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Venice and the crisis of Experience

Tourism impacts and sustainable alternatives

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to shed light on some forms of pollution in Venice and to show that, although seemingly unrelated, they actually have a common denominator: capitalism, and tourism in particular. I begin with a historical analysis of the earliest forms of tourism in Venice and then compare them to tourism today, highlighting similarities and differences. This serves as an introduction to the discussion of the changing meaning of experience caused by industrialization and capitalism. I will then answer the question: What does this change mean for tourism? I will highlight the cultural pollution perpetuated by the tourism industry by extrapolating some examples from the Venetian scenario.

The second chapter will deal with environmental pollution, and I will look at Venetian tourism from the perspective of ecosystem services and discuss the risks arising from the overexploitation of natural resources and the resulting negative effects. Once again, the deep root of the problem turns out to be the crisis of experience that has led people to disconnect from the ecological relationships on which their existence is based.

Finally, the last chapter is about hope and resilience, tourism and sustainable alternatives. I will provide insights and perspectives from the Venetian reality that care about the well-being of the city.

Abstract

L'obiettivo della tesi è quello di far luce su alcune forme di inquinamento presenti a Venezia e dimostrare come, nonostante apparentemente disconnesse, siano in realtà legate dallo stesso filo conduttore: il capitalismo, e, specificatamente, il turismo.

Partirò da un'analisi storica delle prime forme di turismo a Venezia, per poi paragonarle al turismo odierno, evidenziandone similarità e differenze; ciò servirà ad introdurre la discussione del mutato significato di esperienza, provocato da industrializzazione e capitalismo. Risponderò quindi alla domanda: cosa comporta questo mutamento in campo turistico? Svelerò l'inquinamento culturale perpetuato dall'industria turistica, estrapolando alcuni esempi dallo scenario Veneziano.

Nel secondo capitolo verrà discusso il tema dell'inquinamento ambientale. Parlerò di turismo Veneziano dalla prospettiva dei servizi ecosistemici e discuterò i rischi rappresentati dal sovrasfruttamento delle risorse naturali e gli impatti negativi che ne conseguono. La radice profonda del problema risulta ancora una volta essere la crisi dell'esperienza, che ha portato l'essere umano a disconnettersi dalle relazioni ecologiche su cui la sua esistenza si basa.

Infine, l'ultimo capitolo parlerà di speranza e resistenza, di turismo e alternative sostenibili; fornirò spunti di riflessione e prospettive dalle realtà veneziane che hanno a cuore il benessere della città.

Introduction

In the past, the wayfarer in Venice was like a soaked sponge. The liquid, the substance contained in the sponge, was squeezed out in Venice and contaminated the city. It was a substance that contained life: Venice grew a little, thanks to that substance. The fusion of the liquids brought by the different people – which, however, were not always compatible with each other and could not always be mixed – helped to build Venice and make it the Queen of Water. The substance released reflected in its splendor. The liquid was bursting with life.

Today this liquid has come to rest; it no longer flows, but it is an helpless mass. It is beautiful, indeed. The liquid glows when someone passes, and recedes when that person leaves. It is there to be admired, nothing more, nothing less. It is the ghost of its productive past. A puppet. It no longer has a role.

Or perhaps the liquid is trapped in the underground of the foundations, in the walls of the buildings, in the churches, in the *fondachi*, in the *barene*, in the *calli* and the works of art, and it would like to break free, to disperse, but for that it needs an intermediary, someone who recognizes its real value and importance.

Those mediators already exist, and they are many little dips to the heart, in the midst of the daily homogenization that crushes the city and squeezes out the last drops of the past.

Those dips to the heart are indeed liquid. They are engaged conversations, projects, hope and poetry: a painter and his studio on the corner of the calle, *castraure*'s growers, those associations that teach children to care for the environment, those schools of knowledge and all the people who still believe, who still hope, who want to mix their ideas with the Venetian envelope. Those who still talk about possible scenarios and possible futures.

