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Exploring Globalized Scenarios:

The Case of Two Organizations in Venice, VeniSIA and Venywhere, that Aim at
Contrasting Through Remote Work the Depopulation of Its Historic Centre

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Abstract

Although Venice has always been a popular tourist destination, the phenomenon has increased strongly in recent decades, leading to numerous protests from locals. Along with the increase in daily visitors, there have been a series of difficulties for citizens, from overcrowded public transport to the proliferation of souvenir shops, restaurants, and hotels. Many public properties have been sold by the Municipality itself to ensure their preservation in the face of high maintenance costs. Museums, palaces, and sometimes entire islands have been sold to private investors, often foreigners, who have turned them into tourist facilities, taking advantage of the city's fame. Venice in fact attracts between 12 and 20 million visitors every year, increasing year by year. But while the number of tourists rises, the number of inhabitants (of the historic centre) falls. On the 21st of March 2008, a historic pharmacy in the centre exposed a counter in the shop window that marks the number of citizens in real time: on that day it read 60,699 people. At the end of 2021, the number recorded was 50,434. To face the exodus of residents, the only measures taken by the Municipality concerned the regulation of tourist flows, with little if any results. The recent introduction of a reservation ticket to enter the city is only the latest of many measures with little use. In the last year, however, new organizations not linked to the Municipality were born with the ultimate aim of repopulating the historic centre by attracting a new class of residents. VeniSIA and Venywhere – the two organizations analysed in this study – want to exploit new technologies to create a new form of residency that may also have a positive impact on the lives of other inhabitants. Like overtourism, their existence can be defined as a 'side effect' of globalization. This study aims to find out whether the measures offered by these two organizations can really be effective in slowing down the exodus of residents and in what way. Should they prove successful, they would set an example that other cities suffering from overtourism could take inspiration from.

Keywords: globalization, exodus of citizens, overtourism, new technologies

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Area

“Venezia è bella, ma non ci vivrei”

Italian culture is full of clichés, i.e. general and common phrases that hide judgements or ideas. This quoted one is one of the most famous and literally means: *“Venice is beautiful, but I wouldn’t live there”*. Even though it is generally known that clichés often are based on stereotypes and preconceptions, this one does not trace back to ancient times, but has its roots in recent history and is what many Italian tourists have said at least once while visiting the city – even if just for fun. It is from this popular expression that this research stems out: Venice is a worldwide known city famous for its unique location, its cultural heritage, and the environment in which it is settled, but also for the several problems that affect it, one among others tourism and issues related to it – like scarce liveability. During the decades, the number of inhabitants leaving the city centre has raised exponentially, and the historic centre now counts approximately 50 thousand versus the 160 thousand it had when the process of touristification began back in the 1930s (Comune di Venezia, 2021). Over the years, residents' protests have increased, but with little result. The various councils have only tried to contain the influx of visitors but have not acted on the causes of the sharp increase. However, the Covid-19 pandemic marked a turning point by opening the scenario to new organizations that, taking advantage of the recent emergence of distance working, aim to counteract the depopulation of the city centre by attracting new residents. These are VeniSIA and Venywhere, and what this thesis is concerned with is understanding what impact they can have in countering Venice's demographic problem.

Taking one step backwards, the lagoon city has always been a touristic destination, chosen by many in ancient times for its cultural environment. It was a city of *encounter*, where people from all around the world came, either for market purposes or educational ones. Its touristic development trace back to the early years of the XX century: it is in that period that different functions were assigned to different areas of the city. The mainland was destined to the development of the industrial area, many factories, and a harbour. In Lido, the strip of land between the main island and the open sea, there were many hotels due to its beach, and in 1932 the Palace of Cinema was built, along with the Casinò where the Venice International Film Festival is still held today. The historic centre, on the

other hand, kept onto its cultural and representative function (Zannini, 2015, p. 2). In 1950 the number of tourists in the city was less than 2 million. This number had doubled in 1980, when the presences exceeded 4 million. In 2005, the amount was again duplicated, and visitors were more than 8 million. In 2019, before the pandemic, Venice counted 13 million tourists (Assessorato al turismo, 2020). The number of tourists was not the only one to rise: along with that also the number of protests carried out by citizens augmented. Inhabitants complained about the consequences of the excessive number of visitors in Venice – among which were the congestion of streets and public transport, the proliferation of souvenir shops, and the general increase in prices. At the same time, hotels, resorts, and peer-to-peer accommodations proliferated (Volo, 2020, p. 17), and many public properties were sold to privates while offices were moved to the mainland throughout the years.

As the numbers say, Venice has a long tradition in tourism, but it was not a real issue until after the Second World War. Around 1980 tourism in the lagoon city shifted from being elitist to massive. This is due to three main factors: the progressive deindustrialization of the city – which allowed more investment in the touristic sector –, the establishment of the harbour for cruise ships, and the nearby seaside resorts providing daily tours to and of the city. These three phenomena strongly increased the number of daily visitors not spending the night in the historic centre: it was a new form of tourism (Zannini, 2015, p. 4). Venice shifted from being a tourist destination to a touristic attraction: the first one is a geographical location where attractions are and motivate visitors to come. Sponsoring daily trips to Venice, making it a stop during cruises, and developing a touristic hub on the mainland strengthened the idea that the city is just a spot to visit for then proceeding on the trip and not a place where to stay.

In 2020, however, the Covid19 pandemic hit the city, as well as the rest of the world, along with the exceptional flooding of November 2019, putting the light on the extreme fragility of the city and its excessive dependency on tourism. The protests of merchants were many, manifesting against the regulations introduced by the government to constrain the spreading of the virus. On the other side, citizens of the historic centre highlighted how finally they could enjoy and experience their city without the chaotic presence of millions of tourists every day. However, the diffusion of the vaccine and the progressive easing of regulations brought back visitors first from the rest of Italy, then Europe, and once again from all over the world. During the Easter period of 2022, Venice counted around 120 thousand visitors per day, around the average pre-covid period. The news has been defined as “a breath of fresh air” for third sector entrepreneurs by the mayor of the city Luigi Brugnaro (RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana, 2022), a metaphor to say that the return of mass tourism was just what the city and its entrepreneurs needed. It is important to highlight that to the number mentioned above,

must be added other 20-40 thousand visitors that did not sleep in any of the registered sleeping accommodations, but were detected by the Smart Control Room of the Municipality – a monitoring system that counts the number of mobile phones active in the geographical area of the historic centre at 4 am every day. Thanks to this system it is possible to know how many people are sleeping in the historic centre besides residents (Bertasi, 2022).

It is therefore evident that the touristic presences in the city not only exceed the number of citizens, but many of them are not even legally registered, avoiding the payment of taxes and the regular registration in statistics. The debate on what to do to control unrestrained tourism and its consequences has been going on for years, and many scholars intervened in the debate. However, no measures had been taken until April 2022 when the rumours about regulating the access to the city became reality. Starting from July 2022 it will be necessary to book the entrance to the city. It will first work only as an incentive: the reservation will give registered visitors access to discounts for services like transport and the possibility of skipping the several lines required in many museums and attractions. The plan is however to make it compulsory by January 2023, introducing the payment of an entrance ticket. The main aim of this measure is to discourage daily visitors: they are in fact seen as the real problem of the city since they (hypothetically) do not support the city's economy – they do not sleep in the historic centre, meaning they do not pay any tax, and often not even go to restaurants or museum, preferring to walk along the *calli* (Venetian name for *streets*). All those tourists who book a night stay in the lagoon city indeed will already have the reservation automatically done, without the risk of being kept out of it. Access to the city, however, will not be denied to anyone: there is in fact no maximum number of visitors to be admitted. The only difference will be in the price of the reservation ticket, higher if there are too many people. It means that the measure will simply be a deterrent for daily visitors, but not highly effective (Tantulli, 2022).

Venice will be the first city in the world to adopt this strategy and the mayor is aware and proud of this choice, as he says on his social media accounts. The lagoon city indeed is not the only one suffering from overcrowding, citizens protests, exodus, rising prices, and other consequences of mass tourism. It is in fact a specific phenomenon, which became known in 2017 as *overtourism*, first used on Twitter in 2012 and established as a fact after the huge protests of citizens in Barcelona. The term has been mainly used by media, especially the British ones when documenting the demonstrations going on in the Catalan city regarding especially the loss of cultural identity caused by the phenomenon (Butcher, 2020, pp. 70-75). Many people who live in cities affected by it, complain about tourists not supporting the local culture; they only take away something, often showing disrespectful behaviours towards the environment they are in (Ibid). In Barcelona, for example, locals

use the expression *turismo de borrachera* when referring to the habit of tourists getting drunk when in the city. Many complain about the difficulties to fall asleep at night, due to the amount of noise provoked by visitors in the streets. Tourists use to do things they would not do at their home place, and this is a common complaint in many cities, and about tourism in general (Crowded out: an overtourism documentary, 2018).

Anti-tourism protests, however, do not only highlight the problem of tourists being disrespectful. They also raise the issue of *capacity*. When looking at numbers, it becomes easy to see the imbalance between the number of inhabitants and that of visitors. As mentioned before, in Venice, the number of tourists in 2019 was around 13 million, while the number of citizens on the island was 52.143, according to the records of the Municipality (Assessorato al turismo, 2020). The National Statistical Institute stated that in Barcelona, during the same year, approximately 12 million visitors came to the city, compared to 5.541.000 inhabitants of its metropolitan area. Tourism, thus, is a problem for infrastructures too. The most common answer of municipalities, anyhow, is that of enlarging and adapting them to tourism's needs. Even if this practice may ease the pressure for a determined period, the outcome is that of attracting new tourists (Crowded out: an overtourism documentary, 2018). This scenario opens to another issue related to overtourism and its management: tourism represents for local authorities of many cities the chance to invest in local heritage and infrastructures but also to rebrand and “invent” a new place out of nothing (Butcher, 2020, pp. 72-75).

The development of tourism places indeed represents a case of spatial struggle linked to the production of space. Going more in-depth, it is a common practice to take a particular element to brand and promote; it sometimes is part of the city's history, and other times it simply is a related image. Many historic cities focus their image on well-known masterpieces, like famous architecture, paintings, or traditions. In the case of Venice, the city is strictly linked to the Carnival and its masks, and to the *gondole* that slowly cross the narrow canals, an image linked to the idea of romance. It is no coincidence that at the baggage claim in Venice airport there are large mannequins in masks to welcome visitors or that it is world-famous as the *city of lovers*. Venice is an ancient city, and narratives around it have been built for ages. An interesting phenomenon related to these narratives is that its name is sometimes used to promote other cities such as “the Venice of the North”, Amsterdam, or “la Petite Venise”, Colmar in France. This happens with neighbourhoods too, like in London or Bologna, where somehow the view of canals resembles the one in Venice. However, branding a city around specific narratives may not be representative of what is the real identity of the place perceived by its inhabitants.

It is therefore clear the connection between overtourism, and the loss of identity manifested during the protests which gave the name to the phenomenon, which may take place through different practices. This, however, is just an expression of more profound changes shaping the world in the recent decades, which may be traced back to the bigger issue of *globalization*. This significant increase in tourist movements and tourism planning is linked to several factors, among which the most evident is the easing of travelling and the drastic reduction in its costs. Several airlines started selling low-cost tickets and crossing borders and/or obtaining touristic visas were simplified; the advent of social media and travel blogs increased the visibility of places and raised the ephemeral value of living experiences that may be *posted*. At the same time, peer-to-peer accommodation practices were established, contributing to the lowering of travel expenses (Song, et al., 2018, pp. 1000-1001).

All these phenomena are consequences of a more global world, that may be described as characterized by “a process – or a set of processes – that involves the compression of space and time and the intensification of economic, social, political, and cultural interdependence on a global scale” (Ibid, p. 999). Globalization passes through four main indicators: technics, economics, politics, and culture. New technologies allowed the development of modern communication and transport means, resulting in easier and more accessible mobility. At the same time, global financial transactions were simplified, and companies got the chance to establish even outside their country, lowering prices. This was made possible by the will of authorities to ease the restrictions on capital mobility, especially in terms of private capital investments. Procedures for border crossing were simplified too, as well as those to obtain visa permits. As the world became “smaller”, different cultures started spreading around the world through the establishment of ideologies and identities that attract visitors (Ibid, pp. 1000-1001). While travelling was once an exclusive and rare experience that required a certain amount of time, it became easier and more frequent to do short trips due to the *compression of space and time* brought by the consequences of a global world (Crowded out: an overtourism documentary, 2018).

This last concept comes from David Harvey's theories and refers not only to the physical shortening of distances due to technological development but also to the condensation of time of consumption. This derives from an acceleration in production, that had two main consequences: the spreading of fast fashion, which had serious consequences on lifestyles, and the shift from the consumption of goods to the consumption of services, giving more value to ephemeral experiences. Within this framework, instantaneity became merit as *faster is better* (Harvey, 2001, pp. 285-287). The consequences on tourism are clear: travelling is the best expression of this “culture of the ephemeral”,

where experience is at the centre, and instantaneity is a value. Daily visits or short trips, in which a lot of activities are concentrated, are the manifestation of it, and sometimes people are so focused on seeing a doing as many things as possible in a short time that little consideration is given to really understand and *live* what is being experienced.

Within this global scenario, the case of Venice plays an important role in showing the extreme and drastic consequences of an excess of liberalism, displaying sooner than other cities how this neoliberal approach is shifting the attention away from the planning for citizens. The Municipality in fact focused its attention on making Venice a *showcase*, attracting investors from all over the world. As the money implemented for its development comes from privates, the investments have little to do with the social needs of those who live in the historic centre but aim at attracting new capital. Many in fact are the scholars who describe Venice as a *dying city*, and indeed it is if considering the number of inhabitants and activities have disappeared during recent decades (Albanese, et al., 2019). It is important to say that this narrative had the opposite effect on the city from the expected one: the idea of a city that is slowly disappearing simply increased the urgency for visiting it and worked as an attractor for tourists (Zannini, 2015, p. 6). In the last couple of years, however, few initiatives originated with the aim of finding alternative ways to bring new citizens to the historic centre, despite the unstoppable exodus and the lack of action of the Municipality. It is from this final hope that this research stems out, with the aim of exploring the scenario and understanding whether a change of direction is still possible.

1.2 Problem Formulation

As mentioned above, Venice is now facing what may be its last chance to counteract the ongoing trends and still remain a *real* city, despite the recent decision of the Municipality to introduce a reservation ticket to enter it. In recent years, new organizations originated with the aim of counteracting the exodus of inhabitants by bringing a new skilled population to the city through the realization of new projects. None of these organizations is driven by the Municipality, but are all linked to Ca' Foscari University, and only one is under the patronage of the local authorities. The research question upon which this study is built therefore is:

Given the current scenario that sees Venice as a dying city, what is the role that the recently born organizations may play in counteracting the citizens' exodus and other phenomena related to overtourism, and what room for action do they have – if there is any –?

To answer it, however, it will be necessary to focus on other sub-questions that will deconstruct the issue and set the stages for the development of the research. Firstly, it will be necessary to fully understand what characterises Venice as it is now and what the main forces that shaped it have been through the years. Secondly, it will be conducted a deeper study of the new organizations, what their aims are, and what they are planning to do. Finally, I will merge and compare the results of the first two phases with an analysis of what are the needs and wills that citizens – or who for them – manifested during the years, in order to assess whether they may have points in common or not. The sub-questions leading the project therefore are:

- *What is the current scenario in Venice and what forces and processes brought it to be as it is nowadays?*
- *What are the needs and desires of those who still live in Venice and/or wonder about leaving it?*
- *Which are the new organizations that aim at repopulating Venice and what are they proposing concretely?*
- *Are there common grounds between the intentions of organizations and inhabitants' demands that may lead to a positive change in the urban context?*

In order to give an answer to all these questions, several methods are applied so as to gain as much knowledge as possible on the subject. Combining different techniques allows a completer result since collecting data from different sources provides different perspectives that may be merged. Specifically, the major implemented methods are document analysis and interviews. The documents taken into consideration are both printed and digital material.

The aims of this research are several: first, to provide knowledge on the current situation of Venice the organizations are going to work in. This includes the framing of global phenomena and their repercussion on the city's background. Framing the globalized scenario will also put light on the power and possibilities that the organizations have. Therefore, one of the aims of the study is to inform the different stakeholders about the role these organizations may play. As the issues affecting Venice are not merely confined to it but to other cities too, the outcomes of this study have a wider audience. Finally, the hope is that this study may reach different actors in the Venetian context, raising the awareness of the need for alternative management of tourism in the city. At the same time, this paper aims at assessing whether there is still room for these organizations to act for a turnaround of the

city's destiny, understand what is that they are working on and whether there is the need to "adjust the sail".

