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Venice and the Touristic Imagery. On the Utility not to part Big and Small Ordinary Events

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# 1

Preliminary Proceedings

## TERRITORIS DEL TURISME

L'IMAGINARI TURÍSTIC I LA CONSTRUCCIÓ DEL PAISATGE CONTEMPORANI

Actes Preliminars

## TOURISTIC TERRITORIES

TOURISTIC IMAGERY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE

Actas Preliminares

## TERRITORIOS DEL TURISMO

EL IMAGINARIO TURÍSTICO Y LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL PAISAJE CONTEMPORÁNEO



ACTAS DEL CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL

**TERRITORIOS DEL TURISMO:**

EL IMAGINARIO TURÍSTICO Y LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL PAISAJE CONTEMPORÁNEO

Seminario celebrado en Girona los días 23, 24 y 25 de enero de 2014 en la Universidad de Girona

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**VOLUMEN 1**



## ÍNDICE

<b>Presentación / Introduction</b>	1
Nadia Fava; Marisa García Vergara	
<b>Conferencias</b>	
<b>Encuentros internacionales en el Mediterráneo:</b>	3
<b>Bernard Rudofsky y José Antonio Coderch</b>	
Pizza, Antonio	
<b>Saegesser y Mestres, dos viviendas de Emilio Donato.</b>	17
<b>Recuperar la vanguardia, no olvidar la resistencia</b>	
Rovira, Josep Maria	
<b>Comunicaciones</b>	
<i>A.1_Políticas urbanísticas referidas al turismo</i>	
<b>Urbanità del turismo</b>	33
Clemente, Antonio Alberto	
<b>Cultural Heritage and Tourism as Experienced through Mantua's Cultural Districts</b>	47
Fanzini, Daniele; Cassoni, Giorgio; Rotaru, Irina	
<b>Touristizing the Italian "Eastern border".</b>	59
<b>Are there some alternatives to the "celebration" of wars?</b>	
Marin, Alessandra	
<b>Turismo e sostenibilità sociale: un nuovo percorso</b>	71
Onni, Giuseppe	
<b>La 'otra ciudad' funcionalista. El caso del Cabo de Las Huertas (1959-1979)</b>	83
Palomares Figueres, Maite; Pastor Sogorb, Patricia; Martínez Medina, Andrés	
<b>Destino Costa del Sol: La invención de un modelo turístico cuestionado.</b>	93
<b>Mito, historia y realidad de un proyecto para el S. XXI</b>	
Rosa Jiménez, Carlos; Royo Naranjo, Lourdes	
<i>A.2_Políticas urbanísticas referidas al turismo: casos de estudios</i>	
<b>Medellín Futura.</b>	
<b>La transformación de la ciudad colombiana hacia una inédita fusión turístico-social</b>	107
Bullaro, Luca	
<b>El Club Med i el Parc Natural del Cap de Creus:</b>	117
<b>patrimoni i paisatge en conflicte</b>	
Domènech Casadevall, Gemma	
<b>Emporion, 1907-1929.</b>	127
<b>O sobre la operatividad de la ruina en el proyecto <i>noucentista</i></b>	
García Estévez, Carolina Beatriz	
<b>La "utopía" del fin de semana.</b>	141
<b>Dos iniciativas pioneras en el Madrid de los años 30</b>	
Guerrero, Salvador; García González, M. Cristina	

<b>Venice and the Touristic Imagery. On the utility not to part big and small ordinary events</b>	155
Paone, Fabrizio	
<b>Ostia Waterfront. Secondo Polo Turistico di Roma Capitale.</b>	165
<b>La recuperación de la arquitectura racionalista de Ostia Lido como seña de identidad patrimonial</b>	
Royo Naranjo, Lourdes	
<b>Salerno “città del turismo”. Ambizioni, progetti e realizzazioni per la città contemporanea.</b>	175
Teodosio, Annarita	