The initiatives are there, but the weight of the tourist industry and the enormous economic interests to which Venice is subject crush them. The tourist is usually unaware of all this, while instead he or she has an incredible indirect power in this world. Especially in Venice, the tourist does not know the logic of the environment and the impact of his presence on the city.

Venice is still as splendid as it once was, but that time is over, and Venice must rearm. It needs new fluids, and those liquids need to re-disperse and re-shape the environment. Venice should not survive only on its past results.

The wilted flower that revives when it is admired is vain: the warmth generated by astonished gazes is frivolous and fleeting, as soon as they look away, the flower withers again. The flower must therefore be concrete. It cannot live on looks, must not and cannot allow others to determine it.

Venice is a slave to its beauty, which, according to Simmel, "visibly isolates it from being" (Simmel, 1907), it is too romantic and its logic too counterintuitive, so much so that it is "... an adventure and not a home for (the) souls" (ibid.). Not a city in the proper sense, but "... a museum that can only be the object of admiring contemplation, not of immediate participation" (Bettini, 1978, p. 16).

Venice is a real spectacle, it excites, and its visual beauty hides the logic of the technological innovation used to create it. At first sight, the emotions are immediate and leave no room for a rational analysis of what's around. But instead, Venice is the city par excellence, and according to Bettini, the greatest city there is, since it is the place most "built" by man (ivi, p. 35). For if it is true that all cities are artificial, then of Venice not only the *calli* and *campielli*, the churches, the bridges and the pavements are man-made: this is also the truth of the lagoon itself, which did not come into being spontaneously, the way a river or forest comes into being. Venice and its lagoon are rather a "socio-ecosystem" (Ostrom, 2007, Rova et al., 2022, Giupponi, 2022), an encounter between nature and human, the result of man's intervention on the environment and the environment's intervention on man for more than seven centuries.

Indeed, before building roads and houses, the Venetians had to fortify and anchor the ground, consolidate the muddy and elusive soil of the islands with piles, raise and seal the banks against the tides, and impose non-ruinous drains on the canals to finally create the base necessary to affirm their will to survive and to give form and purpose to their lives.

The city co-evolved with the lagoon and used it as an exceptionally effective defense system: only people accustomed to living and navigating in Venice were able to move through the lagoon in boats or ships, to recognize the shallow waters, and to follow the winding waterways; anyone attempting to attack the city would have had great difficulty reaching it, either from the sea or from inland (Giuponi, 2022, pp. 21-22).

The Venetian without the lagoon would have been worthless. It was the mingling, the symbiosis, to prove successful: man and woman recognized the value that nature had not only for their survival, but also for their success in life. No lagoon would mean no defense against the enemy, no trade, no naval power, but also no cultural development, no *gondolas*, no *fondachi*, churches, salt, glass, clams.

The political strategy of the Serenissima Republic was always based on the knowledge of a very particular and constantly changing environment. The city and the lagoon were a single entity to be managed with the technologies available in the different eras, based on the knowledge of natural dynamics, with the aim of fruition and conservation (ivi., p. 22-23).

Then we realize that Venice is not as frivolous as it seems. Here, under the opulent, precious, intangible mantle, we see the highly effective technology that allowed Venice to thrive, to later "put itself on a pedestal". Technology and innovation, pragmatism and concreteness were the gifts that created the material foundation for immense intangible value to spread and flow. Only through so much ingenuity and invective could Venice later beautify itself.

This is something to remember well.

In the past, people were well aware that their well-being depended on the well-being of the lagoon environment, because only through this well-being was it possible to achieve a broader systemic balance; today, the same resource seems to be taken for granted or even to lose the value and recognition it was given in the past.

Venice is gradually becoming one of the most unsustainable cities in the world because of its rapid and intense exploitation. Most of the most well known problems are due to anthropogenic pressure: the phenomenon of subsidence caused by the digging of canals, flooding, pollution from motor vehicles, the chemical industry, and over-tourism. At the basis of the city's unsustainability, however, is the over-exploitation of the Ecosystem Services provided by the lagoon itself (cfr. Rova et al., 2019), an aspect which is often neglected. The peculiarity of Venice thus seems to have become its undoing.