The paper is structured to first give an overview of which are the implemented methods and the methodological approach and consequently give a theoretical framework. This last is essential for the following development of the analysis, as it constitutes the background in which the organizations are set. Moreover, it gives the readers the reading key to understanding the assessments that have been made through the analysis section and the discussion, thus justifying the conclusive answer. The analysis section has been structured according to the different sub-questions, which have been answered considering the collected material as a whole. Even if different methods have been implemented, their results have been merged to reach a cohesive answer to the questions.

2. Methodology

The following chapter explores the interests and questions behind this research and what is the methodology adopted to answer them. Along with the methods, it gives an overview of the implemented literature that constitutes the framework and the basis for the development of the analysis. At the end of the chapter, the limitations encountered when conducting the study are depicted, as well as other considerations on the research development.

2.1 Research Interest

The first step in the development of this research was of outlining the investigation area and identifying a specific subject to study. The debate around Venice and its future has been on for years on a global level, but the city is also the place nearby where I grew up. News about Venice is given every day on the local news, making the issue closer and more real also for those who do not live in the city. However, citizens' complaints, touristic congestion, extremely long waiting for the ferries, and the emptiness of spaces once visitors leave in the evening are all things I have experienced. Year after year, newspapers and public debate focus on the issue, which only seems to get worse. At the same time, the daily repetition of the news has crystallised the situation in the minds of those who do not live in it. For those who are not citizens of Venice, the *unliveability* of the city is a fact, the complaints of the inhabitants are commonplace, and mass tourism is what the city needs to live. All the decisions taken by local authorities in the years seem to not have brought any benefit to the city, simply perpetrating the narratives around the city. The pandemic however seems to represent a breaking point as the debate around how to reduce the impacts of tourism and counteract the emptying of the city saw the rising of new organizations. These have a different approaches to the problem from the Municipality's one – that is now very hard to support –, not centred on limiting visitors, but on increasing the number of local actors. The freshness of this perspective is what turned on my curiosity and triggered the questions that lead to this research. The case of Venice thus represents the perfect one to first understand the global trends that affect many other cities in the world and to investigate whether these new organizations-led projects may have positive impacts on them. As the problems affecting the lagoon city are not only circumscribed to it, the outcomes of this research may also have an informative role for other places that suffer from overtourism.

2.2 Methodological Approach

As the history of Venice is ancient and the phenomena shaping it have been going on for decades, the creation of new knowledge in this regard cannot be separated from a careful analysis of all the dynamics that have led the city to be what it is today. In this sense, my approach as a researcher may fit in a constructivist framework, as my examination of the potential outcomes of new organizations' projects is strictly related to the constructive processes that shaped the background in which they fit.

As Flick says: "What is common to all constructionist approaches is that they examine the relationship to reality by dealing with constructive processes" (2018, p. 36). Within this framework, fundamental role is given not only to constructions, but also to experiences and interpretations of phenomena by involved actors, which constitute the basis for the creation of new knowledge (Ibid, p. 71). Within this framework, particular relevance is given to the analysis of literature and documents on the subject: all the produced material represents an expression of the world's construction, and its understanding is crucial for the creation of knowledge. Developing the construction material analysis has therefore been the first step in the conduction of this research: the considered literature and theories, moreover, do not simply focus on the case of Venice but range from case-specific to global-related literature. To this, the analysis of interpretation material has been added, to gain knowledge on the understandings and the ascription of meanings given to phenomena by actors. To gather this kind of information, an analysis of material produced by stakeholders has been conducted along with interviews. The following figure better illustrates the relation between different materials necessary for the creation of further knowledge.

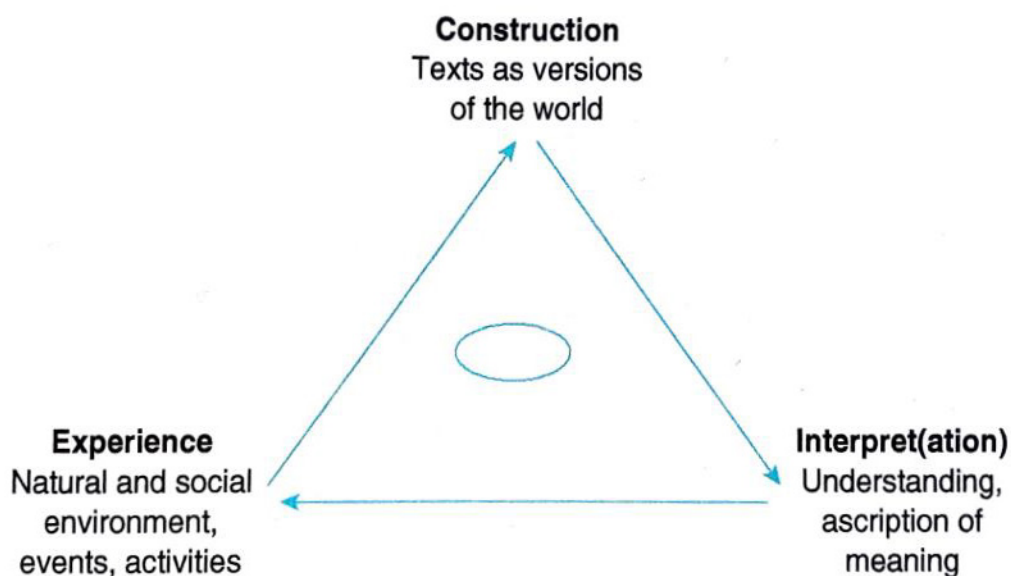


Figure 1 - Understanding Between Construction and Interpretation, Flick 2018

It is important to underline that I as a researcher have an already developed understanding of the case, due to the familiarity I have with the city and its dynamics. As this thesis also covers the political choices made during the last decades, my position as researcher is influenced also by the ideologies I share, which may orient my construction of knowledge. However, as mentioned above, interpretation is valuable for a constructivist analysis of the case.

2.3 The Case Study

As already mentioned, this thesis focuses on the analysis of two specific organizations that constitute the case study of the thesis. Developing research around a case study is useful to build concrete knowledge that may constitute the basis for further studies. It is in fact defined as method through which to obtain reliable information on a specific phenomenon: “Case studies may provide data of a richness and detail that are difficult to obtain from broader surveys” (Abercrombie, et al., 1984, p. 45). As this research focuses on the analysis of two new-born organizations that represent the beginning of a new phenomenon, their study constitutes useful knowledge for the future implementation of the solutions they provide. The chosen organizations are VeniSIA and Venywhere and constitute two *critical cases*. According to Flyvbjerg (2004, p. 396), critical cases are selected for the extreme relevance of the information they provide in the understanding of specific phenomena. Moreover, they allow the logical deduction of the gathered data.

The two organizations are the first two that originated in Venice that aim at bringing new workers into the city; however, they are not the only ones. Lately, a similar organization called SerenDPT launched a project in collaboration with MIT that has a similar objective to VeniSIA’s one. As it is not developed yet, it has not been chosen for this study, as it does not provide enough knowledge. There are other organizations and associations in the city that have interests in the revitalization of the historic centre, however, they mainly work with citizens and organize protests or produce informational works. For the selection of the case study, I therefore considered as essential features having a concrete project other than informative initiatives and being in an advanced status of the project – so as to gain concrete data and knowledge –. There are other initiatives which may have a side impact on citizens’ lives, but I chose to focus on those that clearly stated the repopulation of the historic centre among their objectives, as it is what my main interest lies in.

2.4 Implemented Methods

As mentioned above, the methods implemented to conduct the analysis are different according to the kind of information to gather. The process of analysis has been structured and conducted according to the following scheme.

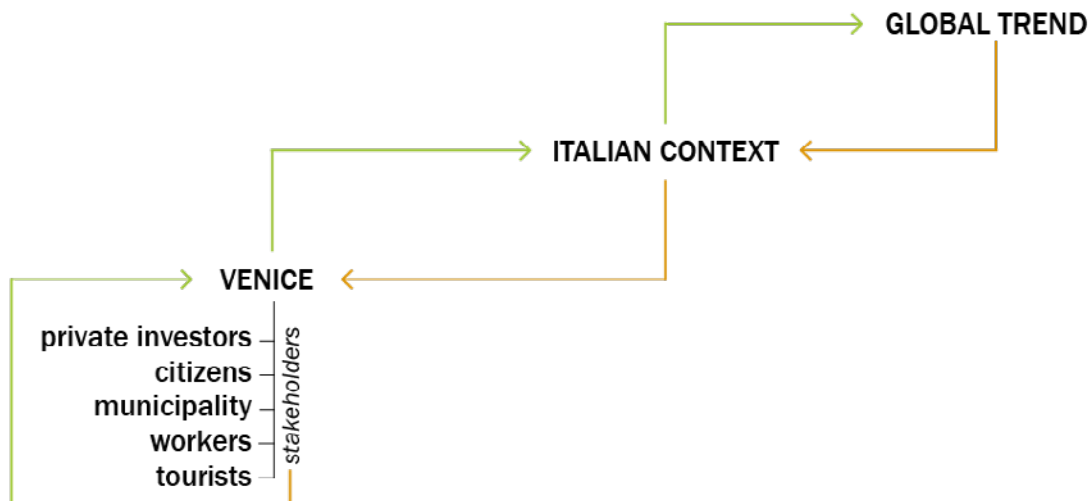


Figure 2 - Scheme of the Analysis Process, Anna Vavassori 2022

First, an understanding of Venice and its context, with relative stakeholders, has been conducted. To understand certain phenomena, a greater look at the Italian context was necessary, especially when considering the laws enacted by the government for the specific safeguard of the city. Afterwards, micro-phenomena on a local level have been framed within the global trends. Once understood the macro-phenomena and events I moved backwards to carry out an analysis of the specific case study and its stakeholders. Proceeding in this order was essential to understand all the bigger or smaller factors acting within the framework.

2.4.1 Document Analysis

As mentioned above, a huge part of this research is based on the analysis of documents through which to develop an understanding of the Venetian context. To conduct this first step of the research, several documents have been taken into consideration and can be divided between literature, that puts in relation Venice to the global trends, and another kind of document related to specific issues of the city. Part of them constitutes an objective basis that provides historical data concerning the processes that shaped the city during the decades – among these, there are reports provided by the Municipality

and several accounts made by historians during the years. Other documents are instead material produced by different stakeholders and provide more critical insight into the city.

As illustrated in figure 2, the analysis moved from literature and documents regarding Venice to literature related to global issues. The first document to be analysed were: *Over-tourism and the Fall of Venice as a Destination* (Seraphin, et al., 2018), *Venice as a Short-term city. Between Global Trends and Local Lock-ins* (Salerno & Russo, 2020), and *Privati di Venezia* (Somma, 2021). Especially this last one constitutes the critical basis upon which the analysis was conducted, as it gives important insights on all the mechanisms behind the Municipality actions and political decisions. I then moved to the analysis and understanding of trends in tourism on a global scale, by going through the following literature: *Tourism Encounters and Controversies* (Johannesson, et al., 2016), *Tourism in European Heritage Cities* (Van Der Borg, et al., 1996), *Overtourism. Causes, Implications and Solutions* (Séraphin, et al., 2020), *Tourism and Economic Globalization: An Emerging Research Agenda* (Song, et al., 2018), and *Tourismophobia or Touristification? An Analysis of the Impacts of Tourism in Poblenou, Barcelona* (Binoti Simas, et al., 2021). Overtourism, however, is just an expression of a bigger phenomenon, globalization, which has been investigated more in depth through the following literature: *Globalization and Tourism* (Keller, 2000), *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy* (Appadurai, 1990), *The Anthropology of Global Flows* (McC. Heyman & Campbell, 2009), *The Impact of Globalization on Cities* (Kara, 2018), *A Critical Review of Urban Livability* (Ahmed, et al., 2019), and *Non-Places, Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (Augé, 1995).

The following step consisted in tracing back again to the Venetian context and analysing the outcomes of these phenomena through documents produced by local actors, among which the most important are the different reports produced by OCIO – Osservatorio Indipendente sulla Casa, authors of much documentation concerning the housing situation in Venice historic centre, and documents produced by We Are Here Venice, an independent organization for the “safeguard of Venice as an alive city” (We Are Here Venice, n.d.), which in 2020 produced a report, *Whose City Anyway?*, discussing the struggle of citizens in relation to tourism-centred planning. They are also authors of a podcast that tells the stories of people trying to find a house in Venice. All these readings provided the basis upon which the answer to the sub-questions *What is the current scenario in Venice and what forces and processes brought it to be as it is nowadays?* And *What are the needs and desires of those who still live in Venice and/or wonder about leaving it?* are structured.

2.4.2 Interviews

The answer to the third sub-question *Which are the new organizations that aim at repopulating Venice and what are they proposing concretely?* is based on data gathered from interviews with exponents of the organizations and documents produced by them. As the projects they launched are relatively new, basing the analysis on published documents would not be enough to gather all the necessary data, as much information was not available.

As the interviewees were more of interest in their role inside the organization rather than their personal background, the conducted method can be referred to as expert interviews, which produce practical knowledge (Flick, 2018, p. 236). Within a constructivist framework, conducting semi-structured interviews is valuable for the understanding of interpretations and ascriptions of meaning. The interviews conducted within this research have the aim of collecting complementary information to merge with data gathered through other methods and are thus defined as *systematizing expert interviews* (Ibid, p. 237). Specifically, the interviewees were three, who will be referred to as Representative I, Representative II, and Representative III. The first two are members of VeniSIA, while Representative III works for Venywhere. Their names have been anonymized to guarantee their privacy. The interview with Representative I took place on the 17th of January 2022 and had the character of being an informative meeting. As the thesis process was at its beginnings, the interview had a semi-structured guide, right because of the explorative nature it played. It was necessary to understand whether the research area and the problem formulation could be developed further. Following this meeting, to get more knowledge about VeniSIA and its work, a new interview was organized with one of the workers directly employed in the first project phase of VeniSIA. For this interview, a more specific guide has been adopted, based also on the information gathered during a two-day presentation event held by the organization in the two days preceding the interview, which took place on the 16th of March 2022. Concerning the other organization, Venywhere, the interview took place on the 14th of March 2022. As well as the interview with Representative II, the one with Representative III was a semi-structured interview aimed at both going more in-depth with the organization's works and finding an answer to the questions arising from the analysis of other material produced by it. As mentioned above, in fact, expert interviews are to be merged with other methods to gather completer information (Ibid).

All the interviews were held digitally, due to the pandemic situation in Italy: even though there was no actual restriction, in Spring 2022 the number of cases was extremely high, and all interviewees preferred to conduct online meetings on Google Meets platform. Every interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and has been recorded with the consent of the participant, with the aim of being

accessible during other phases of the research. Participants were assured that sensitive material they did not want to be used would be deleted. The interviews' guides can be found in the Appendix, translated by the author, as they were held in Italian.

As mentioned above, the aim of conducting expert interviews is that of adding information to material gathered through other methods, specifically document analysis. Flick defines this use as an example of triangulation: a way to merge different data while at the same time validating them (2018, p. 239).

2.4.3 Digital Data

In addition to the mentioned sources, also digital data have been adopted to gain an understanding of the environment in Venice. Using this source of information was extremely useful to gain knowledge on citizens' and former citizens' positions regarding the current situation. When talking about digital data I refer to all the material that can be found in newspapers, blogs, and social media. Nowadays, there are several online pages that inhabitants use to express their opinion: crucial for the analysis was the local newspaper *La Voce di Venezia*, where a whole section is dedicated to readers' letters, with the possibility to leave comments. It is in these comments that different opinions on the changes taking place in the city emerge, giving rise to real debates. It is for this last reason that this method was preferred to the conduction of interviews with former or struggling citizens: what I considered interesting for the thesis development was the debate around the issue of tourism and inhabitants' exodus. Other implemented sources are the Facebook pages of different stakeholders: the mayor Luigi Brugnaro, and several associations – *Venezia non è Disneyland*, *Gruppo 25 Aprile Venezia*, *Italia Nostra Venezia*.

Data gathered from this method have been implemented to other data gathered from principal sources such as the reports and literature mentioned in section 2.4.1 and were useful to gain some personal perspective. However, using written data leaves more room for the researcher's interpretation, as there is no chance to question the author of the source. At the same time, my physical absence allowed a genuine expression of opinions that could not be influenced by my presence or any form of stress due to the condition of an interview – such as being recorded.

2.4.4 A Posteriori Reflection on the Implemented Methods

Although the overall conduct of the methods produced the desired results, there are some aspects of the conduct of the research that could be changed and improved. Firstly, the interviews were

conducted too early: I conducted the interviews when I was in the initial phase of the research when my knowledge of the global scenario was still limited. I already had an insight into the situation in Venice due to my background, but my knowledge of the dynamics behind overtourism and its consequences was mainly built up during the development of the thesis. I chose the topic because of my interest, but my knowledge of the subject was limited, and this influenced the quality of my interviews. In conducting them, I mainly focused on the general characters of the organizations, but I also had to devote a part of them to unraveling the dynamics behind them. However, I was able to reconstruct the mechanisms afterwards, but it took me a long time, as I had to process all the information again.