*B.1\_Tipologías arquitectónicas, imagen y modelos de urbanización turística*

<b>The «Spanish influenza» epidemy</b>	189
Casu, Alessandra	
<b>Oasis de modernidad: los hoteles de Benidorm (1950-1975).</b>	199
<b>Nuevas tipologías turísticas basadas en directrices del movimiento moderno</b>	
Coll Caballé, Xavier	
<b>Proyectos en busca de ciudad. La llegada del turismo a la Costa del Sol</b>	211
Gavilanes Vélaz de Medrano, Juan	
<b>Designing the seaside: mass tourism in Portugal</b>	223
Lobo, Susana; Tostões, Ana; Bandeirinha, José António	
<b>Carreteras secundarias: fragmentos para la construcción de España.</b>	237
Marin, Celia	
<b>La construcción de la imagen de la Arquitectura del relax</b>	251
Méndez Baiges, Maite; Hurtado Suárez, Inmaculada	
<b>I modelli utopici e l’invenzione degli insediamenti turistici</b>	263
Posocco, Pisana	
<b>Ficciones urbanas vernáculas diseñadas “según principios artísticos”.</b>	273
<b>Permanencia y poder simbólico del ideal urbano tradicional</b>	
García Hermida, Alejandro; Rivera Gámez, David	

*B.2\_Tipologías arquitectónicas, imagen y modelos de urbanización turística: casos de estudio*

<b>Luigi Piccinato e il turismo balneare</b>	287
Belli, Gemma	
<b>Torino e la Mole. Architettura, letteratura, cinema e società di un simbolo turistico</b>	297
Fiore, Ilaria; Stella, Federica	
<b>From rest as maintenance of workers to the conquest of free time.</b>	311
<b>Tourism in Russia from the Soviets to the free market.</b>	
Lambertucci, Filippo	
<b>Potenza del glamour e trasformazione del territorio.</b>	323
<b>Il boom turistico a Ischia negli anni Cinquanta e la figura di Angelo Rizzoli</b>	
Maglio, Andrea	
<b>Progetti e ricerche per la valorizzazione e qualificazione del paesaggio contemporaneo del Piemonte</b>	335
Mellano, Paolo	
<b>El turismo religioso y las transformaciones urbanas y tipológicas en el segundo santuario más importante de México. La ciudad de San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, México</b>	347
Pineda Almanza, Alma	

<b>Concurso Internacional Elviria</b>	359
<b>Idea inédita n. 74: el equipo de Verdugo y Caballero de Rabat</b>	
Santana Guzmán, Antonio Jesús	
<b>Modernidad y turismo: el lugar de los grandes hoteles en Barcelona</b>	371
Valdivia Pardo, Pamela	
 <i>B.3_ Modelos de urbanización turística y su influencia en las políticas urbanas</i>	
<b>Arquitecturas y territorios turísticos en el paisaje litoral. Revisión crítica</b>	385
De Lacour, Rafael	
<b>Benidorm y la “architecture d’auteur”:</b>	399
<b>Patrimonio de un Pasado reciente, Legado para un future próximo</b>	
Gasco Alcoberro, Montserrat	
<b>El turismo dentro del espacio agrícola en la Costa del sol Oriental.</b>	411
Luque Guerrero, Manuel Eliberto	
<b>Tipología e implantación hotelera en el proceso de transformación del litoral portugués en los años 50 y 60 del siglo XX</b>	423
Cunha Matos, Madalena; Santos Pedrosa, Patricia; Sequeira, Marta	
<b>Estrategias de revitalización para el modelo turístico de sol y playa.</b>	435
<b>La Manga del Mar Menor, Murcia.</b>	
Mínguez Martínez, Enrique; Vera Moure, Maria; Meseguer Garcia, Diego	
<b>Parcelario agrícola y ocupación turística del litoral mediterráneo:</b>	449
<b>la obra de Josep Ferrer Bosch en Tarragona</b>	
Ródenas García, Juan Fernando; Ferrer, Manuel; Zuaznabar, Guillermo	
 <i>C.1_ Modelos urbanísticos de la modernidad y su impacto en el territorio</i>	
<b>Turismo e urbanística corporativa: i piani italiani degli anni Trenta</b>	461
Bonfante, Francesca; Pallini, Cristina	
<b>Palm Springs, un oasis de hedonismo moderno</b>	475
Díez Martínez, Daniel	
<b>Ocupación, explotación y dilución de los territorios vivenciales.</b>	487
<b>Entornos urbanos tradicionales y “disneylandización” del mundo</b>	
Esteves Jr., Milton; Rangel Nunes, Orlando Vinicius; de Melo Passos, Rafael	
<b>Cadaqués, isla del Mediterráneo</b>	499
Garnica, Julio	
<b>Ciudad de Vacaciones 1933:</b>	513
<b>el concurso internacional para Playa de San Juan (Alicante)</b>	
Martínez-Medina, Andrés; Oliver, Ramírez, José Luis	
<b>Sabaudia. Le trasformazioni di un territorio</b>	525
Mittner, Dunia	
<b>El Plan Bonet, 1961-64. La condición del paisaje en la ordenación del desarrollo turístico de</b>	537
<b>La Manga del Mar Menor</b>	
Parra Martínez, José; Moreno Ortolano, Juan; Martínez-Medina, Andrés	
<b>Tourism and sense of place</b>	549
Tripoldi, Leonarda	