Pascolo (2020) reverses the trend by firmly believing in the city's inherent sustainability. For him, Venice could be an ecologically progressive city if its potential were recognized and promoted. It could be one of the most attractive cities in the new world scenario because that sustainability makes it a paradigmatic example of the city of the future.

The foundations of this sustainability lie first and foremost in Venice's urban morphology, a water and pedestrian city where people walk and talk and move around in rowboats.

Venice also boasts an historical resistance to modernization, a modernization that runs counter to its specificity (ibid.), as evidenced by several episodes. The rejection of the construction of the central station in front of St. Mark's Square, which would have resulted in the destruction of the island of Giudecca, and the rejection of the project to build an undersea highway ring that would encircle the entire city with exits at key points, are two examples.

The Venetians were often able to recognize the negative and pernicious character of that rigid notion of modernity associated with homogeneous and homogenized economic growth. But instead of preserving and enhancing the inherent dissimilarity that has always distinguished Venice from the prevailing model of the modern city, attempts were made to adapt to this model by distorting the city's connotations and subjecting it to excessive, degrading pressures.

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Today, "the new, the macro, the XXL format, in all its forms, is seen as better than the old, which only serves as a shop window to be exploited as economic rent. Thus, devastating changes are justified in the soup of homogenization and immediate profit, and the old is reduced to an accessory from an urban planning point of view, but fundamental as a slot machine". (ivi, p.37)

If tourism is becoming unsustainable everywhere, Venice is one of the places where unsustainability is even more evident and dangerous, because it has an extremely fragile and sensitive ecosystem, much more affected by anthropogenic pressure than other places. The city is not able to support the weight of so many people and it is not for nothing that it is said, somehow metaphorically but also realistically, that Venice will sink under the weight of people.

The wisdom of balance was the art that enabled the Venetians to build the city and secure their prosperity and lives. "If you lose the ability to maintain this balance, the water (and beyond) becomes a threat against which is difficult to defend. A harsh and unrelenting but unavoidable and necessary lesson, a planetary metaphor that is extremely relevant today." (ivi, p.51). The inability to maintain this specific balance results from a broader phenomenon: the crisis of alienation and the inability to make sense of the world around us.

Global phenomena are not easy to deconstruct and to analyze. This is why Venice can serve very well as a laboratory for testing and understanding these dynamics: the city is like a magnifying glass for the world, is a small but very rich vessel for contradictions and themes found in other places and contexts, so that the abstractness of the great phenomena in Venice can take shape and be observed accurately and effectively. That is what I will attempt to do in writing this thesis.

The overall aim is to highlight some of the dynamics that have led to Venetian tourism taking on the characteristics it has today and to reflect on its impact. Much has already been discussed about how all this is related to the transition to a capitalistically organized society, an epochal change that has plunged not only Venice but the whole world, into a deep crisis. I would like to deal specifically with what I consider to be different forms of pollution, but which have the same origin. They are specifically different not only because one is cultural and the other more environmental, but also because they involve specific cultural aspects and specific environmental aspects.

1. Contaminated culture, contaminated experiences

1.1 Venice as the representation of otherness

"You must know that until a few decades ago, people came because they knew they would find a large selection of quality products... Can you imagine that this city was once known for its excellence craftsmanship and variety?!" (words of an elderly Venetian).

Today, we no longer manufacture goods, but heritage, a commodity that no one seems able to define, but everyone wants to sell (Hewison, 1987). As a matter of fact indeed, globalization has had a unifying effect on the city, and the most lucrative commodity has become its very representation: Venice today sells itself and its various images.

If it is true that the sight of Venice in most cases triggers a positive impression in the tourist, it is also true that the tourist is in a way already predisposed to this kind of emotion; he or she arrives with certain expectations, already "half-excited", looking for a confirmation of the feeling that has been aroused in him or her by looking at photos or hearing stories about the city.

Tourists already experience an emotional transport before departure, and most of them undoubtedly experience a sense of wonder, typical of those who see something amazing in person for the first time, but it is unlikely to be a sense of discovery.