Also relevant for the thesis outcomes would be to interview some of those who moved to Venice thanks to the organizations. I had access to the point of view of citizens through many different sources, but I have no information on how the projects worked out for those who moved to the city through VeniSIA and Venywhere. This, however, represents a possible further development of this research, as it would make the final assessment stronger – or weaker, depending on the outcomes of the interview. Talking to people who are working remotely from Venice would allow me to understand whether they face the same problems as current citizens but would also constitute knowledge on how to improve the programs.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the theories upon which the study is based are presented and discussed in relation to the case of Venice and its relevance for the global issue. Starting from the concept of *globalization* and its neoliberal features, the chapter traces the issue of mass tourism and its consequences on city's liveability, highlighting also the "side-effects" of a more interconnected world that do not simply concern the movement of capital around the globe.

3.1 Globalization

What the recent Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the most is probably the huge interconnection among countries all around the world, and how dependent they are. Space and time appear to be shrank, making it faster and easier to move from one place to another not only for people but for goods too, as well as information. This compression and its consequent intensification of economic, political, social, and cultural interdependence on a global scale is a process generally referred to as *globalization* (Song, et al., 2018).

Although it may seem a relatively new phenomenon, some scholars argue that globalization started with Cristoforo Colombo in 1492 with the discovery of America, which opened the way for an always more international dependency through the exchange of goods as well as cultures. However, the phenomenon gathered speed in the last decades, especially due to the advanced technological development (National Geographic Society, 2019). Along with this, also the increasing liberalization of markets economies has given impetus to the shift towards a *more global world* (Keller, 2000).

3.1.1 Neoliberal Economies

The spreading of neoliberal policies played a decisive role in the establishment of a global world. According to Keller, globalization's acceleration "began with the transition from fixed to flexible exchange rates and the liberalization of capital transfers and financial transactions" (2000, p. 288) and combined with the technological advances in different sectors – such as transportation and communications. The consequences on markets and production were several. The production of goods and services, for example, is not regulated anymore by the government, according to a production plan, but is determined by the demand and supply law. Moreover, the distribution of goods is not under government control, impacting the selling price. To this shift has been added the easing of restrictions on capital transfers and transactions among different countries, which helped the

monetary exchange. The currency exchange value passed from being fixed by the government to another country's one – or the price of gold –, to a flexible one; this means that the exchange value is determined by the forex market and the supply and demand. These factors established a strong interrelation among different countries, which may have positive impacts but also high risks. The international scenario, moreover, has been characterized by the liberalization of national boundaries and the push toward a regional integration (Ibid).

When talking about neoliberal economies, extremely relevant are the cases of the United States and United Kingdom during the 1980s. The shift adopted in their governments has been so impactful that their policies took the names of those promoting them, respectively Ronald Reagan – with *Reaganomics* – and Margaret Thatcher – *Thatcherism* – (Ibid, pp. 288-290). The first refers to the economic policy adopted by the American president between 1981 and 1989 to counteract the recession and stagflation. His program was mainly based on the cut of taxes and reducing the government's expenses while easing the regulations on businesses and products (Amadeo, 2022). Specifically, he stimulated consumers' demands by enlarging their purchasing power. Higher demand resulted in business growth and consequent hiring, expanding the tax base. At the same time, Reagan eased the regulations on banks, certain goods, and services but augmented the regulation on import merch (Ibid). Reaganomics had a positive impact on the economy, allowing it to grow contrasting the recession, but most of all, it played a significant role in the internal deregulation of the United States (Keller, 2000, pp. 288-290).

Margaret Thatcher's economic policy can be summed as a “belief in free markets and a small state”: the only job of the government is to defend the realm and the currency, without being involved in markets economies (BBC, 2013). At the same time, the taxes on income were reduced, and there was a shift from direct taxation to indirect one, but unlike Reagan's case, in the UK, easing of taxes resulted in mass unemployment. Thatcherism played a key role in reducing the presence of governments in economic issues and opened the way to the intervention of private investors in areas that were once public (Keller, 2000, pp. 288-290). This very last practice can be seen in Venice's history too: in the last decades, starting from the 70s, the city underwent a huge process of privatisation that brought many public properties to change their function and forced many citizens to move and work outside the city centre. This aspect will be developed more in the Analysis section.

A key role in the establishment of neoliberal policies was played by Tony Blair, United Kingdom's prime minister from 1997 to 2007, through his *third way* administration. The last term refers to a political alternative that stands between the neoliberal right-wing politics and the social-democratic left ones (Hay, 2018). Tony Blair's party, the New Labour, had a program based on “the rejection of

neo-liberal belief that everything can be left to the market, but also saw the traditional left-of-centre faith in state intervention in the economy as outdated” (Mellbye, 2003). His approach had huge resonance at an international level as well as in Italy. The prime minister of that time, Massimo D’Alema, took, in fact, part in a round-table discussion entitled “The Third Way: Progressive Governance for the 21st Century” in April 1999 (Ibid). Even though this political approach embraced the social-democratic views on social and environmental issues, it was not able to provide a concrete answer on the economic level, surrendering to neoliberal trends. That is why many critics use the term *third way* to refer to a “to a centre-left capitulation to neoliberal globalization” (Hay, 2018).

Neoliberal politics adoption, however, had huge consequences on other aspects that do not directly deal with money, but rather with the movement of people and culture.

3.1.2 A Globalized International Network

The progressive easing of regulations and boundaries among countries resulted in increased international networking. What started as a mere economic process, although, had consequences on other sectors of daily life too. Expanding the international market also meant opening to international competition. This process stimulated growth, innovation, and productivity, allowing a faster development in many sectors, especially the technological one (Keller, 2000, p. 289).

Technological development played a key role in the spreading of a *global world*, shortening the physical distance among places through the development of faster means of transport, but also connecting places through the digital space. At the same time, this overture opened the way to the delocalization of productivity in places where the labour costs less. Many industries moved their production to developing countries, where the cost of work is lower, incentivised by the easing of regulations and the improvement of transport. Along with these phenomena, there is also the creation of corporates: international companies that network existing realities among different countries, for example having the legal headquarter in a country and the production site in another one. In this way, they can benefit from cooperative marketing efforts while preserving their local independence and authority (Ibid).

Consequences of this hyper connection may be seen also on a cultural level: media, internet, and social network provoked the diffusion of different lifestyles and cultures, along with great international events. The desire and the need to experience new realities, therefore, increased, so as the cultural contamination in cities' backgrounds. In his *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy* (1990), Appadurai refers to the phenomena outlining five different dimensions of

the global flow: ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes. Each of them refers to a particular aspect of the global reality that is influenced by – and influences – the movement of people, money, and ideas. They are defined as “*scapes*” because of their nature, similar to the one of *landscapes*: they are *perspectives*, depending on the context and actors they are linked to in a specific discourse (Ibid). The concept of *scape*, however, is not too specific: there is no clear distinction between the outcome, and the processes and forces that cause it (McC. Heyman & Campbell, 2009, p. 130).

As mentioned above, the existing scapes are five:

- The *ethnoscape* is defined as “the variety of actors that constitutes the shifting world we live in” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 297). More precisely, it is the landscape *of those who move*, whether they are tourists, migrants, refugees, guest workers, exiles, or other moving people. The flow of actors has an impact on politics and the economy but is also affected by them. Moreover, it is not only the landscape of those who move but also of those who dream of moving: this shows the effect of globalization both on behaviours and mind assets. Although people have been migrating for ages, the phenomenon has increased in the last decades, due to the several factors mentioned above (Ibid). This opens to another of Appadurai’s scapes.
- The terms *technoscapes* refer to the global configurations of technology and their “high speed movements across boundaries” (Ibid, p. 297). By technology, Appadurai refers not only to the informational one but also to the mechanical. They both are tools through which industries and companies could develop faster and larger, as happened for multinationals. It implies, however, that more than one country has interests in the productivity of a company; at the same time, the organization is subjected to different regulations that vary with the country. Consequentially, the distribution of technologies around the globe is uneven: it depends on the relationships between money flows, political possibilities, and availability of labour – skilled or low cost -, that pushes people to move.
- The above-mentioned scapes are strictly intertwined with a third one: *finanscape*, that refers to the “disposition of global capital” (Ibid, p. 298). Appadurai defines finanscapas as rapid and complicated to describe due to the high speed at which capital moves among boundaries, with implications for each state’s economy. The relationship among the three scapes is crucial since each of them is subject to its specific constraints and incentives. Variations in a scape have effects on the others, but these are described as “unpredictable and disjunctive” (Ibid, p. 298).

- Along with finanscapes, global interconnections define and mould *mediascapes*: they are the capability to produce and disseminate images and information electronically around the globe. They work through the production of images that vary depending on the modality of spreading, the hardware through which are shared, the audience they reach, and above all, the interests of those who produce them (Ibid, pp. 298-299). These scapes play an important role because they trigger the movement – or the desire of it – of people through images and ideas thus constituting ethnoscapes.
- The images produced by mediascapes have an impact also on the last scape: *ideoscape*. It is constituted by all those images and narratives concerning power that are used to persuade public opinion. It is a set of conventions that define a specific key of reading to approach the narratives around political culture (Ibid, pp. 298-299). The way in which these are translated has an impact on the other scapes too, as it has a strong persuasive nature and has indirect consequences on the actions of governments. At the same time, the hyper-diffusion of ideas has a homogenizing effect, not only on political ideas, but also on values.

Appadurai describes the meeting points of these realities as problematic and calls them *disjunctures* of reality due to each scape's constraints and incentives that influence their behaviours (Ibid, p. 301). However, critiques were moved to Appadurai's theory: scapes are not alike and not always in disjuncture. Some flows are bigger and stronger than others, with consequences on the relationships they engage with each other (McC. Heyman & Campbell, 2009, p. 132). According to Heyman and Campbell, Appadurai insists too much on the physical, empirical, and analytical separation of scapes, without coping with the interactions among them. Moreover, he shows a static reality as an alternative to these flows, while Heyman and Campbell (2009, pp. 137-138) see *Processual Geography* better describing the global reality. It describes it as in continuous transformation, creation, and modification according to the ongoing changes and movements that cause it. This last approach to global flows and how they define space is particularly relevant for the case of this study: Venice is a set of huge fluxes, not only of moving people but also moving capital; at the same time, Appadurai's framework is important to understand the different phenomena occurring in the city, sometimes labelled as mere mass-tourism consequences, but that hide much more. How ethnoscapes and technoscapes are related to the issue is evident and needs no further clarification, finanscapes however are what made possible the attraction of so many foreigners, not only in terms of visitors but investors too. They represent the underlying mechanism behind the policy adopted by the Municipality on how to take care of the city's heritage and maintenance: the ready availability of capital to invest. Investments are made profitable by the relevance given to them through mediascapes: it would not be worth spending money on extra luxury resorts without an adequate promotion of them.

Mediascapes also work as attractors, stimulating the movement of people and capital, by building an image of the city. This is therefore reconnected to ideoscapes and the idea built around Venice: the narratives built on its uniqueness have the only outcome of strengthening the ones normally used to brand the city. New interventions in the city, like the construction of hotels, museums, or exhibition spaces, simply contribute to the homogenization of the city based on the idea built around it. Automatically, when people come to see it, they look for those elements typical of the narrative, without looking for the real city: that is why the only people who take a *gondola* ride are tourists, why people crowd in front of typical postcard sights to take a photo, and why as soon as you leave the “tourist route” the city appears deserted.

3.1.3 Globalized Cities and Tourism

When talking about Venice and globalization, it is spontaneous to connect the city to the phenomenon of mass tourism. The city is – and has been for ages – the destination for many visitors around the world, but the phenomenon is not confined anymore to the Italian city. The easing of regulations, the shortening of distances, and the technological development led in fact to the booming of tourism in any part of the world, increasing the competition among destinations.

More generally, the consequences of globalization on leisure travel are twofold: tourism in regions that were once harder to reach increased, and cities began to host events to attract as many tourists as possible while shaping the cities in relation to them (Song, et al., 2018, p. 1001). Tourism thus becomes the object of marketing strategies: in a world that is always more and more connected, the variety of experiences among which to choose is increasing day by day. It has become essential *to sell* the destination. The competition is not anymore on an industrial level, but an experiential one too. The worldwide diffusion of this culture has two main results. On one side, places that were once unknown started to be more and more visited, with repercussions on the local urban fabric. At the same time, copies of famous locations, symbolic places, and experiences began to spread all around the world, raising the issue of the *originality* of an attraction (Keller, 2000, p. 295). These phenomena established a climate of *hyper-competition* among places, with the consequent necessity for each of them to specialize in a field. At the same time, international clientele – tourists – became more aware and critical of what they choose to visit and do. This last phenomenon was facilitated by the diffusion of more direct tools through which to organise the touristic experience: while it was once more complicated to organise a trip – people needed more time, money, and often paid touristic agencies to do that for them –, the process is nowadays easier and more accessible. Thanks to new web platforms – like Booking, Airbnb, Trivago, etc – everyone can easily book a trip anywhere, saving

time and money. At the same time, social media and online websites provide the user with any kind of information regarding almost any destination, selling *a dream*.

The digital connection among places and the increased ease of travelling had several impacts on places, as well as on the environment. The circulation of lifestyles, policies, principles, and ideologies had serious impacts on the culture and behaviours of people. This flow of information affected *how people stay* in places too, with repercussions on cities' structure, design, style, and development. New trends in tourism, therefore, required new ways of management in city planning (Kara, 2018, p. 112). The increased number of actors in the city – in certain cases mainly seasonal – triggered several processes of city management, pushing especially towards its growth. Many places embraced increasing tourism as a positive phenomenon, something that could lead to the improvement of existing structures and infrastructures as well as the creation of new ones. This belief is reinforced by the fact that new development helps to create jobs and therefore money.

Tracing back to the case of Barcelona mentioned in the introduction, meaningful is the development of the city occurred in connection to the Olympic Games of 1992. First, the latter is an example of great global events that attract visitors from all over the world – and not only. Hosting the Olympics also means drastically increasing the visibility of a place which is crucial for the competition among cities in the world. Barcelona, therefore, underwent a process of modernization and development since the 1980s to make the city more attractive (Binoti Simas, et al., 2021, p. 118). Public administration adopted a strategy based on investments in culture and entertainment, infrastructures renovation, and marketing of the city; a “strategy, structure and promotion stance similar to the administration of private companies to attract the preference of capital flow” (Ibid, p. 118). On the other hand, while investment in the development of the city may have helped to develop what appears to be better infrastructure to accommodate more visitors, there have also been negative consequences for citizens. Among all, Barcelona – like many other touristic destinations in the world – underwent two main processes. The first one sees the construction and development of the city not for inhabitants but for tourists: the urban environment was characterized by the production of experiences and goods thought for *potential buyers*. This phenomenon is described by Lefebvre as the construction of a “system of signs” where happiness, power, wealth, and satisfaction are incorporated in the production of space (Fuchs, 2012, p. 137). In this way, an image of the city is produced and sold, creating international expectations and standards to which to adhere to: a city of spectacle (Binoti Simas, et al., 2021, p. 119). The concept of *spectacle* has been deeply discussed by Guy Debord, who says that “in societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into representation”

(Debord, 2012, p. 107). Spectacle therefore is the physical representation of the social relationships among individuals through images: it is the objectification of the human beings' vision of the world. In this way, spectacle becomes the affirmation of appearance (Ibid, p. 108). Koolhaas (2014, p. 53) refers to this phenomenon as a process of *homogenisation*, where the city is characterised by the construction of new buildings that stand to the spectacle's standards. The function given to them are often touristic – such as hotels or museums – and serve as attractors and promoters of the city. More specifically, when talking about spectacle and system of signs, Lefebvre distinguishes between what the space is and what it represents, which is the result of planning and construction based on specific knowledge, power, and ideologies. In this sense, what a space represents is the product of those who have the power to shape it and it communicates their means, as well as giving room to the reproduction of these lasts through human relationships. (Fuchs, 2018, p. 135).

By keeping this in mind, it appears clear how the ideologies behind the production of space and spectacles have the power to reinforce globalizing dynamics. Building and developing a city for tourism, for the attraction of foreign capital, and giving priority to these elements instead of locals' interests leaves room for the reproduction of these relationships, making space an integral part of the process. In Venice these dynamics have been going on for years: many are the public properties that have been sold and turned into luxury hotels or art galleries. Many buildings saw their original public function be changed to allow private investors to turn them into touristic facilities or attractions, not prioritizing citizens' needs. At the same time, the perpetuation of these decisions is what has made Venice a showcase city, where investors can display their power and wealth.