*D.1\_ los modelos del turismo como reflejo de un proyecto de ciudad*

<b>The mutation of the Ofir's pinewood in seaside resort.</b>	559
<b>The residential model variation between 1940-2010</b>	
Bragança Borges, Tiago	
<b>Turistas y veraneantes ante el paisaje: la conquista del hábitat residencial turístico</b>	569
Carbonell Segarra, Mercedes; Oliva Meyer, Justo; Martínez-Medina, Andrés	
<b>Il territorio del tempo libero tra controllo sociale, <i>welfare</i> e utopia.</b>	581
<b>Riflessioni sulla cultura del progetto italiana degli anni '50 e '60.</b>	
Deambrosis, Federico; De Magistris, Alessandro	
<b>L'Hotel Anabel com a síntoma</b>	595
<b>(l'evolució del turisme a Lloret de Mar, 1905-1975)</b>	
Faura, Ramon	
<b>Capri e il mito dell'architettura tra Ottocento e Novecento</b>	607
Mangone, Fabio	
<b>La fotografia turística, les guies i la publicitat, testimonis arquitectònics de la transformació del paisatge de la Costa Brava entre els anys 20 i 60</b>	619
Musquera Felip, Silvia	
<b>Barcelona: instrucciones de uso (1839-1912).</b>	631
<b>El imaginario de la ciudad moderna en las guías turísticas</b>	
Rodríguez, Carmen	
<b>A true Catalan Flamenco night!</b>	645
<b>Turismo globale, crisi d'identità locale e produzione di asset monumentali.</b>	
<b>Barcelona como caso-pilota del <i>branding</i> urbano.</b>	
Scarnato, Alessandro	

*D.2\_ Las imágenes y los modelos del turismo como reflejo de un proyecto de ciudad*

<b>The construction of contemporary landscape by means of the touristic imagery</b>	657
<b>The landscape of UNESCO in Aude (France)</b>	
Ballester, Patrice	
<b>Verso la costa.</b>	669
<b>Il ruolo del turismo nella litoralizzazione della Sardegna.</b>	
Cannaos, Cristian	
<b>Playas y paseos marítimos:</b>	681
<b>el nuevo paisaje urbano de Benidorm (1956-1986)</b>	
López Fernández, Manuel; Martínez-Medina, A.	
<b>Costa del Sol occidental:</b>	693
<b>construcción física y social de la ciudad lineal turística</b>	
Palacios Ortiz, Antonio Jesús	
<b>La creación arquitectónica y fotográfica de un espacio de ocio sobre el mar.</b>	707
<b>El paseo Marítimo de Palma.</b>	
Sebastián Sebastián, María	
<b>Città stagionali</b>	719
Vespasiani, Silvia	