This is because, since it is one of most sought-after destinations, an unprecedented proliferation of images has developed around its essence: whether written, painted, photographed or even sung, they are "...so similar to each other as to be interchangeable, so numerous as to merit a whole critical strand". The city in flesh and blood, the city of stone and that of its inhabitants, seems to withdraw more and more, submerged by its representations (Salerno, 2020, p. 157).

The dissemination and hyper-production of these images,"...superimposes on the body of the city a kind of smoke screen... that obscures and impedes the possibility of immediate analysis and understanding of the city", replacing its tangibility with the powerful image of its myth.

Venice today thrives on the abstraction of itself from the real. The dreamlike aura that embeds it places it in an otherworldly dimension; always somewhere else (ibid.).

As Sartre writes, Venice is "definitely the Other" (Sartre, 1953, p. 691), and this state of otherness has always accompanied it and withstood the transformations of its image and myth: "Venice city of water, different from the cities of the mainland; Venice immobile in time, different from modernity; Venice city of tourism, different from the days of everyday life" (Salerno, 2020, p. 158). This otherness has become an attraction, a symbolic commodity, exposed to the gaze of

consumers as a living museum of stone and men. "The historically formed city is no longer experienced", since it has become an "...object of cultural consumption, marked by an aestheticism addressed to tourists who crave the spectacle and the picturesque" (Lefebvre 1968, p. 102).

But how was this "Other" born? Where are the designs for this set to be found? Who wrote it? What are its characteristics?

1.2 Pilgrimages, tourists, capitalism and the outcomes of the change in experiences

1.2.1 On the way to the holy land

Salerno argues that the discourse on tourism is almost always produced from the point of view of the visitor and far less often from that of the visited, and thus "... the history of tourism, in Venice and elsewhere, has been largely written by tourists" (Salerno, 2020, p. 159).

In the beginning, however, most foreigners who wanted to go to Venice did not travel there to experience it, but for trade, since the city was a commercial hub inhabited by colonies of artisans and merchants from all countries. The category whose presence acted as a precursor for what would later become Venice's main economic resource was most likely that of pilgrims, religious travelers on their way to the Holy Land (Davis, 2023, p. 21).

An activity that had long been disputed with other Mediterranean cities, the transportation of pilgrims became Venetian's domain starting from the late 14th century; galleys were regularly sent to the Holy Land till the mid of the 16th century. Every year, at least two to three hundred pilgrims from various parts of Europe passed through the city and stopped there.

Pilgrims were devout people who set out on a pilgrimage in earnest, often in response to a vow or to atone for sins they had committed in their lives. Their backgrounds were humble at best; they dressed poorly, traveled anonymously, and did their best to avoid material and carnal temptations. However, this did not prevent them from being interested in new and different scenarios they encountered, nor did it stop them from engaging in what could be described as worldly activities.

Many traveled in groups, with a priest or monk who took care of their spiritual needs and then left them alone to explore the city...Venice, was thus the starting point to an unknown world, full of fantasies, stories, real dangers and spiritual ambitions; but also a place in itself full of attractions and rewards.

In the city, they marveled at the variety of goods, treasures and foods of most diverse origins, the beautifully decorated palaces, the imposing churches and monasteries.

Venice, a stopover on their way to the Levant, proved remarkably valuable to them; it was worth enjoying, visiting and discovering. Some of them "... behaved in ways – aesthetically, culturally, and in their leisure time that we now associate with the term tourist" (Davis, 2023, p. 21).

By the end of the 15th century, there were numerous reports and diaries written about the journeys: "... it is not possible to put into words and describe the beauty of the city of Venice" (Casola's words, ibid.). The city was described by some "the greatest", "the most honored" and gradually became an attraction in itself. Hierarchies of places to visit and itineraries were drawn up for themselves and their successors, which could be changed depending on the length of their stay.