At the same time, however, other parts of the city – that do not stand to the ideals –, are objects of gentrification. The term refers to a practice of urban renovation aimed at reconverting neglected areas of the city – usually home to low-income citizens – into newly developed and attractive areas, forcing in this way older residents to move elsewhere, and replacing the users with middle and higher class or tourists (Smith, 2002, p. 438). This process is, however, similar to the one happening in more central and/or historical part of the city – once devoted to inhabitants' accommodation and now slowly turning into places of consumption and tourism (Binoti Simas, et al., 2021, p. 119). When talking about Venice, however, the phenomenon worked slightly differently: the lower class was forced to move away because buildings were turned into hotels and daily services into facilities for tourists. The costs became too high for tenants, who lost at the same time commodities too. But unlike other places that are an object of gentrification, those who replaced and continue to replace the lower class are not higher income inhabitants, but tourists. More specifically, properties are bought by richer people and turned into touristic accommodations, very often through the creation of “diffuse hotels”

or sold to private companies that transform them into luxury destinations. Key to these transformations has been the online platform of Airbnb, among the others, that gave the chance to property owners to rent their houses to people for short periods. Founded in 2008, it is one of those services born thanks to the globalized technological development: the platform allows people from all over the world to rent their houses to anyone in a very simple way. If at first, it represented an innovative way through which to experience the real life of a citizen in his city – avoiding hotels and gaining insights from the owners – it gradually turned into a business for many of its users. The tool itself should not be seen as “evil”, but its unregulated usage led to critical situations like the one object of this thesis. In Venice, where the number of touristic beds is nowadays the same as those for inhabitants, 1 Airbnb host out of 5 is the holder of more than one property for rent. That is to say that the 22% of the hosts manage the 65% of the ads (OCIO, 2021). Venice is only a significant example, but the phenomenon is not strictly confined to the city.

It is important to say that Airbnb and similar services are not the whole problem: they may represent a way through which to create contact among visitors and citizens – an initiative that may also have positive implications if implemented correctly, for example through the valorisation of the local heritage. The real issue is related to the limitations that local authorities should impose on the use of the tool, especially to the number of ads that the same owner might have. Regulations may help keep the phenomenon a genuine way through which to create a network without being detrimental to residents. The direct consequence of not having any sort of regulation is that owners rather rent to tourists than to long-term citizens, due to the easier and higher earnings (Binoti Simas, et al., 2021, p. 119). The difficulties in finding permanent accommodations are one of the biggest issues raised by those who once were citizens and left, but also by those who would like to become new inhabitants of the lagoon city – as shown and discussed further on in this paper.

3.2 Liveable Cities and *Non-Places*

It is clear at this point that mass tourism is a direct consequence of a globalized world. Its implications on cities, however, do not only concern urban development and tourism management. Another process linked to globalization is the privatisation of public properties and/or companies. Along with tourism, the phenomenon harms a city’s liveability and may also play as an adjuvant in increasing tourists’ attraction. This section explores more in-depth the various dynamics that concur in making it harder for citizens to live in a place. But what is liveability? How is it measured and by whom? And what is its relationship with globalization?

It is important to underline that there is no strict or fixed definition of liveability and that it is a term rather broad and subjective. This is because the qualities that make a place more *liveable* for some may not be essential for others (Ahmed, et al., 2019, pp. 166-168). More broadly, liveability is understood as a subcategory of sustainability but, unlike the second one, it is a concept closer in time and space. It focuses on how to bring the attention back to planning for citizens' well-being, favouring faster solutions that may give more immediate *relief*. Sustainability is a concept that aims at finding the equilibrium between economic, environmental, and social axes of planning; liveability concentrates more on the social one, especially on equity. At the same time, some could argue that liveability is a synonym for *quality of life*, but this last is related to the user experience of a place, while the first considers the environment in its entirety (Ibid).

The implementation of this concept is relevant when assessing Venice, what has been at the centre of the last decades' policies, and what is the aim of the new organizations in terms of quality of *space* and *life*. At a global level, liveability is now the object of several rankings that evaluates cities according to several criteria - the majority of which are based on objective measurements and do not reflect the subjective experience of citizens. Moreover, many rankings consider the city as a whole, without taking into account the differences, sometimes vast, among neighbourhoods. In their *Critical Review of Urban Liveability* (Ahmed, et al., 2019), the authors provide a system of evaluation to analyse a specific space that uses needs as measurement units: the city is differentiated between the *viable city*, the *liveable city*, and the *memorable and lovable city* (Ibid, pp. 171-175). The first one is where the basic needs are met, such as the one for shelter, food, water, employment, safety, In a liveable city also psychological needs, such as friendship, family, esteem, respect, and others are met to establish communities. The most liveable city is the memorable and lovable one, where citizens see their self-fulfilment needs satisfied, where there is room for creativity, spontaneity, and experience. The concepts are summed in the following figure. The concepts are summed up in the following figure.

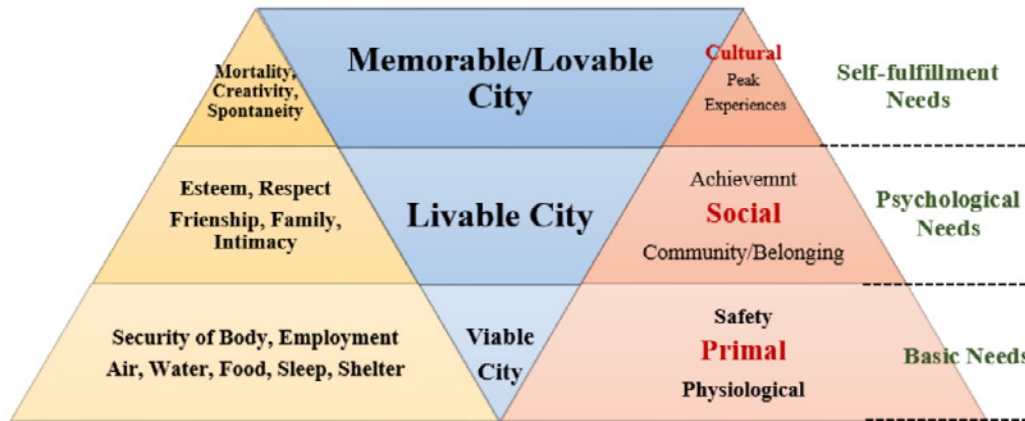


Figure 3 - Relation Between the Hierarchy of Needs and its Effect on the City, by Ahmed et al., 2019

What is evident from this review is that cities' liveability depends on how much they give to their inhabitants, and not to external observers. While considering the case of Venice and especially its citizens' exodus, this theoretical framework is useful to understand and explain the phenomena going on. Giving the priority to tourist planning and, above all, private investments provoked the loss of basic needs such as easy and affordable access to housing, the proximity to work, and accessibility to primary services. All these shortcomings drastically reduced the liveability of the historic centre of the city, making it for some people, not even a viable city. Two are the consequences of this trend: firstly, citizens do not have access to the basic services they need and therefore choose to move outside the city to a more suitable environment. At the same time, the conversion of commercial activities into facilities for tourists created an environment where they can easily get whatever they need, working as an attractor for new ones.

Strictly connected to this issue is the concept of *non-place* theorized by Augé (1995): he defines as such all those spaces that do not have any relational, historical, or identifying characteristic nor link with those who live them. Taking a step backwards, at the base of the theory there is the distinction between spaces and places: the firsts are the mere geographical entities, while the others are lived and experienced spaces. It implies the presence of a link between people and spaces, that is both relational and peculiar, bilateral. In this way, people acting in space define its history and identity of it, turning it into a place. Consequently, a non-place is a space where this mutual relationship lacks (Augé, 1995, pp. 103-106). It can be said that non-places are places of passage: they are characterized by simple and anonymous laws under which the actors must act. For example, the most common non-places are airports and terminals: people do not establish a constructive relationship with them, but simply obey the strict rules that regulate them, transiting. Augé defines them as contractual relationships, where the access ticket must be bought, the access card must be shown, etc (Ibid).

Peculiar of a transition place is the feeling of being suspended in time and space: people do not think about their daily routine, life, and duties, they are trapped in a sort of parallel dimension, where the only important thing is the *here and now*. It happens to everyone who travels: people experience places that are not those they have roots in, attracted by some extraordinary characteristic which brought them to buy the ticket and travel, sometimes around the world, to seek and see it. This has an impact also on the behaviours that tourists have when they travel, sometimes not paying too much attention to local culture. The diversity of places is also their strength in reproducing. Taking the example of Venice, its being diverse and slowly dying is what attracts millions of visitors every year. This process works on the fact that what is at the base of tourism is the emotional feeling of experiencing something completely different from daily routine and reality (Ibid). While travelling, people know that the place they are visiting is not home, and that is where the paradox of non-places lies: “a foreigner lost in a country he does not know (a passing stranger) can feel at home only in the anonymity of motorways, service stations, big stores, or hotel chains” (Ibid, p. 106). People who travel seek international landmarks capable of making them feel at home. The process is natural but is also a result of supermodernity – or globalization. The diffusion of cultures enabled travellers to look for pieces of their homes elsewhere, in spaces – and places – where they once would have not found them.

When it comes to Venice, however, the discourse becomes more complicated since what was once a place is (not so) slowly becoming a non-place. The recent decision of introducing a reservation to enter the city (Mantengoli, 2022) is only the latest of many decisions that brought to the progressive transformation. Considering what Augé described as features of non-places, the city already has several of them: the entrance booking is nonetheless a ticket needed to enter the space, resembling those of terminals, and it is in the intentions of the Municipality to also place gates at the city entrances. At the same time, local authorities but also inhabitants are condemning those who come to the historic centre daily, no matter the reason, because they do not pay and concur with the city maintenance. Touristic attractions are both disapproved and fed, showing the dualism of locals’ interests. But most of all, what makes Venice a non-place is the almost absolute lack of engagement with visitors: a simple attraction. It has become a place where people from all over the world come to take a picture on the *calli*, ride a *gondola*, wait in line to see the famous attractions, and return to the hotel. Tourists follow some sort of “guide”, a list of things to see and photograph before leaving back to their homes. The consequences have already been depicted and will be discussed more in-depth in the Analysis section of this thesis, but the parallelism with non-places is evident.

If Venice is to become a non-place, the exodus of its citizens acquires a new meaning: it is not only the lack of services and the *unliveability* of its spaces that push inhabitants away but also the increasing loss of a relationship between the city and its citizens. At the same time, the investments made in its development depend on global forces, meaning that are being made towards the reinforcement of globalization values, the same that are transforming it into a non-place. Crucial for this paper is to investigate how parallel initiatives to the ones carried on by the Municipality may play a relevant role in this background. Citizens' exodus is a mere consequence of the several factors that have been theoretically framed in this chapter; in the following sections, they will be discussed more in-depth concerning the case of Venice, merged with empirical data collected through several methods.

4. Analysis

Within this section of the paper, all the gathered data are presented and analysed in relation to the theoretical framework that constitutes the basis of this research. The chapter is divided according to the sub-questions that led the investigation, to constitute the basis for the following discussion that will aim at answering the main research question.

4.1 Venice Context

What is the current scenario in Venice and what forces and processes brought it to be as it is nowadays?

And

What are the needs and desires of those who still live in Venice and/or wonder about leaving it?

This chapter aims at answering the above-mentioned research questions. Understanding the current scenario is important for defining what is the background the organizations aim at working in and changing, to further develop an assessment of their potential success. The phenomena that characterize Venice are presented and discussed concerning the presented theoretical framework, to highlight the underlying forces that shaped the city.

4.1.1 Citizen's Exodus from Venice Historic Centre

As the main objective of this thesis is to evaluate whether new initiatives aimed at repopulating the centre of Venice may have room for action, it is important to first understand the processes that caused the exodus of citizens they wish to counteract, that led to the need of attracting new inhabitants. The exodus in fact opened up two possibilities: acting on the causes that push people to move away and trying to attract new citizens. Working on one of the two, however, does not exclude working on the other as well, as they may be extremely linked. The dynamics behind citizens' exodus are multiple and each element is highly interconnected and dependent on the others. Rather than starting with the causes and arriving at the effect to unravel the phenomenon, it may be clearer to start with the result by going back to the triggers. In a letter written to a local newspaper, Veronica S., once a Venetian resident stated:

“Unfortunately, there is nothing left of my Venice, where life in the *campi*¹ and the *calli*² has disappeared, the local milk shops for the few remaining residents are almost non-existent and the long-standing Venetians are fewer and fewer. [...] It is impossible to live in Venice with dignity on a worker's or even a clerk's salary. No Venetian who has left, that I know of, would return to live in Venice and, even if they wanted to, it would be difficult to support themselves. It makes me smile bitterly that to enter churches that I saw in my childhood and adolescence I have to pay because I am no longer a resident, but others who know nothing about Venice and what it was like are instead the new residents with all the rights that come with it.”³(La Voce di Venezia, 2021)

From these few lines, it is possible to capture some of those problems that residents must face every day, highlighted in this letter as the main reasons why the person who wrote it would not return to live in Venice. The three main raised issues are:

- The lack of basic services, such as local shops for necessary goods.
- The loss of the working class and the high costs of living in the historic centre.
- The lost benefits for residents and former residents, who are now treated as tourists

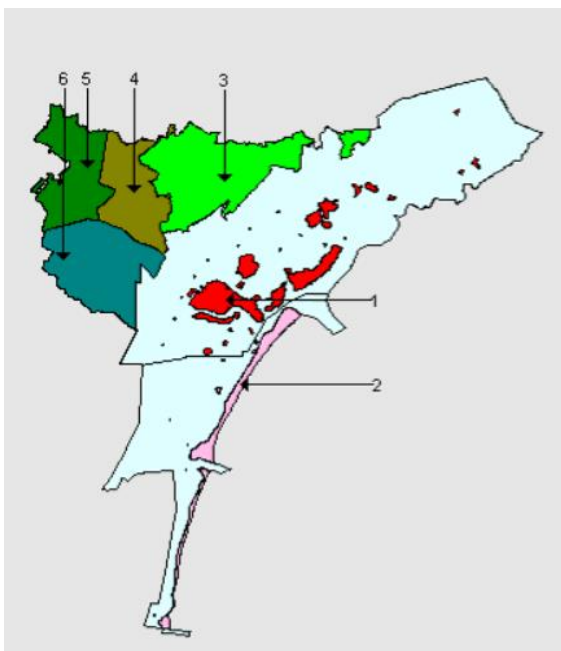


Figure 3 – Administrative Subdivision of Venice Municipality, Comune di Venezia

These three factors are mutually intertwined. However, to better understand how they originated and how they are connected, it is necessary to analyse them individually, starting first by framing the exodus' numbers.

It is important to underline that the Municipality of Venice covers about 415 Km², 258 of which are covered by water. The surface of the main island is about 8 Km², and the small islands in the estuary have a total surface of about 18 Km². The largest portion of the Municipality that is not covered by water is on the mainland and has a surface area of approximately 130 km². The Municipality is divided into six

administrative districts shown on the map: 1. Venezia-Murano-Burano (comprising all the smaller

¹ Venetian name for “squares”
² Venetian name for “streets”
³ Translated by the author

islands in the lagoon), 2. Lido and Pellestrina, 3. Favaro Veneto, 4. Mestre-Carpenedo, 5. Chirignago-Zelarino, and 6. Marghera.

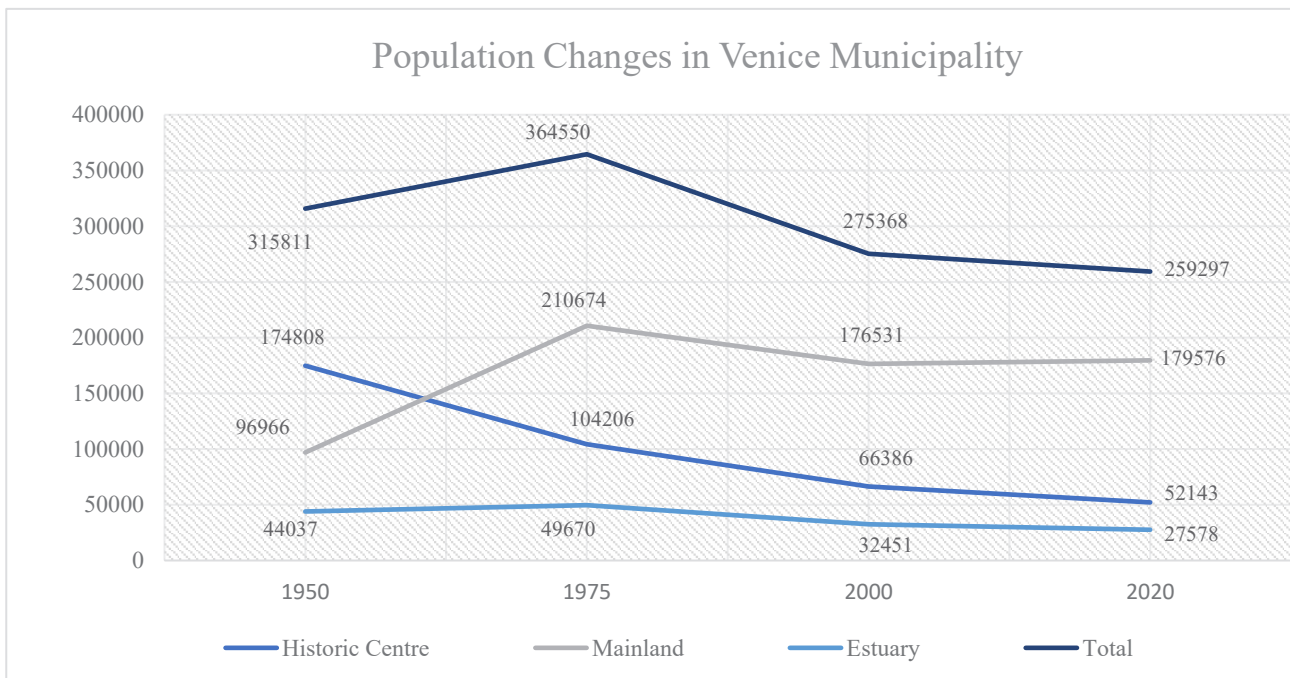


Table 1 – Population Changes in Venice Municipality, by Anna Vavassori 2022

Taking as a sample 5 different significative years, the chart above shows the variation in citizens' number occurred during the years in the different areas of the Municipality. In 1950, when the factories began to close or move to the mainland, the historic centre of Venice had around little less than 175 thousand inhabitants, while the mainland had almost 97 thousand, and the estuary 44 thousand. In 1975, some years after the disastrous *aqua granda*⁴ of 1966 and the Special Law for Venice - a law enacted by the government that favoured the investment of private capital for the development of the city – the population in the historic centre was slightly more than 104 thousand people. The mainland counted almost 211 thousand and the other small islands a total of almost 50 thousand citizens. In the space of a few years, the population of the historic centre has fallen by around 70 thousand inhabitants, while that of the mainland has more than doubled. Twenty-five years later, in 2000, the curve of inhabitants in the historic centre continues to fall, confirming the exodus of citizens over the decades, passing from 66.206 of that year to 52.143 of 2020, at the height of the pandemic (Comune di Venezia, 2021).