## **Venice and the Touristic Imagery**

### **On the utility not to part big and small ordinary events**

Fabrizio Paone, IUAV University of Venice

#### Abstract

The discourse about tourism and urban structures deals with real, imaginary and symbolic themes. Starting from the images of the aristocratic holidays, and of the travel like a knowledge adventure, I focus on Venice as a study-case: 10 millions tourists per year (85% from foreign countries) face 60.000 inhabitants living in the central islands. The Lido of Venice has an autonomous feature inside the urbanization, with an image related to the "Belle Epoque". The transformation of the city parts seems now to pass through the relations among different fields. The first one are the cultural activities, like the most vitalizing factor. The second one is the demand for environmental quality, that is getting higher. The third one is the residential function, that comes together with the reduction of the welfare state. The fourth field are the local economical activities, while unemployment is getting higher in Italy (40% jobless young people). The tourists will go to Venice with an unlimited, vague and mediatic idea of its essence. The citizens and their rapresentances should better think at Venice like a great but limited resource, that cannot be preserved if its citizens don't increase it through ordinary actions, within a coherent public vision.

*Keywords: infrastructures, modernization, contemporary city, tourism politics, heritage conservation*

Within urban studies the relevance of touristic phenomena is linked to physical things (hotels, resorts, theme parks, infrastructures, sports, etc...) and landscape values, according to their effects on local economies. The diffusion and democratization of the touristic practices in Europe after the second world war, in connection with the increase of individual mobility and the reduction of working time, has given to the places and times of tourism a high importance in relation to everyday life and wellness. It has changed lifestyles, giving the possibility to many people to stay in touch with natural environment and stimulate physical and intellectual activities. In such a way, an increasing part of the European population get after the second world war the possibility to spend some time in other sites, not only in the working places or in their own private dwellings, or in the social institutions organized by the religious or political powers. Starting from the two archetypical images of the aristocratic holidays, and of the travel like a knowledge adventure, the time for tourism became a real and imaginary dimension of freedom for everyone. His function was powerful because of the fact to be protected from the ideologies apparently, and from the ritual organization of collective life. A number of individuals could look for practices about socialization, nature experience, re-discovery of their body and wellness. The fuzzy set of these experiences became a part of the whole life, much more than a shared time for specialized activities about recreation or leisure entertainment. A strong network of physical, infrastructural and mental relations have been built among living, working, and touristic places and times.

One aspect of the general process of modernization in European citizenship, too shortly mentioned above, is concerning the spread of settlements and uses connected to tourism and to the overwhelming individualization of tourism and mobility. A second relevant aspect is about the industrial management and planning of the touristic activities that the huge dimension of the phenomena requested. Both of them are opposite to the individual emancipation rethorics apparently, and lead the discourse about the consequences of tourism on urban structures to deal with real, imaginary and symbolic themes at the same time.

I would like to focus on Venice as a study-case, paying special attention to the Lido, the bar dividing the Venice lagoon from the sea. 10 millions tourists per year (85% from foreign countries) face in Venice 60.000 inhabitants living in the central islands. In the world imagery, Venice appears like the witness of a collective past, which a lot of individuals and families want to return to, once in life at least. Its attraction is still getting bigger, especially for travelers coming from India, China, Russia. Its appeal is strong and projected in past, present and future times. The tourism regarding Venice is obviously related to the attraction of the heritage, to the experience of a past civilization able to be brought to mind by the form of the city, by its great architectures and open spaces. The Venice appeal has been taken-for-granted and politics and planning limited themselves to accompany the touristic phenomena, growing higher in its international dimension in

last ten years by internet bookings and low cost flies especially. The main public attention is devoted to the heritage preservation, and to the relations between the touristic flows and the citizens rights and hopes about the future development model of their own territories.