1.2.2 Opportunities and attractions

It did not take long for the inhabitants to recognize the economic potential of this category. The city equipped itself with everything needed for the journey to the Holy Land and developed an infrastructure of support services for visitors. In addition, the presence of the pilgrims triggered fierce competition among the galley owners, who fought to attract as many customers as possible, and indirectly influenced the organization of some of the most important Venetian civic festivals with the aim of attracting and integrating the pilgrims, which took also part in parades and processions, in some cases accompanied by the Venetian nobility, and were greeted personally by the Doge. New inns and hostels were opened.

Thus, the efforts of Venetians from all walks of life to profit from this potential market contributed to the creation of the social infrastructure that would later place Venice at the forefront of secular tourism in Italy (ivi, p. 25).

Despite all the various entertaining activities the city offered, the main attraction for pilgrims still lay in the religious sphere: Venice had an exclusive collection not so much of holy sites but of holy objects, unrivaled in the Western Christian world (ibid.).

Whether clergy or laity, by the end of the 15th century all pilgrim-tourists seemed to seek contact with these sacred relics, trying to see and touch as many as possible. The opportunity for these spiritual rewards was by no means trivial or negligible.

In their eagerness to come into contact with them, they traversed the labyrinth of calli and canals in search of the objects of desire, wherever they might be hidden. Sometimes they even organized "mini-pilgrimages" to search for the finds scattered around the city; many of them then entered them in a list.

Accounts of this tireless search for the sacred suggest that the pilgrim-tourists believed that the merit they gained from relics was cumulative, as if each site contributed a part to the overall

spiritual journey. Special power could also be gained by touching small objects such as beads, rosaries, and gold or silver crosses brought from home or bought in town.

Some of these objects can be considered "proto-souvenirs", similar to those sold today in the kiosks in *Riva degli Schiavoni*: easily transportable mass-produced items that certainly derived much of their evocative power from contact with the sacred, and, once brought back from Venice, also constituted mementos comparable to today's gadgets in that they carried the added value of a particular Venetian site (ivi, p. 28-29).

Although the practice dates back to the 15th century, we can recognize in it features peculiar to the modern era, for although relics and sacred objects were given deep significance, their value was exclusively symbolic, their meaning was abstract; it did not derive from their actual discovery. It was the combination of religious significance and the quantity of objects seen and accumulated that determined the value of the experience, not the actual learning and experiencing of something new and meaningful; a more consumerist aspect.

This behavior is reminiscent of today's mass tourism. Indeed, despite the temporal and ideological distance between the two phenomena, a parallel can nevertheless be drawn: in the pilgrim's obsession with the holy relics that were kept in Venice, it is easy to see the consumerist and cumulative character inherent in modern tourism; the sacred object was the bearer of a predetermined meaning, just like the great tourist attractions of today.

1.2.3 Pilgrimage and tourism

Today, the term "pilgrimage" is commonly interpreted as "religious journey", "a journey of a pilgrim; especially: one to a shrine or a sacred space" (Webster's Dictionary). However, its roots in the Latin leave room for a broader interpretation, e.g. wanderer, exile, stranger, newcomer, traveler and foreigner. The term "tourist" also has its roots in Latin, it is derived from *tornus*: someone who undertakes a circular journey, often for pleasure, and eventually returns to the starting point.

The definition of "tourist", is "someone who undertakes a journey for pleasure or culture" (Webster's Dictionary). But since both characters are travelers, it seems logical to recognize an analogy between the two.

However, in the 70s the field of tourism research was still in its infancy and as a result there was virtually no approach to studying the relationship between religion, pilgrimage and tourism: no connection was made between the subjects, which were instead seen as antipodes, or at best only a very slight correlation was recognized.

Over time, several scholars have progressively recognized the significant influence that religion and pilgrimage in ancient times had on the development of tourism. The development of leisure, they have argued, cannot be understood without the understanding of the aforementioned practices (Timothy & Olsen, 2006, Vukonic´, 2002).