Among the reasons – stated at the beginning of this section – that caused and still cause the movement of citizens, there is the loss of the working-class people. They started to leave the island in the second

⁴ Dialect name indicating an exceptionally high tide

half of the 20th century. Productive activities in the area either ceased or were moved to the mainland, leaving empty many industrial buildings. In the following decades, starting in the 70s, many private investors arrived in the city intending to renovate and convert those abandoned properties left empty for years, changing the intended use of buildings and properties (Somma, 2021, pp. 12-24). When talking about the loss of the working-class people, however, the reference is not only to factories' employees, such as glass, beer, and textiles workers but also to those people working in government offices. At the same time, the shortage of funds and the conditions of buildings where public offices were located forced the Municipality to sell them to private, moving offices to the mainland. By doing so, many employees decided to move closer to their job-place. Consequently, the city's historic centre saw itself lacking both working- and middle-class people. The two sectors that have been most deprived of public space are health care and public administration, and it is relevant that the local health authority and the State Property Agency are those directly responsible for the selling. Among others, examples of activities moved to the mainland are the custom offices, the social services, the local transport service headquarters, and post offices (Ibid, pp. 25-40). Many of the former offices and buildings were sold to private investors who had the aim of refurbishing and transforming them into luxurious properties, saving the Municipality from bankruptcy and, at the same time, helping the city maintain its cultural heritage.

The same luxurious nature of the interventions, however, altered the surrounding urban fabric. Those that once were public buildings had their function changed, passing from "public usage" to "residential" or "touristic", according to the wishes of new owners. This phenomenon had consequences both in terms of accessibilities and in terms of people flows. Many areas of the city that once were devoted to public activities or services are now closed, while new museums, exhibition spaces, private collections, and especially hotels and resorts were opened, attracting in this way new tourists (Somma, 2021, p. 14). In 2000 the number of beds places for tourists was 14.248 versus 76.007 of those for residents. In 2019, before the pandemic started, the numbers were almost the same – 59.373 touristic and 59.570 residential beds (OCIO, 2021). The change is not only due to the proliferation of accommodation facilities but also to the increasingly frequent short-term rentals by private individuals, for example through Airbnb. Nowadays, 92% of the facilities are owned by privates and constituted by various kinds of accommodations: from single private rooms to B&B, or multi-properties agencies. Even though this phenomenon may seem less invasive, the total amount of beds places owned by private citizens is 56% of the total amount of tourist places in the historic centre (Ibid).

Both cause and effect of this scenario are the increasing numbers of citizens who converted their activities from basic services, such as grocery stores, kiosks, and haberdasheries, to tourist-centred activities, like restaurants, bars, and souvenir shops. At the same time, many found it more remunerative to rent out their properties for short term to tourists instead of long-term residents (Smith & Da Mosto, 2020, pp. 32-34). The effects on citizens have been twofold: the lack of activities has made it more difficult to live in the historic centre, forcing people to go to the mainland. At the same time, the rising demands of tourism caused an increase in prices, not only for dwellings but also for food and services, and, although many people complain about mass tourism and day visitors, many citizens benefit economically from tourism activities, even if they have moved elsewhere (Ibid, p. 14). During the pandemic, many were those complaining about the lack of tourism, insisting on the reopening (Berlinghieri, 2021). At the same time, the investments of big capitals by privates became necessary to sustain the preservation of the city. Most of the earnings due to tourism go to the very same private owners, most of them foreigners. Therefore, the only income for the Municipality is through taxes and fees on the last properties it has, thus weighing on residents themselves.

Citizens still have some benefits, for example on public transport: the single ride ticket of ferries costs €7,50, while for those who own the *city card* the price is reduced to €1,50. At the same time though, the possibility to get this card is open to tourists too, but for a higher price. Public transport, as a result, is constantly congested, forcing people to proceed by foot. This and other issues have caused residents' protests, asking for a reduction and control of tourism. The only solution provided by the Municipality so far, as already mentioned, is to introduce a reservation ticket to enter the city. Whether it might represent a solution to overcrowding, it is not a solution to the main problem of Venice: it is slowly turning from a city into a theme park. This measure does not provide a solution to the complaining of citizens, giving them spaces and benefits back within their city, but rather turns them into specimens on display at a "zoo". Tracing back to the initial remonstrances raised by Veronica S., it is now easy to see how they are all interconnected: moving factories and offices to the mainland caused the loss of workers and middle-class people. Consequently, room for touristic services and facilities increased, attracting new visitors, and pushing away more locals.

The hidden cause behind these problems is the same: the privatisation of Venice and the surrounding islands. However, as it is strictly linked to the economic survival of the city, it cannot be easily reconverted, since the preservation of the existing heritage cannot be bare by the Municipality on its own. To reconnect with the theories presented in the previous chapter, it is clear that overtourism raises the issue of its management. Venice Municipality however did not implement any real policy to overcome it, apart from the introduction of compulsory registrations. It is instead fostering its

development by pushing privatisation practices that is at the root of the phenomenon. How the privatisation process started and developed through the years is the object of the following chapter.

4.1.2 The Privatisation of Venice

In the last decades, the process of privatisation of Venice has drastically accelerated due to two main factors: the thirst for development and the necessity of foreign capital to bear the expenses of a historical city highly affected by the effects of climate change.

The first two milestones in the path towards Venice privatisation are the 1966 *Aqua Granda* and the subsequent Special Law for Venice issued in 1973. In Venetian dialect, *Aqua Granda* means “high water” and is a term used to refer to the exceptionally high tide that occurred in November 1966. The level of water reached 194cm, which is extremely above the guard level: the lowest point of the city, that is the entrance of St. Mark’s Basilica, is at 60 cm on the medium level of water, meaning that when the tide reaches that level and beyond, the square and the city start to go underwater (Concessionario Consorzio Venezia Nuova, n.d.). This extraordinary event had causes not only in the astronomical tide, but also – and especially – in climate factors, since the astronomical tide was not higher than 40 cm (Canestrelli, et al., 2001, p. 25). Its consequences were many, from the devastation of shops and commercial activities to the flooding of entire apartments and houses, leaving many people without electricity, gas, and heating (Comune di Venezia, 2017). 1966’s *Aqua Granda* highlighted the fragility of the city and the necessity to intervene for the preservation of its buildings and heritage and its safeguard from the atmospheric agents. The Italian government, therefore, started working on a law that was enacted in 1973 – the *Special Law for Venice*. This law provides for the protection of the lagoon environment, of historical buildings, and of artistic and cultural heritage. Moreover, it insists on the necessity of stopping the citizens' exodus through a revitalization process that must be both social and economic (Informattiva, 2003). The main outcome of this law was the creation of a board in charge of examining and approving projects proposed for the development of Venice. The decision of this council on every proposed project must be considered as binding. Members of the board were - and still are - representatives of different administrative bodies such as local authorities but also national ones. In 1987, after the registration of Venice and its lagoon as UNESCO sites, there is also a representative of it in the board (Ibid).

The law provided for the allocation of Lire 600.000.000.000, equal to € 300.000.000 ca. to invest in development and renovation projects – to be used in three years – concerning public properties and implementation of safety and security measures for the heritage (Ibid). A high number of private

companies, therefore, arrived in the historical centre of the city to take advantage of the money invested by the government to finance restoration projects. Particularly, many privates grouped into consortia, to gain more power (Somma, 2021, pp. 11-12). Among these, in 1982, the Consorzio Venezia Nuova was created – literally “Consortium New Venice” – formed by many small and medium-sized businesses. It obtained from the Government the concession to project and build physical safeguard and maintenance systems for Venice and its lagoon (Ibid). Consorzio Venezia Nuova is still in charge of managing many projects in Venice, an example is MOSE, the system that should preserve the city from flooding.

An example of privates’ investments consequences on the urban fabrics is that of Fiat, a famous car company in Italy. In 1983 it became the owner of Palazzo Grassi, an ancient building from the 1700s with the aim of using the government’s fundings to renovate it (Somma, 2021, pp. 12-18). The palace became a museum and exhibition centre, which occasionally hosted luxury private and public events. Nevertheless, even if the function of the city master plan remained unchanged, the renovation of the building and the opening of the new museum did change the urban fabric. The traffic flows in the canals and streets were often being modified due to the distinguished hosts of the Palace, new flows of tourists came into the area, causing the opening of new commercial activities in the proximities, and a new ferryboat stop was added (Ibid). All these changes have been addressed as good by the Municipality, and that is why the mayor of Venice insisted on the necessity for the Municipality to intervene and buy 80% of its shares. In 2003 in fact, Fiat decided to sell the building due to the huge financial costs of its maintenance, and in 2005 the Municipal Casinò became the majority shareholder of the building. The authorities’ intention was to re-establish its core position in the cultural and mundane panorama of the city (exibart, 2004). This operation was part of a bigger plan of the municipal administration aimed at rearranging the museum system of the city: the intention was to entrust the management of the bigger city museums to a special agency and leaving the smaller ones to private owners (Somma, 2021, pp. 12-18, 98-102). In 2006, in fact, 80% of the Casinò shares were sold to the Pinault Collection, which also financed the renovation of its building. These financial transactions paved the way for large foreign investors in the years to come.

In 1990 the practice of selling public buildings became the object of a financial law to restore fiscal balance and, at the same time, allowed for more efficient management of the goods. Concerning Venice, the majority of sold buildings once belonged to public administrations, such as the National Institute of Social Security, the Regional Administrative Court, the headquarter of the local transports company, the National Research Council, and others (Somma, 2021). Among other properties, many were those sold by the local section of the National Health System: not only buildings that hosted

hospitals and residencies for elderly people but also entire islands south the Giudecca, that now host hotels and resorts. The main consequence of these selling operations is the already mentioned loss of the middle-class people, which must be added to the already lost working-class ones. In fact, in the second part of the century, many industrial activities closed or move their production sites to the mainland. One of the most famous examples is that of Molino Stucky. It was once a mill and the whole island was characterized by industrial activities, like cement plants, rope factories, breweries, and others. People living on the Giudecca Island, therefore, were belonging to the working class, and it was the poorest area of Venice. After the middle of the century, most of these activities closed and citizens started to move out. Molino Stucky remained empty and abandoned for 20 years before it was decided to transform and revitalize it. Although there were many proposals and requests for it to be restored as a centre for citizens and daily activities, it was decided to transform it into a hotel and congress centre. Many people were forced to move out of the island, while those who remained had to face the rising prices and the increasing number of tourists and visitors (Ibid, pp. 28-35). Selling or transforming public buildings or factories into tourist facilities had a twofold effect on the urban fabric: the forced migration of the lower- and middle-class, and the rising prices for housing and rent. Moreover, commercial activities changed to adapt to new users, not only tourists but also seasonal and temporary visitors coming to Venice for jobs and events (Ibid).

This process has always been considered positive by the different mayors of the city, highly interested into attracting the new investors, one of them explicitly stated that “this is what Venice needs” (Vianello, 2013). Within this perspective, in 2005 the Municipality created a special society with the aim of facilitating the buying and selling process, Vecart s.r.l. It was highly sponsored by the city, also at an international level during exhibitions and fairs. All around the world, it became clear that Venice was for sale, attracting in this way capital from abroad, enhancing the status of the city as a mere showcase (Somma, 2021, pp. 63, 96). A special law issued in 2001 stated that the protection constraints would not interfere with the selling process and cease after the sale (Limen, 2005). Additionally, in 2004 a variation to the General Town Plan had been issued, stating that all those public buildings and properties in neglected conditions could be renovated and their functions changed. There was no constraint on keeping their original public purpose, but those properties converted into private – like small islands surrounding the main city where once there were hospitals and clinics – should have guaranteed free access to citizens to at least one part of the property on selected days and times of the week (Somma, 2021, pp. 57-73).

Along with the selling of public properties, through Vecart or directly, the Municipality started to work through *project financing* to renovate and add value to its buildings. According to these

practices, public properties' leases are given to private investors in exchange for the financing of renovation projects (in the case of properties in Venice). Privates gain the right to use the property and all its earnings as refunding of the investment. The lease has a limited amount of time, even though it is usually long to give the chance to the investor to benefit from the financing (Bentivogli, et al., 2008). In the case of Venice, the Municipality managed to renovate many properties through project financing, but in the long term, this practice has done nothing but exacerbate the economic condition of the Municipality, since the main incomes were to refund the investment. Vecart was not the only society with the specific aim of managing the trading processes: in 2016 Agenzia Sviluppo Venezia was founded⁵. On their website, they claim to “promote the Venice brand in the awareness that Venice is a brand of excellence” (Agenzia Sviluppo Venezia, n.d.), but it simply presents a list of properties of the Municipality which are for sale, indicating for each of them the technical specifications.

A response – that is also a powerful signal of condemnation - to these issues came directly from citizens who started, when possible, to fight against this compulsive selling of public land. In 2013, yet another of the small islands in Venice lagoon, Poveglia, was put up for auction and a group of citizens managed to take up a collection and buy the island (Somma, 2021, pp. 51-52). The same happened at the end of 2021 when a private citizen managed to buy the island of La Cura, saving it from becoming a luxury resort (Vitucci, 2021). These examples show the dramatic situation in which citizens in Venice and its lagoon find themselves nowadays, forced to use their savings to *save* their own land from those who should guarantee it to them. And even though the State Property Agency claims that “they mean to give priority to those investors who will promote public activities of social interest and environmental safeguard” (Agenzia del Demanio, 2018), in the reality of facts there is no legal bind that forces private owners to respect this constraint (Somma, 2021).

4.1.3 A Globalized Context

What emerges from the previous two sections is the consequence on a practical level of a global world. There is no need to go more in-depth with the analysis of how the free movement of capital and the neoliberal economies have shaped the city, but it is interesting to highlight how the movement of people stems from them. It is not the investment of money, however, that pushed citizens away, but how they were invested. To talk about Venice and its position in the global scenario, I used two metaphors that refer to two different aspects of the city: the first one is “showcase” and it is useful to

⁵ Literally meaning “Agency for the Development of Venice”

describe the function Venice has covered during the last decades. It became a place to invest in, where to displace power, money, and luxury, making of it a showcase, where investors from all over the world put their money and effort to enhance their visibility. It is a showcase for powerful people, those who have shaped and continue to shape it nowadays. The outcomes on the city's liveability, however, depict a slightly different Venice. To talk about it, I used the term "theme-park", as its increasing visibility is attracting visitors, but its tourism-focused development is pushing out inhabitants. The “theme park Venice” strengthens the showcase usage made of the city: its attractiveness is what triggers investors' interests, and vice versa. The interconnection between the two appears even more clear if thinking about Appadurai's scapes and their bonds: the movement of people, money, and ideas are all linked, and the related ethnoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes are intertwined and colliding at the same time.

Within this framework, it is evident that the measures taken by the Municipality to counteract the exodus of citizens do not work. They simply cling to the discontents expressed by citizens, without going to the causes, but trying to act only on the effects. While inhabitants protest about the overcrowding of the city, the proliferation of souvenir shops and restaurants, for the impossibility of finding an accommodation that is not reserved for tourists, the administration believes that simply limiting tourists' access to the city will be enough. It is extremely likely that the Municipality is aware of the limitations of its measures, but has no or limited interest in acting differently, as they benefit from private investors and the continuous attraction of new capital.