Within this scenario the tourism increase in last two decades produced modifications running in the direction to strengthen the inner differences in Venice city and territory. The spatial definition of the city is not univocal: it clearly includes the main historical buildings, places and events, but also the land connections and infrastructures, as well as the waterways and the water related settlements. This spatially discontinuous frame is linked and melted within a wider urbanization pattern, including the network of cities and urbanized territories within the northern Italy plain, from Piemonte to Lombardia to Veneto to the western part of Friuli Venezia Giulia. The central city is composed by the bridges connection of the central isles of the venetian archipelago, and hosts the main spots in the world imagery, piazza San Marco, the Grand Chanel, the gondolas. The central isles are a part of the larger lagoon archipelago, an anthropized soil that can only exist because the tides are moving water four times a day. Also in the isles of the north lagoon, and in the south one, there are touristic sites, like Murano, Mazzorbo and Burano. All the venetian water settlements lives by the presence of the “tree of life” shaped by the main channel pattern, that dig the water basin of the lagoon, not deeper than one meter, like a sheet of glass. This structure also sets the transportation system, integrated by the Freedom Bridge that since the XIX century brought railway to Venice, than cars. Today it has not only the main connecting function, but also the revealing role of the spatial continuity among Tessera international airport, the “barene” (muddy lands with low vegetation) waterfront, the industrial and chemical plants in the Marghera lagoon harbor. The brownfields low price areas in Marghera, and the presence of urbanized infrastructures between the airport and the Freedom Bridge also lead to a new enlarged offer of low and medium cost hotel accommodation.

A thin bar divides the Venice lagoon from the sea, a linear barrier interrupted by three harbour mouths protected by long peers, where the new mobile barriers named MOSE (2003-2016), the main public engineering work in Italy (5.000 millions euros) in past ten years, are under construction. Running from West to East to examine the strip of land that divides/connects the open sea to the lagoon and to Venice, we find a confirm of the morphogenetic role of the waters system. The mouth of the river Brenta, artificially moved in pre-modern times to prevent the filling of lagoon basin by river sediments is the first side of the triangle of land that hosts the small harbor city of Chioggia, facing the Chioggia harbor mouth. After that begins the Litorale di Pellestrina, with the two fishermen villages Pellestrina and San Pietro in Volta. The Malamocco Harbour Mouth divides the Litorale di Lido, including the former localities of Alberoni, Malamocco and san Nicolò, facing the central isles of Venice. In that strip of land, about twelve kilometres long, are located the main sea resort facilities connected to Venice, in an interesting mixing between modern residential extensions and sea resorts. The following

segment is named Litorale del Cavallino, between Lido harbor mouth and Piave Vecchia harbor mouth, where the river Sile reaches the sea, and has more intense touristic feature, connected with the large camping settlements for users that not necessarily see Venice like the main destination. The last sand and land bar, the Lido di Iesolo, is leading to an autonomous place for sea vacations, Iesolo, before the Cortellazzo Harbor Mouth.

In the Venice central islands the recent problems of the planning regulation of the urban transformations caused by the high touristic presences belong to the same thematic field of the general town planning, in the city and in the state too. In particular in long periods we can read an opposition between the ordinary town planning regulation efforts, and short periods of deregulation, that draw their dramatic consequences on the others. In 1999, in particular, the Veneto Region introduced a law that deregulated the opening of hospitality activities outside hotel structures, producing a number of transformations of small houses or flats into bed & breakfast and rooms for rent, with conflictual effects within the residential heritage. In such a way the sets foreseen by the plan for ancient centre drawn by the municipality in the same year was completely vanished. The plan introduced tight rules for new hotel activities, that couldn't be introduced in residential units smaller than 120 square meters, and without separate entrances for residents and tourists. In the same way, all the palaces, that usually in Venice have the same basic size and are no more inhabited by a single patrician family, couldn't produce higher profits than changing their use in hotels or retail surfaces. Such a kind of action produce strong effects on single layers of the built urban heritage. The illusion to live for one or more days in a real ancient town, that looks great and that we would not be able to reproduce or rebuild in an authentic way today, doesn't want to look itself. It doesn't want to be host in modern buildings. It doesn't want to project its modifications on town, and cannot limit itself.

