland, reinforcing in particular its capacity as "an international Capital of Culture and Arts", as well as an industrial innovation and exchange centre.

Certainly, Venice enjoys many resources (strong universities, European and international research centers, prestigious cultural and artistic institutions) necessary to develop a path towards innovation and creativity. New creative movements are also developing, with creative professionals renovating Venetian traditions (arts, craft, glass-making design, design). Supporting pluralism of ideas and making cultural creativity is an essential component of economic and social development. This workshop is therefore an opportunity to reconsider the possibilities for creative and effective cultural strategies in an urban setting like Venice, currently under huge pressure due to the effects of globalization, de-industrialization, mass-tourism, increasing inter-city competition, and contraction of public funding.

In this context, this session 4 might question the socio-economic model of managing a cultural based development of a City like Venice and address some of the following issues:

- How to make creativity an essential element of local economic and social development?
- How to build local capacity and train local cultural actors in business skills?
- Can a dynamic and innovative cultural sector (cinema, music, theatre, dance, folk and contemporary art, fashion, craft, design, media and visual arts, gastronomy) enable Venice, despite a very fragile human and social fabric, to gain and maintain a competitive edge in the global cultural arena?
- Can the territory of Venice be still extended in a multifaceted and extended platform for experimentation and socio-cultural innovation?
Modalities of workshop and expected results

Experts will be asked to present short papers during their presentations (30 minutes) and to have interactive discussions, with questions and answers. Each session will have one moderator to introduce the debate, summarize the position papers and facilitate the discussions of the session. A report and consolidated position paper will be prepared at the end of the workshop. Each participant is therefore asked to send in advance a one page abstract of his intervention to facilitate discussions among participants and the preparation of the report.

Working language

Working language will be English.

Place of the meeting

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- Mr Jan Van der Borg, Professor, Dipartimento di Economia Università, Cà Foscari, Venezia,
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Agenda of the meeting

- **Sunday 19 June 2011**
  Arrival of participants

- **Monday 20 June 2011**
  09.00 Registration of participants

09.00-09.30 Opening remarks

- Engelbert Ruoss, Director, UNESCO Office in Venice
- Jan van der Borg, Professor, Dipartimento di Economia Università Cà Foscari, Venezia
- Anthony Krause, Head of Culture Unit, UNESCO Office in Venice
Session 1: Restoring Venice: how to better impact economic, social and human development
Session moderated by Anna Somers Cocks (Chairman, Venice in Peril)

09.30-9.45 Introduction, by Anna Somers Cocks, Chairman, Venice in Peril

9.45-11.15 Presentations:

- Claudio Menichelli, Soprintendenza per i Beni Ambientali e Architettonici di Venezia
- Franco Mancuso, Professor, Facoltà di architettura, Università IUAV di Venezia
- Marino Folin, Professor, Executive Board, Fondazione di Venezia
- Anna Scavezzon, Consultant, former Technical Director (Restoration) of SACAIM

11.15 - 11.30 Coffee break

11.30 - 13.00 Session 1 Discussion

13.00-14.00 Lunch, Palazzo Zorzi

Session 2: What is quality tourism in Venice? Promoting cultural assets and resources in a historic city
Session moderated by Jan Van der Borg (Professor, Università Ca' Foscari)

14.00-14.15 Introduction, by Jan Van der Borg, Professor, Dipartimento di Economia, Università Ca' Foscari

14.15-16.00 Presentations:

- Roberto Panciera, Assessore Comunale al Turismo, Venezia
- Roberto Crosta, Secretary General, Camera di Commercio di Venezia
- Noam Shoval, Professor, Head of Department of Geography, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- Arrigo Cipriani, Gruppo Cipriani
16.00 - 16.15 Coffee break

16.15 - 18.00 Session 2 Discussion

- Tuesday 21 June 2011

Session 3: A living heritage? Sustaining the dynamics of intangible cultural heritage
Session moderated by Vincenzo Casali, Vice-President, 40xVenezia

09.00 - 9.15 Introduction by Vincenzo Casali, Vice-President, 40xVenezia

9.15 - 11.00 Presentations:
- Brian Smith, Secretary General, European Association Historic towns and regions
- Nelli-Elena Vanzan Marchini, President, Venezia Civiltà Anfibia
- Alberto Toso Fei, writer
- Anna Fornezza Girello, President, ArtSystem

11.00 – 11.15 Coffee break

11.15 - 13.00 Session 3 Discussion

13.00-14.00 Lunch break, Palazzo Zorzi

Session 4: The making of a Creative City? Prospects and challenges for Venice
Session moderated by Martin Bethenod, Director, Palazzo Grassi-Punta della Dogana

14.00-14.15 Introduction, by Martin Bethenod, Director, Palazzo Grassi-Punta della Dogana

14.15-16.00 Presentations:
- Walter Santagata, Professor, Dipartimento di Economia, Università di Torin
- Shaul Bassi, Associate Professor, Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Culturali Comparati, Università Ca’ Foscari di Venezia/Incroci di Civiltà
- Enrico Bettinello, Director, Teatro Fondamenta 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