4.2 The Organizations

Which are the new organizations that aim at repopulating Venice and what are they proposing concretely?

In this section of the paper, new organizations that are the subject of this study are presented. Information regarding them has been collected through interviews with the exponents and document analysis of material produced by them. The aim of this section is that of giving the readers an overview of their projects, which will be further merged with other data and only subsequently be the object of analysis.

4.2.1 VeniSIA – Venice Sustainability Accelerator

VeniSIA – Venice Sustainability Accelerator – is a project led by one of the city’s universities, Ca’ Foscari, and Strategy Innovation s.r.l. – a side organization with the aim of linking universities and companies. The core idea behind it is to attract start-ups that deal with sustainability issues in Venice giving in this way a two-fold answer to the problems the city is currently facing. Representative I defines the core idea as follow:

“Venice is known as the least smart city by definition [...] when in fact it is facing a lot of sustainability problems, not only environmental but also social and cultural; so actually because of that [...] it can be imagined as a laboratory of excellence where smart solutions can be tested. If they work in Venice it means they can work in any other city with similar problems.”⁶ (2022)

Representative I explained that the project is divided into three main phases, each of them corresponding to a challenge that is seen as fundamental for the future sustainable development of Venice. Each phase is characterized by a specific theme, which are:

1. Green energies and climate change
2. Smart cities
3. Sustainable tourism

These topics originate from what they see as the needs of the city, especially the last one, as Representative I said:

“From March we will make the second call in which we will try to make acceleration not so much again on circular economy and clean energy, which are part of this area, but on smart cities - we are starting to make agreements with companies and large operators in this sector. Finally, we have also identified work on cultural initiatives and sustainable tourism as crucial. [...] These are focal topics not only because they are somehow related to climate change, but they are also extremely important for the situation in Venice, especially regarding 'hit and run' tourism. [...] In the end, however, each theme is intertwined with the others.”⁷ (2022)

According to their vision, “starting from the experience of ideas developed in Venice, improved technology solutions can be developed and implemented to save other extraordinary cities which share a similar fate” (VeniSIA, 2022, p. 13). The ideas developed to answer the three main topics should therefore be transferred to and adapted in other contexts. To paraphrase Representative I,

⁶ Translated by the author

⁷ Translated by the author

Venice unique and fragile structure – both in terms of environment and social and urban fabric – makes solutions developed for it scalable to other context, which are in a better condition (2022).

As mentioned above, VeniSIA's work has been divided into three phases, each corresponding to one of the themes. They play the role of *start-up accelerators*, but the way through which they do it is different from call to call. During the first one, dedicated to climate change and specifically to green energies, VeniSIA worked through co-innovation: they helped participating companies to match with already-established start-ups. The final aim of companies doing co-innovation is not to take over the start-ups, but to have them as part of their suppliers or collaborators. In the next calls, VeniSIA will work also through acceleration or start-up studio: the first one differs from co-innovation in the development level of the start-up – which must be in its early stages –, while the second one consists in putting the basis for the creation of new start-ups. When talking about start-up acceleration, the main difference concerning start-ups is the status of the development of their project: to fall into the category, they must be at the beginning of the process, meaning that the start-up has only some initial funds for the realization of a prototype or a beta project. Start-ups that can work through co-innovation, on the other hand, must be well-established, not in need of funds, and with a completed project and product. A start-up studio is a process that brings together people with common ideas and interests and, through several activities and encounters, leads them towards the creation of a start-up with a well-defined mission. They will then need funds to realize the prototype of their product. It becomes clear then that VeniSIA plays a different role in each call, but consequently also Venice, as a city and laboratory, has a different weight and relevance in each of them, as clarified by Representative II during our meeting.

“Starting in April, [...] the programmes will start involving start-ups in an early stage, i.e. acceleration phase. This means, for example, that the star-upper says: ‘I have raised the first funds, I have a beta project that works but needs to be improved’. These are start-ups that we really have to get our hands on before we can launch them on the market. And we will definitely have to test their products in Venice: the first customer/user will be the city's inhabitants. [...] Even more so with the start-up studio, which is the creation of an idea from scratch with Ca' Foscari students. We would like to create so-called *call for ideas* or *call for students*, which brings together students who are very good in their field with ideas that tend to be heterogeneous, but who can become future entrepreneurs in a start-up. By being born and growing here thanks to our support [...] they will be even more connected to Venice, achieving the goal of having them stay here.”⁸ (2022)

⁸ Translated by the author

Depending on the development status of the project, the selected start-ups have the chance to use the city as an open-air laboratory where to test their products: VeniSIA project has the patronage of the Municipality, meaning that they have the permission to test out prototypes and ideas within the city area and “this is fundamental to have the chance of really testing products in the city, as in Italy it is necessary to obtain many permissions [...] before acting” (Representative I, 2022).

The following chart summarizes the differences between the three calls:

Type of call and theme	Who is involved?	What kind of sponsorship do they win?	What is the impact on the city?
Co-innovation X <i>Green Energies and Climate Change</i>	Well established start-ups that have a product already on the market	The 3 finalists receive €20.000 from VeniSIA and start working with the company that chose them	Semi-finalists can test their products in Venice with the permission of the Municipality
Start-up accelerator X <i>Smart Cities and Sustainable Tourism*</i> *this call will work also through co-innovation	Start-ups that are at the beginning of their project; they have an idea and a prototype to improve	The 3 finalists receive €140.000 from VeniSIA to develop their project and start working with the company that chose them	Semi-finalists will live and work in the city for a period of time, all expenses paid by VeniSIA
Start-up studio X <i>Smart Cities and Sustainable Tourism</i>	People with ideas and proposals but who have yet to develop a project	The 3 finalists receive €140.000 from VeniSIA to develop their project	Semi-finalists will live and work in the city for a period of time, all expenses paid by VeniSIA

Table 2 – Differences Between VeniSIA’s Calls, by Anna Vavassori 2022

As mentioned above, VeniSIA is a recently born organization and had just concluded the first mission of the three – Co-innovation X Green Energies and Climate Change. In 2021 they launched the call on climate change and circular economy and started working with three Italian companies which

invested in the project. These are Eni, Enel, and Snam, leading companies in Italy working in the energy sector. The first step of their collaboration with VeniSIA was to identify the fields in which they wanted new inputs, ideas, or solutions from the start-up:

“For the selection of the start-ups in the first call, we moved on themes other than sustainable tourism. We had the objectives of the companies Eni, Enel, and Snam [...] that fell within five themes and consequently five SDGs: affordable and clean energy [...], responsible consumption and production [...], climate action, life below water, life on land. [...] We both received autonomous applications and proactively researched start-ups through various channels, such as specific websites. We identified about 1500 of them with these targets in mind. [...] Of these 1500, with the help of other colleagues who are experts in sustainability and business, we defined which start-ups best fit the canons of Eni, Enel, and Snam, and which fit the co-innovation target. [...] We identified 300 start-ups that were sent to the companies whose representatives sit on a board with VeniSIA and ranked their preferences by giving scores. [...] We defined a shortlist of 31 companies from which the three finalists were chosen.”⁹ (Representative II, 2022)

As mentioned by Representative II, the second step of the selection consisted in ranking the start-ups according to specific criteria set by the board. Members of the committee were exponents of the companies and a selection of VeniSIA’s staff. They gave points to each start-up according to the following criteria and then put them in a ranking:

- *Idea degree innovation*, which refers to the existence of patents or licences
- *Idea feasibility and development*, the stage of development of the project
- *Market scalability*, i.e., the adaptability of the project to other contexts
- *Team commitment*, which considered the characteristics of the team’s members
- *VeniSIA challenge impact*, that is the impact and relevance of the project for Venice
- *Benefit for the corporates*, i.e., why would companies choose them

After this process, 32 start-ups were selected for a pre-acceleration process that consisted of one-to-one meetings with the leading companies, which in the end chose three finalists, one for each company. These were CarboRem, a company that works with wastes to produce new materials and recover biogas, 9-Tech, a Venetian company whose leading project is a plant where to recover waste material from PV panels, and Radoff, who developed a tool through which to limit the damages caused by Radon in closed environments. The three winners not only gained the chance to work with Eni, Enel, and Snam, but won a prize of €20.000 each (VeniSIA, 2022).

⁹ Translated by the author

When it comes to benefits for the city, however, this first call had limited impact on Venice: since it was a co-innovation project, the products were already developed, and the start-ups already had offices elsewhere – even though 7 out of 32 are from the Venice area. This implies that none of the people working in the start-ups selected in the first call came to Venice, except for some short events, not fulfilling the goal of bringing new workers into the city. Moreover, even if one of the criteria for the selection was the relevance of the project for the city of Venice – *VeniSIA challenge impact criteria* – only few projects were concretely applicable in Venice. Only some of the 32 selected ones had the chance to implement their solutions in the historic centre:

“Pixies, the cleaning robots’ one, will do a pilot in Venice; Radoff [...] will put the sensors at Ca' Foscari, which will be the pilot test of this solution; G-move, the flows of people’s one, will do a test in Venice; [...] we are slowly structuring the plan to test as many solutions as possible in the city. Energintech guys are from Venice, so even though they work at an industrial level [...] they are already based here. Also, the Breath team, those who make the special fabric, brought us some benches with a panel that captures carbon dioxide and filters the air, which were left around the university campus. The idea of making Venice truly a laboratory was a little difficult to realise, partly because of Covid and partly because they were advanced start-ups.”¹⁰ (Representative II, 2022)

For what concerns the future calls, VeniSIA aims at offering start-ups the chance to live in the city. They offer to find and pay for the accommodation, providing them with places where to work and experiment their projects. This is part of the ultimate goal of VeniSIA:

“In the end, however, what we also want to achieve is to reverse the haemorrhaging of residents and ensure that, if not in the short term, at least in the long term there is a turnaround. So, we want to attract new, quality residents, from university students to smart-workers who want to come and do a semester or more of work here, to innovation professionals who come to Venice knowing that it is a place where it can be done. What happens now instead is that these people go to Milan, at best, or abroad. So, the problem is also to convince companies and start-ups that Venice is also a place where you can stay. [...] This would really change the face of Venice.”¹¹ (Representative I, 2022)

And confirmed by Representative II:

“This is the ambition, but we started with the co-innovation programme, which is actually the most difficult to get off the ground in Venice. This is because co-innovation programmes do involve working with start-ups that are sent to corporations, but this requires that the start-ups

¹⁰ Translated by the author

¹¹ Translated by the author

are already developed. Apart from a few that still had to perfect something, they were all start-ups that already have a product on the market, a trained team, more or less significant funding, and, of course, a headquarter [...]. This meant that it was impossible to start them in Venice, then Covid made things even worse. Our initial idea was to start with co-innovation and then go down for acceleration and start-up studios and invite the start-ups to live in Venice during the development period of the programme, but we will probably use co-innovation too in the next calls. [...] Related to this is the possibility of testing, which we did anyway with some of the participants in the first call”¹² (2022)

To fulfil the aim of creating a Venetian community, Representative II prepared a series of activities thought to stimulate community building, which have at their core experiencing not only the most famous attractions in Venice but also some of those known only to locals. The entire list can be found, translated by the author, in the Appendix, but they thought about both cultural, sportive, and gastronomic activities. Thinking about activities and community building is a key aspect of the project:

“[...] The idea is to replace the tourist who comes and visits the city but then leaves, or the student who [...] after graduating goes to live elsewhere, with an entrepreneur. We want to create more value than that of being in transit: we want people to experience Venice for what it is, consequently upgrading it by bringing new companies, since now there are practically none, apart from the artisan ones that are gradually closing down precisely because there is no system that allows them to create a fabric that makes doing business in Venice meaningfully.”¹³ (Representative II, 2022)

Cultural activities comprise both visits to museums and foundations, theatres, and artistic ateliers, while sportive activities mix more known sports with those of the Venetian tradition, such as *voga veneta*, a particular kind of rowing. The community-building activities include a series of dinners and aperitives in typical places of Venice, outside the touristic routes. Moreover, they organized daily trips to other places in the region of Venice. These activities highlight the desire of taking a step further than simply attracting people to the city for a determined period, as if it was a dormitory, but allowing workers to really know Venice. The outcomes of them, however, cannot be evaluated yet, as the first call participants did not move to Venice. Moreover, they are aware that to build a suitable environment for remote workers, doing experiences in the city is not the only essential thing:

“Those who work remotely need three things: broadband, which is already there in Venice (no thanks to VeniSIA); tax benefits for remote workers with taxation at 30% and not to 60% as it

¹² Translated by the author

¹³ Translated by the author

is for freelancers, which is already a reality; and an international community, which is what is lacking in Venice, despite the large number of foreign investors. There are no international kindergartens for children, English is not spoken fluently everywhere, recycling does not work very well, etc. One of the goals is precisely to work with start-ups that have the social purpose of building an international community.”¹⁴ (Representative I, 2022)

Tracing back to the theories, this last part of the project assumes relevance when thinking about cities’ liveability: inviting new workers into the city with the aim of either testing their products or developing new solutions concerning the city’s needs contributes to the creation of a new working class, which is something that Venice is lacking. Access to a working place is one of the basic needs that people have, as the one of dwelling – also something VeniSIA provides for. By promoting community-building, the ambition is to shift from being a *viable city* to a liveable one, where psychological needs are met too, such as bonds with people. A simple list of activities cannot of course guarantee the creation of relationships and the above-mentioned shift but highlights that VeniSIA is aware of the need to go beyond mere job creation, pushing towards values too.

The objectives of this organization are interesting and challenging, especially considering that the city lacks a working class that is not dependent on tourism. However, future citizens will have to face the same problems as those who already live in the city, and the work of VeniSIA on its own may not be enough to overcome them. This aspect will be discussed more in-depth after all the organizations have been presented, to give a greater insight into the issue.

4.2.2 Venywhere

Venywhere is an organization promoted by Ca’ Foscari University and Foundation Venice – originally a bank foundation that became private in 2004 and supports interventions to promote the cultural heritage of Venice. The main objective of Venywhere is to promote the lagoon city as a remote working place, attracting people and companies from all over the world for prolonged periods of time – at least six months:

“We wanted to create a platform that would help people to come here for longer or shorter periods, but at least six months [...] and that would allow them to integrate with the city immediately. In this way, we wanted to create a slice of the temporary population that, although not resident for life, would have consumption and living patterns similar to those of

¹⁴ Translated by the author

citizens, keeping small activities alive, such as the bakers, and activating a series of services”¹⁵
(Representative III, 2022)

It is addressed to anywhere workers, not to be mistaken with seasonal workers, who are employees of companies with the chance of working from everywhere. Venywhere originates from the observation of global trends already present before the pandemic, which gained weight and importance after it. In Representative III’s words, “the pandemic did not so much improve things but gave the impression of discontinuity [...] a break was perceived and therefore a possibility of reopening the game for cities which suffer of depopulation” (2022). He observed the desire of cities to invest not anymore in the attraction of companies but in single workers:

“We have realised that the world of work is changing, where there is a large group of people moving around. This changes the game of urban development, because it becomes less important for cities to attract companies, but more important to attract people. And above all, it is possible to do so. In Venice, we went on for 40 years saying that to have more population we needed more workers not related to tourism, but to have more workers we needed more companies, and companies do not want to come to Venice. Now, this mechanism has been broken because it is possible to make people come even without the companies, changing the cards on the table, not only for Venice but for all historic cities.”¹⁶ (Representative III, 2022)

The pandemic simply accelerated the phenomenon, strengthening technological development and highlighting the benefits of working from home. Venice has always worked as an attractor for its unique environment, which turned out to be a point of strength in a post-pandemic world:

“If one moves to come to a city like Venice, one does not come there just to have an office in a nice place, but because one probably wants to rethink his relationship with the city and the working day. So, we moved towards the idea that perhaps to give meaning to the project we needed to think of the city as a space for widespread work. [...] The idea is to use the city as a workspace that can be more or less conventional depending on the location chosen, the worker can be outdoors or indoors and above all move between the different locations much more freely depending on the needs of the day. [...] This goes well with a city that has unused spaces like Venice, which is crawling with empty spaces [...] and would not need large investments to equip these areas.”¹⁷ (Representative III, 2022)

Venywhere then proposes itself as a service and mediator for transforming the city into a *diffuse working-space*, that is different from normal co-workings, due to its extreme flexibility. Venice seems

¹⁵ Translated by the author

¹⁶ Translated by the author

¹⁷ Translated by the author

the perfect city where to test this new idea, thanks to its small dimension: along with the famous concept of the *15-Minute City*, the limited size of Venice allows quick moving around. “Venice is already by definition a 15-minute city, so it is an ideal testing ground for these things” says Representative III (2022). This last theory refers to the possibility for citizens to have everything they need within a 15-minute walk or bike (:15 City, 2021).