The tourism relevance in central places has often been seen in last years in connection to contemporary arts related activities almost. The activities by Francois Pinault in Palazzo Grassi and in Punta della Dogana with Tadao Ando interventions, the Vedova Museum and Foundation by Renzo Piano in Magazzini del Sale, the Palazzo Grimani Exhibitions, the Accademia Galleries and Natural History Museum renewal, and many other interventions and events, have gone together with the opening of many galleries, especially in the Dorsoduro and San Marco sestieri. Also the national and international educational programs held in Venice have been recently more orientated on art-related topics, gaining appeal from the beauty of the city itself, and from the links with the Venice Biennale activities in arts, architecture, cinema.

The Lido of Venice has an autonomous feature inside this large scale pattern, with a strong touristic image related to the "Belle Epoque". In a linear spatial sequence we can see beautiful sea bath facilities, planted promenades, grand hotels, and garden city neighborhoods. It's a part of the venetian life, and the Venice native inhabitants use to move themselves and stay in Lido in summertime, living in small villas or apartments.

The main transformation potential in Lido is characterized by a high conflict level. The future attractiveness has been searched in the direction of big public or private works: the new Venice Film Festival Palace, after the design competition held in 2005; the redevelopment of the Ospedale al Mare (Sea Hospital), changing from a urban facility to a new sea resort, including a new harbour in S.Nicolò, and the Malamocco Fort development, on the opposite side of the isle, where an austrian fortification could become a new residential complex; the Grand Hotel Des Bains' renewal with luxury apartments. Actually, none of these yards is open yet, and the hotels accomodation is decreasing, as well as the last of the tourists permanence in the city is getting shorter, and the Lido places are considered too far from the city centre. A lot of money (more than 40 millions euros) have been spent for the designs, the areas and for the beginning of the yards, discovering in the cases of the new Film Festival Palace and of the Sea Hospital a deeply polluted by asbestos soil.

The transformations couldn't be managed through the ordinary administrative procedures. In 2008 the central italian government partially financed the new Film Festival Palace as one of the main works included in celebration of 150 years of the political unification of Italy, in change of imposing (2009) to the municipality a Special Commissioner for the Lido, with special powers in order to get simpler the decision process and the realization. Today, no operation is under construction, also after the resignation of the Special Commissioner (2011). The urban transformations of Lido seems to pass through the relations among different fields. The first one are the international cultural activities, like the most vitalizing factor. The second one is the feature of tourism in last five years, in which the local component is getting stronger than the international one, and the demand for environmental quality is getting higher. The third one is the residential function (16.000 inhabitants), that comes together with the reduction of the welfare state. The fourth and last field are the local economical activities, in a moment in which unemployment is getting higher in Italy (40% jobless young people). The social demand of a higher environmental quality could be the leading theme for a general project for Lido, starting from the design potentials opened by the big engineering works that are under construction, trying to connect the inhabitants desires and the seasonal tourism. In this sense, the tourism can be a very important resource in order to avoid the urban situations of generic city, not related to Venice, that do not satisfy the new awareness of smart and sustainable growth.

After the second world war since today a lot of town planning efforts have been done in Venice, most of them finalized to the two general masterplans approved in 1962 and in 1999. The direct urbanism forecasts about tourism impact has been treated in two ways basicly. The first level of efficiency has been looked for a wise action about the single buildings use regulation. This level demonstrated to be useful and necessary, able to be translated in ordinary practices by the action of the city administration and by the work of the Authority for Architecture and Landscape Preservation of Venice and its lagoon. The second level that seemed decisive to the planners through different decades is the

re-organization and razionalization of the mobility at a large scale. The problem of mobility has been thought since today as a solution about the access to central isles mainly. This planning level always failed, for a redundant set of reasons. The idea to re-equilibrate the land accesses to Venice by the creation of two strong land terminals in Tessera and Fusina remained illusory, also after the construction and the enlargement of the international airport. The different competences by the municipal authorities, the metropolitan area, the stakeholders, the Region and the State didn't collaborate with a purposes unity, and all kinds of particular, chaotic and unrulred processes of urbanization happened in the periphery of Venice. Today a strong civic conflict raised about the frequent passages of big cruise ships along the Giudecca channel and through the San Marco water basin, after the inhabitants and committees protests, and the lack of authorities decisions. This presence is not really dangerous for the conservation of the city and for the navigation, but has a strong visual impact on the inhabitants perception, due to the ships height, less or more double than the houses height. In a very astonishing way, no one is protesting against the artificial Petroleum channel, twelve meters deep, that leads from the Malamocco harbor mouth to the industrial Marghera port, and is used by oils and chemical ships daily. This fact underlines the necessity to promote new unitarian visions about of Venice in the close future, based on analytical and technical analysis, able to reopen a dialogue between citizens opinions and technical elites. The future visions should be able to connect fields as mobility politics, public works priorities, urban maintenance culture, touristic flows management, environmental regeneration of the lagoon, incentives to the economical activities independent from the touristic resource.

Perhaps today is only possible to promote single works, and sectorial programs, or it is easier. In Venice have been reported to magistracy the construction of the Constitution Bridge by Santiago Calatrava, whose costs doubled and brought great externalities in the close properties, that didn't participate at all to the public costs. All the management of the Consorzio Venezia Nuova, who was encharged to design and build the Mose is now on trial, as well as the director of the Ater (Province Institute for Popular Housing). Thereafter individual or groups guilties, that have to be demonstrated in the proceedings, these phenomena highlights a general problem of deterioration in public life, that is hard to fully understand, within a country that is still living inside a catholic anthropological vision of the social behaviours.

However, the city continues to evolve itself, and to preserve its monumental image. The ordinary operations of urban maintenance had a decisive impulse by the first Cacciari administration, during wich channels restated to be digged, through the institution of the new public society Insula. The action of these works for the first time after the second world war enterprised a systematic action of conservation of the city, sharing the operation "isle by isle", jointing interventions about channels, rising of the land pedestrian level, razionalization of underground nets, connection of the sewer system. The main change in historical central islands seems to be a process of re-centralization,

that moves its barycenter towards piazzale Roma and the land mechanized systems of moving goods and people. Specific decisions like the move to piazzale Roma of the new tribunal, once in Rialto, and of the main city post office, that also was in Rialto in the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, the transformation of the block close to the railway station into Region offices, and the multiplication of university buildings in the sestiere Dorsoduro go in the same direction. Also the many public spaces in Venice, first of them campi and campielli, have been re-vitalized in this zone, and the private interventions of restoration has regarded every kind of buildings, also industrial and recent ones. The real estate values has grown higher in these zones, letting the places far from the land connection (Castello, partly Cannaregio, Murano, Burano, Lido) mostly for local market. Also in the land territories many things happened, most of them related to the masterplan directed by Leonardo Benevolo, with formation of new parks in Catene and in san Giuliano, on polluted soils partly renewed, and with the regeneration of the brownfields in Marghera, that let the possibility of large retail areas, and new business incubators, like Vega.

The present and future tourists will go to Venice with an unlimited, vague and mediatic idea of its essence. The citizens and their representatives should better think at Venice like a great but limited resource, that cannot be preserved if its citizens don't increase it through ordinary actions day by day, inside a coherent public vision. In such a hypothetical direction may be will be more useful to design and to manage the connections between culture, education, tourism, economy, arts, environment, architecture, not in ideological or interdisciplinary way, without believing in big single works or actions. The multiplication of small and diffuse events and initiatives will reply better to the structure of the archipelago, and to the issue of stronger relations between water and land settlements. It also will allow the citizens not to be under mortal attack, like happened in 1988 during the famous Pink Floyd concert in Venice.

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Gondolas in the San Marco basin



The Lido, Venice and the land



The Lido sea resorts at the beginning of XX century



The Litorale of Pellestrina