Concretely, Venywhere is a platform that offers a series of services to remote workers – both those already in Venice and those who wish to come. Unlike other similar services, it is not offering cash, but it sells a one-off paid service. At present, people can register free of charge as it still is in beta mode, but in the future, it will be made available at different rates, depending on the number of services one wishes to access. Venywhere portal, in fact, assists those who wish to come through four different services:

- *Soft landing*: the service dedicated to those who need to obtain entry permits, health insurance, or who need help understanding the tax system, bank account opening, and logistics.
- *Accommodation*: through this service, people will be given a choice of four apartments selected according to custom filters and the chance to visit them remotely through a videocall.
- *Workspace service*: it helps workers in finding and reserving the right spot where to work from.
- *“Becoming venetians”*: it allows joining and enrolling in several courses or activities usually not open to tourists. The activities may vary from sports, crafts, and arts to food experiences, language classes, and others.

To provide these services, Venywhere has initiated several dialogues with third parties, both local and national. Regarding assistance with residence permits, for example, the organization has initiated a dialogue with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to facilitate the obtaining of residence permits, health coverage, and other necessary documents for those coming from non-European countries and wishing to stay in Italy for more than 90 days. At the same time, to respond to housing needs, a collaboration with the Federation of Estate Agents was initiated to convert many of the available accommodations from short-term or tourist use to medium/long-term use:

“There is no point in attracting people if there are no houses because they are all on Airbnb. Our goal is, through a collaboration with the Federation of Estate Agents, to convince owners to switch from short-term to medium- and long-term rentals. This is fundamental because we

must not take away houses that are already available for people living in Venice, but we want to and must create a new offer.”¹⁸ (Representative III, 2022)

During the beta program, they received more than 1200 applications, of which an estimated 1 thousand will come to Venice. Considering the current availability of medium-term rentals, they would need to quadruple the supply to satisfy everyone according to Representative III’s forecasts. That is why a collaboration with the Federation of Estate Agents is needed – also considering that “for estate agents a shift from short-term towards medium-term rentals would mean less work to do and lately there is a general interest in it [...] as everyone is aware that this field of the business may open to new perspectives” (Representative III, 2022).

At the same time, Venywhere initiated a dialogue with some citizens organization in Venice that may need the help of newcomers: “we want to offer the chance to those who move into Venice to give something back to it” (Representative III, 2022). One example is the collaboration with Venice Calls, a social promotion association that organises events and projects on the theme of environmental and social sustainability in which citizens can participate and lend a hand. Among other activities, Venywhere joined a project that seeks to create an “emergency network capable of providing immediate assistance to vulnerable people through a computer system” (Representative III, 2022). Most of those who answered Venywhere calls, according to Representative III, are employees of the IT sector, among which there is also the company Cisco, with whom they started the first trial program. In March 2022 in fact, a group of 16 of their employees moved to Venice and have enjoyed the services offered by Venywhere. As Cisco is a telematics services company, they have also started a collaboration to enhance Venywhere’s offer, which is based on being able to easily connect to anywhere in the world. “Working with corporates could also result in the company liking the city and deciding to invest in it, which would be desirable” according to Representative III (2022) During their stay in Venice, remote workers from Cisco will also participate in researching how to strengthen hybrid work, together with Venywhere. As they work in telematics services, their contributions will be for the development of technologies that ease remote work, making Venice a laboratory where to test them (Cisco Italia, 2022). If globalization is what triggered overtourism and its related issues, it may also provide tools to overcome some of them: without the technological progress of the last years, thinking about Venice as a city for remote workers were to experiment with this new way of living would not be possible. The collaboration with Cisco, a leading company in technological development, constitutes both a trial of the program and a way through which to improve it and develop a better project. It is true that it will contribute to the establishment and reinforcement of

¹⁸ Translated by the author

those factors that caused Venice's situation to be as it is now, but it also provides an alternative way to use them, to bring some advantages to the city.

Another relevant aspect of the projects comes from the analysis of the received applications, which were more than 1200:

“The demographic composition of those who applied to participate in the programme is very interesting: they are all between 30 and 45 years old, exactly where Venice's demographic gap in terms of working population is. As type of professions the applicants cover three/four major sectors: IT, marketing and communication, and finance. Their income is usually medium-high, which allows them to pay a Venetian rent.”¹⁹ (Representative III, 2022)

Venice’s historic centre population in fact is mainly formed by students, who leave once graduated, and older people (Comune di Venezia, 2022). These data are important because, through this project, the social fabric of the city would be enriched by people who are not linked to tourism, providing a partial answer to the need for jobs and users not involved in tourism. At the same time, young people in their 30s working in these sectors are those most likely to move: if the extreme movement of people and capital is what caused the city’s emptying, it is also possible, through investing in this sector, to invert the trend. Representative III’s word sum up the potential of this last concept: “Those who are already in Venice and want to stay, such as young graduates who usually only find work elsewhere, are a privileged target group for us. We don't just want to attract but also allow those who are already here to stay” (2022).

The work and impact that Venywhere may have on the city, like the one of VeniSIA, is considerable. However, they both cannot overcome and provide an ultimate answer to all the issues affecting Venice – and perhaps it is not even their role. This argument will be deepened in the following chapter dedicated to the discussion of data.

4.2.3 SerenDPT and Its Collaboration with MIT

SerenDPT is a benefits company with the aim of creating quality work in Venice through projects that aim to solve some of its main problems. It was created in 2017 and among its main products, there are solutions to easily move around Venice, the establishment of a virtual jewellery fair to support local artisans, and the creation of a network for electroacoustic workers belonging to the city. It has recently launched, with the collaboration of the Venture Accelerator of the MIT –

¹⁹ Translated by the author

Massachusetts Institute of Technology – School of Architecture and Planning, a call for ideas and start-ups, very similar to the VeniSIA project. The goal is that of supporting local entrepreneurs by helping them create new firms, with the common point of preferring projects that can also be applied to other cities in the world. The focus will be on ideas that provide smart solutions to the preservation issue – extremely expensive and difficult – and the rising sea level, which is likely to cause flooding of all ground and first floors of buildings (MITdesignX, 2022). MITdesignXvenice came after the VeniSIA project: the call is still open and will close at the end of June 2022, meaning that there are no concrete results yet. This initiative is therefore only mentioned in the study, without a deeper investigation; however, it is presumable that the impact of the initiative on the urban fabric will be comparable to VeniSIA's one, given the similar nature of the two projects.

4.3 Common Grounds

Are there common grounds between the intentions of organizations and inhabitants' demands that may lead to a positive change in the urban context?

The last sub-question aims to merge the different findings gained by answering the first three and is crucial for the final assessment of this research. What emerged from the analysis of the Venetian context and the needs of its citizens is a profound clash between economic and primary interests. Over the years, several factors have led to a preference for a development model based on major investments and the attraction of large, often foreign, capitals. This is due both to the enormous maintenance costs that a city with such an artistic and cultural heritage must face and to the personal interests that outweigh those of the community when properties cease to be public. Over the years, the phenomenon has grown stronger, making it practically impossible to halt the rise of Venice as a showcase city. The result is a city that slowly ceases to be a city but becomes a simple *window on the world* – a showcase – chosen by many to display their wealth and brands. Having a spot in Venice means being able to be seen and known by the whole world, as demonstrated by the continuous arrival of new investors or by the fact that it is often chosen as the set for luxury events by famous firms. In a global scenario, this mechanism worked as an attractor and booster for mass tourism, that now dominates the city. The link with Appadurai's scapes is clear: movement of money triggers movement of people and vice versa. Within this context, citizens have seen factories and production activities close, and their offices move elsewhere, often choosing to follow them. This has triggered a vicious circle in which the activities of primary services no longer have enough users and therefore are readjusted to the new players in the city – tourists. At the same time, citizens no longer find primary

services, which have been converted into services for tourists, such as restaurants and souvenir shops. The two phenomena are one cause of the other and vice versa: “it is clear that if there are no inhabitants, shops become bars, bakeries close, etc. At root there is a population problem. Of course, Venice will remain a tourist city, but it must be a city that has a life for its citizens” (Representative III, 2022). The loss of services made Venice unliveable, and the extremely high prices of rents made it a city where not even primal needs are met – namely a viable city. However, VeniSIA and Venywhere’s team are aware of this potentiality, that can be summed up in Representative I’s words: “VeniSIA allows you to use Venice as a laboratory but participating is also a marketing strategy because if you launch an idea in Venice, it clearly has a much greater resonance than if done elsewhere” (2022)

It is in this last acknowledgment that the meeting point between what organizations want to do and what citizens demand lies: to stop the exodus of residents it is necessary to act on the causes, but to act on the causes it is also necessary to attract new citizens. The success of VeniSIA and Venywhere in bringing new workers into the city may have a variable impact – depending on the level of success of the projects – on the urban demographic fabric. Bringing jobs other than those specialised in tourism to the city would break the above-mentioned mechanism, demonstrating that a future in Venice is also possible in other work sectors. The same nature of Venice as a showcase may help the projects to reach a large audience – just think of the initiative of SerenDPT with MIT, one of the most famous universities in the world, that sounds very similar to VeniSIA’s one. In a long term, seeing the opportunity to work remotely in Venice might also attract people without the need to apply to the platform or participate in a start-up project, as Representative I said during the interview²⁰. However, the trends that dominated the city for ages cannot be inverted so easily: Venice won’t stop being a city whose economy is based on tourism, that people will choose not to visit. Even though this research highlighted the complaints of residents on tourism, it is important to stress that many others live of its incomes (Smith & Da Mosto, 2020, pp. 32-34). If it is true that most of the luxury hotels and art foundations are property of private foreign investors, also true is that many small activities such as souvenir shops, bars, restaurants, Airbnb, and B&B, are property of Venetians – or former inhabitants who decided to move on the mainland. Indeed, over the years, the different Municipalities did not care for the interests of weaker citizens, but the mayor and the town council have been elected by Venetians. Part of the problem lies in the fact that Venice's historic centre and Venice mainland districts – two areas in which citizens have very different interests – are under the same Municipality. Mass tourism and neoliberal economies cannot simply be ceased, and it is not in the interests of most

²⁰ See page 45

of the population, but VeniSIA and Venywhere, such as other possible future organizations, may limit the dependency of Venice's economy on tourism. As the report realized by We Are Here Venice says:

“To ensure a positive future for Venice, those who have made their living from tourism must be actively engaged in the economic re-diversification of the *città storica*; synchronising the needs of Venice’s diverse stakeholders is critical to broaden the range of productive activities and employment opportunities” (Smith & Da Mosto, 2020, p. 33)

What citizens are asking for is certainly much more than what these organizations propose to do. At the same time, however, it is not the task of an independent organization to solve all the problems faced by the inhabitants of the lagoon city. VeniSIA’s team thought about the possibility of working with start-ups devoted to social causes, the problem however lies in the necessity of finding interested sponsoring companies:

“We will certainly meet with start-ups that want to intervene in areas such as housing, mobility, etc. At the moment we don't have any concrete answers, we only have proposals from start-ups that participated in the first call and were considering certain solutions. But until we have the multinational or the company that does co-innovation or acceleration on these ideas, and chooses these projects, we don't have an answer to test. [...] the first call had some start-ups that only gave partial answers on the topic.”²¹ (Representative I, 2022)

Their work however, should be merged with initiatives carried out by the Municipality, which has the task to take care of all its inhabitants – or at least should have to. Another obstacle lies in the difficulties that actors other than the local authorities have to face to gain the permits for testing any sort of project (Ibid). These premises lead to the main research question, which will be addressed in the following chapter.

²¹ Translated by the author

5. Discussion

Given the current scenario that sees Venice as a dying city, what is the role that the recently born organizations may play in counteracting the citizens' exodus and other phenomena related to overtourism, and what room for action do they have – if there is any –?

In the previous chapter, all the sub-questions have been discussed; if considered as a whole, it is now possible to answer the above-mentioned research question. As suggested in the previous section, a room for action there is, even if extremely limited. Organizations and initiatives such as VeniSIA and Venywhere mean to attract new workers to the city, and even though it would not solve all the issues inhabitants complain about, it may trigger important dynamics. Attracting start-ups through acceleration programs and partnerships, helping remote workers to settle down in Venice, and avoiding graduated students to leave the city, could have a relevant impact on what is the most suffering part of the population. As highlighted in the first section of the Analysis, the last decades saw a huge loss of workers not employed in touristic activities, making the historic centre of the island mainly a place for and of students, elderly people, or tourists. Having more inhabitants would trigger a request for basic services, counteracting the negative trends. If it is true that Venice is a city dominated by markets, what the organizations promise to do – bringing in more inhabitants – could have implications for services demand, which could lead to an increase in supply. This could reverse some trends, especially the one that sees the real estate market oriented towards the short-term accommodations, as well as the commercial activities' one. As the difficulties of finding a dwelling place are at the centre of citizens' protests, Venywhere's project, in particular, is relevant. As mentioned in the section dedicated to its presentation, Representative III and other employees started a collaboration with the Federation of Estate Agents. The main goal is to convince property owners in investing more in medium/long-term rentals. As this is key for Venywhere's program to succeed, as mentioned by Representative III in the interview, it may also trigger a shift in the trends, allowing other people who do not come to Venice as remote workers to find a place to stay. This change is fundamental for the city to meet at least the basic needs of its inhabitants. If they are likely to succeed it is right because they act within a neoliberal framework, where markets are dominated by the law of supply and demand.

On the other side, since the organizations are not funded by the Municipality but by privates, the effectiveness of their action may be limited. This is relevant, especially for VeniSIA, whose start-ups and projects are chosen by the paying companies. It is important to remember that these lasts are not small local firms, but big companies acting mainly on a national and international level. Their

interests do not strictly lie in the future of Venice, but in greater earnings coming from projects that may have nothing to do with Venice. An example made by Representative II is that of 9-Tech, one of the three finalists of the first call:

“[...] we can perhaps think of having those who have solar panels in Venice take them to 9-tech at the end of their cycle, that's fine, but it would be a communication aspect to stay in line with the mission we have set ourselves rather than concrete and effective action. Obviously, if Eni processes 50,000 panels a year outside of Venice but with 9-Tech's technologies, it does the planet much better than if Eni only recycled those panels that we at VeniSIA tell people to come and recycle at 9-Tech. Obviously, the interest is that Venetians know that the waste management company works with a company in the city. [...] There are some projects that go better with Venice and others less so, but the macro-objective is to develop sustainable projects for all contexts.”²² (2022)

Also relevant is the fact that the two more impactful programs are those that competes start-up acceleration and start-up studio since they make actors coming, living, and experimenting in Venice. However, these two programs are those that more relies on private companies' funding: the impact of VeniSIA and its programs is dependent on the choices that will be made by actors who are not directly interested in Venice. This means that the results on the urban fabric will be dependent on whether the companies choose to sponsor specific projects instead of others, and it is something that cannot be forecasted. Regarding this, the fact that investors come from outside the city is direct consequence of globalization, especially if they are foreigners.

The very existence of the organizations taken as the case study is possible only thanks to the globalized dynamics that shaped the world in the last decades. Remote work implies many more things other than the simple movement of the worker. As the assistance that Venywhere gives to its users, being able to work remotely means that it is possible to easily cross the borders, to get a visa permit, but also that paying even with different currencies is easy and fast. Moreover, technology plays a relevant role: the latest development, that was possible only thanks to globalization, is what allowed smart working and being present in more than a place at the same time. It is in this sense that Venywhere and VeniSIA are considered two products of globalization, and it is around this concept that the whole argumentation is built. The tools to counteract globalization's side effects can be retrieved from the very same phenomenon that caused them. If technological development and its consequent easing of travelling are one of the main causes of overtourism – and therefore of the exodus of citizens –, it is also true that they may originate a new way of living. That of anywhere

²² Translated by the author

workers is an ethnoscape and can be considered a new type of residency that is becoming always more popular. The movement of these people will have impact on ideoscapes, i.e. on policies and ideologies, with consequences on the city planning and the management of flows. The pandemic years have indeed highlighted the benefits of working from home, which is the step before working from another city. The process is not so different from the one that, for example, sees new technologies providing solutions to global change issues such as mobility and green alternatives. If a globalized world is the reality we live in, it is easier to take advantage of the possibilities it opens to overcome the side effects it causes. As VeniSIA and Venywhere reflect this globalized world, a partial solution to all the issues may come from the very same cause. It is unimaginable to simply stop doing all the things we are used to, which are somehow interconnected, as the Theoretical Framework chapter highlighted. Most of the commodities come exactly from globalization and having a solution that is not simply avoiding *the cause* may act as an incentive, especially when thinking about the Municipality's role. *The cause* is a general term to refer to all those mechanisms triggered by globalization, especially the use of private (foreign) capitals and the attraction of visitors. Remote working however is not the solution to all the issues affecting Venice. It provides only a partial solution to two main ones: the lack of a working-class not dependent on tourism, and the demographic lack of inhabitants between 30 and 45 years old. As the Context chapter highlighted, however, there are many other problems that citizens are facing. Both VeniSIA and Venywhere may represent a chance to attract capital to develop projects with the specific goal to overcome these issues – and the Municipality has always invested great effort and put resources into attracting investors. Moreover, relevant for this operation would be the role of showcase that Venice covers, as Representative's III words show: “Venice works very well as an advertisement, I wouldn't mind finding a far-sighted sponsor interested in setting up a network of outdoor hubs where remote working is possible, such as floating stations [...]”²³ (2022).

Another aspect is that, recently, the organizations gained great relevance in the public environment. In the last couple of months, VeniSIA passed from being an organization with the only patronage of the Municipality to being the flagship project of the recently established Fondazione Venezia Capitale Mondiale della Sostenibilità – literally *Foundation Venice World Capital of Sustainability*. As the name may suggest, the foundation has the aim to promote innovative projects for the safeguard of the lagoon city and its environment, that may represent a model of sustainable urban development both in economic, social, and environmental terms (Comune di Venezia, 2022). The fear is that it will turn out to be yet another disguise of private investments, with the risk of spending money on projects that

²³ Translated by the author

are not needed or are simply cosmetic, as happened with other foundations and highlighted in section 4.1.2. Investors in fact may be private individuals with no interest in ensuring the sustainable development of the city, especially in the social aspect. However, as nothing has happened yet, this is only a supposition of the possible outcomes. Moreover, the use that will be made is more relevant rather than who the funders are. It is not relevant whether the investors are public or private if the projects they support are beneficial for the city, but it is still too early to assess the foundation's work.

The establishment of this foundation can also simply be a tool that the Municipality uses to show interest in the issues that only it has the power to solve – while not working in concrete terms to solve them. VeniSIA and Venywhere have the power to attract new workers, however, data showed that most of them have a medium to high income, limiting in this way their action area. The demographic problems of Venice are related to the age of its residents and the social class they belong to. It is not a secret that Venice is an expensive city, but it is also full of public houses: the problem is that many of these are empty, and for people with a low income it is practically impossible to find accommodation. It means that VeniSIA and Venywhere projects give answers to only part of the population's issues. As mentioned above, it is not the role of VeniSIA nor Venywhere to solve this and other related issues, but the model they have implemented may be inspirational. As happened for VeniSIA, the Municipality showed a marked interest in the project after its success and attraction of investment. This happened because a discourse of international relevance arose around the organizations: tracing back to the theories presented in chapter 3, the role *spectacle* plays in cities shaping attracted the Municipality – referring to the Fondazione Venezia Capitale Mondiale della Sostenibilità – and can also attract new investors. As Representative I²⁴ and Representative III²⁵ said, intervening in Venice also means getting publicity. Organizations like Venywhere and VeniSIA can take advantage of this condition by attracting investors interested in specific issues related, for example, to social housing. The presence of investors and partners may trigger the Municipality's attention which can be devoted in this way to the lower-income population issues too.

Another positive aspect of the activities of VeniSIA and Venywhere is that their success serves as a demonstration that the city can also live from non-tourist activities. As mentioned above, Venice will never cease to be a touristic city, but many other cities have been capable of not losing inhabitants while also attracting visitors. The key lies in not specializing the city's economy only in one sector. Developing a more sustainable tourism, as in the intention of VeniSIA's future calls for start-ups, may be a starting point to regulate the development. At the same time, tourism can be used as a tool

²⁴ See page 53

²⁵ See page 57

to demonstrate that Venice is not just an attraction but a city too. When talking about VeniSIA's project, Representative I stated that:

“The move to action came about mainly due to the very strong interest of the most diverse segments of the population: academics, politicians, private individuals, young people, students, Italians, but also foreigners... Venice has a meaning for everyone that goes beyond politics. It is not a capital, it is not a military centre, and it has no specific market. It is in people's hearts for the most diverse reasons. So, working on sustainability in a city like Venice can only be a stimulus.”²⁶ (2022)

This extract highlights the impact that visiting the city may have on tourists' future behaviours. Tracing back to Augé's theory of non-places and the figure of “suspended tourists”, it is relevant the intention of Venywhere of acting on tourists' experiences by making them aware of the city's potentialities and how they might come back not as visitors but as workers. Intervening on how people come to visit the city, avoiding the “classical experience” of perceiving the space as separate, but investing in using the visit as a tool to promote the working and liveable environment could play a major role in inverting the trends of the city. As the opening of this work says, people use to think that Venice is beautiful, but they would not live there: the image of the city people get when they come as tourists influence their future behaviours and it may be positive or negative. As the city will never cease to be a touristic destination, investing in the development of touristic programmes that show how Venice is the perfect place where to work remotely may have a strong impact on the future of the city. One of the desires of Representative III is to use tourism as a tool to promote the city as a place where to live and work:

“Tourism will be there, and it will be mass tourism. I find it illusory to make a battle against it. What can be done is to improve it, control it and exploit it. [...] Many of those who have written to us have already been to Venice as tourists, if we could make a systematic campaign on tourists saying 'next time come back as workers' there would be a change. It would be enough for one in a thousand to be tempted to make this choice to have thousands of new citizens. [...] But this requires the collaboration of the Municipality.”²⁷ (2022)

In this way, the *spectacle* of the city becomes a tool to promote its repopulation. It should be used not only to represent power dynamics but also to reach other scopes, as the representation of dominant ideologies. It has been said that the ideologies that stand behind the production of space have the power to reinforce globalizing dynamics. However, the very same nature of Venywhere and VeniSIA

²⁶ Translated by the author

²⁷ Translated by the author

– which have been said to be products of globalization – can make them an *internal tool* to establish dynamics favourable to citizens too.

Promoting Venice as a city for remote workers, with all the mentioned implications for the urban structure, would also counteract the particular gentrification process that is going on. Citizens would not be replaced by tourists, especially if Venywhere manages to increase the number of medium-/long-term rentals. As most applicants have a medium or high income, however, there would be the necessity to avoid classical gentrification processes. However, this would be possible only through an intervention of the Municipality and local authorities, as it is their role to ensure housing and services for everyone.

Summing up what has been said in this chapter, the answer to the initial question “*Given the current scenario that sees Venice as a dying city, what is the role that the recently born organizations may play in counteracting the citizens’ exodus and other phenomena related to overtourism, and what room for action do they have – if there is any –?*” is that there is room, but is limited. The organizations may play a relevant role in attracting a population that the city centre lacks – i.e. middle or high-income workers between 30 and 45 years old, engaged in non-tourist work. This will have some consequences on the demand and supply of services, highlighting that the city may live on other things than tourism. At the same time, there is the chance that these organizations’ work will trigger a rethinking of tourism, to make it a constructive part of the city. However, what VeniSIA and Venywhere cannot do, is to act on social issues the Municipality should take care of, such as the regulation of touristic allocations, or the availability of social housing. The only power the organizations have in this sense is to raise awareness of the needs of the city and the possibility to act on them through innovation.

6. Conclusion

As already mentioned in other paragraphs of this research, the issues affecting Venice and the solutions that the organizations are offering both originate from the globalized world we live in. The Theoretical Framework chapter gave an overview of how the recent changes have shaped the panorama and situation in which Venice is now. If technological development is what facilitated the shift towards mass tourism and overcrowding of the city, it may also represent a means for solving these problems, or at least a way of restraining them. Wishing for national agendas to invert the trend would be of no utility to solve issues that affect Venice and other touristic cities in the world. International markets are what originate many of the commodities we are used to, and it seems impossible to even think about abandoning most of them. It is enough to think about the pandemic years to understand that it is in the interest of few to go back to an *unglobalized* world. People suffered from seeing their freedom of movement limited while the use we make of technological devices and knowledge, and the opportunities given by them, simply increased. At the same time, modern knowledge and technology are what solved the pandemic problems. Similarly, the strength of VeniSIA and Venywhere, and other initiatives, lies exactly in their nature: they are the fruit of globalization, and simply represent a wiser and more sustainable way of “using it”. If they are likely to succeed it is because they have consequences – such as free movement and highly developed technologies – that can be useful to reduce and solve the side effects originated in the process, without forcing anyone to drastically change life habits.

As already mentioned, the work of these organizations on their own is not enough to solve all the issues affecting the city but may be crucial in establishing a working class that overcomes the lacking in the demographic fabric of the city. Even though they do not directly intervene in citizens’ exodus causes, they put into practice projects that trigger certain dynamics which may avoid Venice to become a mere theme park. Explaining the dynamics of globalization highlighted how every phenomenon is interconnected to others and how small changes may trigger bigger ones: attracting new workers not engaged in tourism will bring new people into the city. These people will need a place to stay, raising the demand for medium-/long-term rentals in the housing market. At the same time, people have specific needs that go beyond their work, such as leisure, sports, or creative activities. If Venice manages to fulfil these requests, there are more chances that it will manage to shift from being a dying city to first, a viable city that offers the answer to basic needs, and lately a liveable city where psychological needs are met too. The last step would be of becoming a memorable and lovable city, according to the theories, where self-fulfilment is accomplished. Establishing a relationship with space is crucial not to turn it into a non-place, according to Augé (1995). This is

though extremely subjective, as we all establish different relationships with different places. However, many of those who applied for Venywhere's project had already been in Venice, meaning that the visit had triggered something upon which the relationship may be built.

A change in the way the Municipality is managing the city needs to be added to the work the organizations are doing. The last decades have seen a political agenda devoted to the attraction of capital in different forms, even though the ruling class was changing: a shift is in fact dependent on citizens' votes too, and neoliberalism is the current dominant ideology. VeniSIA and Venywhere, however, demonstrate that a shift is possible without waving up the commodities that globalization gave us, but by simply thinking about different phenomena in a connected way. The two organizations in fact have an impact on citizens' living conditions too, even if they are not directly working with and for them. In a city that has been governed for years by a political agenda with the attraction of investors at its core, the solution may be that of looking at things from a different perspective. Even if the Municipality is likely to hide behind slogans and ineffective action, it has demonstrated in the years a keen in attracting investors: the main change needed is in which kind of investors. To do so, VeniSIA, Venywhere, and other similar initiatives may play a fundamental role, taking advantage of this practice but investing funds that come from companies with different scopes.

In an ideal world, it would be enough to choose to invest money in projects that are fairer for all. However, the market is dominated by the interests of individuals, who do not always take a social position. The work of the organizations presented is therefore a way of reaching an objective in which the Municipality has been reluctant. Although their contribution is certainly relevant, it will not be enough to solve the entire problem but may trigger a change in the population and consequently the given votes.

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8. Appendix

All the interviews were held in Italian: the presented guides have been translated to fit the research.

8.1 Interview Guide to Representative I - VeniSIA

[*introduction*]

- Good morning, thank you for meeting me
- Short introduction of who I am and what I am doing for my thesis:
 - Nordic Urban Planning Studies master, what it is and what I am focusing on
 - Personal interest in Venice, its situation, and VeniSIA's project for the relevance I believe it may have
- Aim of this interview

[*main part of the interview*]

- I wanted to ask you if you could tell me a bit about your vision, the thinking behind it. Where does this idea come from and what is the mission of the project?
- How does the collaboration between you the sponsoring companies work?
- I saw that the focus of VeniSIA's first call is on the development of new technologies to respond to environmental problems relevant for Venice, such as water pollution, rising waters, use of energy resources, ... are there also projects that fit into the tourism debate?
For example, are there any project that deal with the use of technology to manage flows of people or outline new routes, ...
- Why is Venice the best place to develop these new technologies/projects?
- In your website, you mention attracting new residents as one of the goals of VeniSIA; does the project also include some kind of support for those who decide to move to the city? For example, assistance in finding housing, or is there housing provided by the organization? Are there financial subsidies? *Other...*
- Are there offices made available for those who decide to work remotely in Venice? Subsidies in terms of services, such as vaporetto tickets, etc.?

- I saw that some of the residents you intend to attract are students, are there special facilities for them in terms of housing, etc?
- Is there a branch of your organization that also deals with the urban planning aspects of your initiative? And what kind of relationship do you have with the Urban Planning Department in the Municipality?
- Do the funds come only from the sponsor companies? Does the Municipality fund the project? Or what kind of relationship do you have with them?
- Can you give me any examples of projects VeniSIA is supporting now?
- Approximately when should the new residents arrive in the city? Do you have an estimate of the number of people?

[*conclusion*]

- May I have any other contacts of people I could talk to?
- Acknowledgments

8.2 Interview Guide to Representative II - VeniSIA

[introduction]

- Good morning, thank you for meeting me
- Short introduction of who I am and what I am doing for my thesis:
 - Nordic Urban Planning Studies master, what it is and what I am focusing on
 - Personal interest in Venice, its situation, and VeniSIA's project for the relevance I believe it may have
- Aim of this interview

[main part of the interview]

- The idea I had when reading your site and the full document on VeniSIA and its mission was that the selected start-ups would bring projects conceived and developed in Venice (and in its context) and that they could then be scaled up nationally and globally through collaboration with partner companies. Instead, only one of the start-ups presented during these two days (E-dock) has a project that starts in Venice and can be scaled up. This gives rise to two questions:
 - Are the projects presented in these days are the final elaboration of the work that has been done in this year – and therefore they already present an idea born from the Venetian context and then scaled up – or is it the other way around, and therefore these projects still have to be applied to the city?
 - What is the link that ties these companies to Venice?
- How were these projects selected? What were the criteria? And, above all, was their applicability to the city of Venice one of the criteria?
- What will happen to these start-ups now? One of the aims of the project, or rather, the ambition – which is also the reason why I contacted you – is that those who work and do research in these projects could repopulate the city and settle in Venice as citizens. Will it happen? Has it happened already?

[conclusion]

- May I contact you again if needed?
- Acknowledgments

8.3 Interview Guide to Representative III - Venywhere

[introduction]

- Good morning, thank you for meeting me
- Short introduction of who I am and what I am doing for my thesis:
 - Nordic Urban Planning Studies master, what it is and what I am focusing on
 - Personal interest in Venice, its situation, and Venywhere's project for the relevance I believe it may have
- Aim of this interview

[main part of the interview]

- Can you tell me what is your vision, the thinking behind Venywhere? Where did this idea come from and what is the mission of the project?
- How does the collaboration between you and those who buy your service work?
- Many of the residents who have left complain about the lack of basic services; are there any initiatives/collaborations with other actors to provide a possible solution to this problem?
- Could some of the services you offer (especially the rental search service) be extended to current residents/who are already looking for a home in Venice?
- Is there a branch of your organization that also deals with the urban planning aspects of your initiative?
- Where does the funding for the projects come from? Is there any collaboration with the active Municipality?

[conclusion]

- May I contact you again if needed?
- Acknowledgments

8.4 VeniSIA's "List of Proposal for a New Residentiality"

– Translated by Anna Vavassori

Although the list has been translated, the content has not been modified.

Vademecum Community Building VeniSIA

- Sporting activities
 - Venetian rowing
 - Dragonboat
 - Sailing Course
 - Kitesurfing
 - Sup
 - Tournaments: football, basketball,
 - Judo
 - Climbing

- Cultural activities
 - Guggenheim Collection (*remove because too famous?*)
 - Prada Foundation
 - Scuola Grande S. Rocco and Basilica dei Frari
 - San Marco and Campanile (*remove because too famous?*)
 - La Fenice Theatre and Goldoni Theatre (organised visits and shows)
 - Gallerie dell'Accademia (*remove because too famous?*)
 - Ca' D'oro
 - Ca' Pesaro
 - Cini Foundation and San Giorgio Prisons
 - Biennale
 - Espace Louis Vuitton
 - Querini Stampalia Foundation
 - Ca' Sagredo
 - Venice Original Association, visit to Venetian art workshops
 - Heritage Tower and observatory

- Various leisure activities
 - Electric boat tour
 - Day at the Lido
 - Day in Jesolo
 - Aperitivo in Zattere

- Bacaro Tour
- Visit to the Prosecco hills, also by bike
- Fondaco Dei Tedeschie rooftop
- Festival dei Sestieri
- Murano Glass and Glass Gallery
- Orsoni, hand-cut mosaics
- Lunardelli, giftware
- Delucrazia, deep tech in Giudecca
- Crafted, digital communication in Giudecca
- Venini Vetro
- Venetian Masks and Costumes Market 36th ed (February)
- Burano - Torcello (Archaeological excavations)

- Where to Eat
 - Bacaro al Remer
 - La vedova (best meatballs in Venice)
 - Osteria A' Marisa
 - Osteria da SEPA
 - L'antica Adelaide
 - Ae Do Spade

- Where to stroll
 - Jewish Ghetto
 - Calle dei Saoneri, ancient mask workshops
 - Accademia area, Punta della Dogana and Santa Maria della Salute (especially for the festival of Santa Maria della Salute)
 - Biennale Gardens
 - The Squero di Zattere
 - Campo S. Giacomo dall'Orio