Anthropologist Smith (1992), for example, sees the phenomenon as a continuum of travel and claims that the identification of the "pilgrim" as a religious traveler and the "tourist" as a vacationer is a culturally constructed polarity that obscures the motives of the travelers. Instead of dividing tourists and pilgrims into two distinct groups, she places pilgrims on the sacred side and tourists on the secular side. Between the two exists an almost endless range of possible sacred-secular combinations, which reflect the multiple and changing motivations of travelers, whose interests and activities may change—consciously or subconsciously—from tourism to pilgrimage and vice versa. Anthropologist Turnbull (1981) takes a similar line, arguing that the pilgrim seeks a sense of belonging to a religion or a sacred place, while the tourist pursues hedonistic goals, but there are cases where the tourist's motivations, even if secular, can become as fundamental and spiritual as that of the pilgrim.

Nowadays, the distinctions are fading and the categories are becoming increasingly fluid: sacred sites that are no longer used for purely spiritual purposes have become an attraction for non-pilgrims, who visit them more and more frequently, confirming the importance that the religious heritage market segment has acquired. In parallel, contemporary pilgrims are sometimes more consumptive than ordinary tourists, as Aliza Fleischer argues: "Pilgrims who come for a once-in-a-lifetime visit are willing to spend a significant amount of money on shopping, for souvenirs from the Holy Land for instance, in order to take back a tangible memory of their spiritual experience."(Fleischer, 2000, p. 323).

The differences between tourism and traditional pilgrimage are fading, while many aspects of similarity are emerging: both require spatial movement and involve an individual's emotional desire to visit places that are meaningful to them.

1.2.4 Discontinuity and continuity between the old and the contemporary

However, I would like to attempt a personal analysis of the phenomenon. If we shift the focus from the most recent pilgrimages to ancient and medieval versions and relate them to contemporary tourism, we see that the logic changes. While there still is a continuity between the phenomena, there are also differences that cannot be overlooked.

Pilgrimages were products of the norms and values of social tradition and order and at the same time the creators of this culture and tradition. The same logic applies to tourism. So we can certainly see a connection between the two and consider pilgrimage as a precursor to tourism, but the passage of time and the evolution of society have inevitably added and removed parts to the practice, as it has been characterized by cultural changes and innovations in different areas.

It follows that while old and most recent practices are both products of the culture in which they originated and tell us "stories" from political, religious and social perspectives, those "stories" are necessarily different.

What remains constant is that all these stories are "social constructions". As Alderman (2002) has argued in his discussion of the concept of "pilgrimage landscape", no place is inherently sacred, no place simply emerges, but undergoes "sacralisation" (Seaton, 1999, 2002), a sequential process through which places - religious and non religious - are marked as meaningful. This leads to tourist attractions becoming "quasi-religious" shrines; they have a given, predetermined meaning.

Tourism, like pilgrimage, is embedded within a complex of socio-spatial processes that are historically, culturally, and locally dependent. Both are complex systems involving perceptions, expectations and experiences (Gatrell & Reid, 2002, McCann, 2002, Petric & Mrnjavac, 2003).

1.2.5 The experiential tourist

According to Eliade and Turner & Turner, the pilgrim visualizes the sacred place to which he is traveling as the "center of the world" (Eliade, Turner & Turner, 1969) or the "center out there" (Turner & Turner, 1969). The fact that he interprets the place as the center implies that, geographically speaking, he is located in a periphery or on the edge of this supposed centrality, but whose remoteness is also and even more than loco-geographical, that is, significantly symbolic and cultural. According to the analysis of these scholars, this is because most pilgrimage sites are located on the periphery of population centers and socio-political centers of society, often beyond a patch of wilderness or other uninhabited territory, in the "chaos" that surrounds the ordered and"cosmic" social world (Turner, 1973, pp. 211–214; Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 241).

The physical and spiritual distance of the pilgrim from the destination of his journey and the detachment from his usual life give value to the feat and enable the individual to understand the spiritual meaning of his faith. He also finds himself in a milieu where he is often more open to new experiences, meet new people, hear new things, and rethink some of his previously unquestioned assumptions.

Are tourist centers still seen by visitors as the "center of the world"?

That depends. Two points should be taken into account: the structural societal system from which subjects come and the "mode" in which he or she travels.

The mode of traveling refers to the fact that, since tourism is obviously a multidimensional phenomenon, it is impossible to define "the tourist" once and for all: rather, there are different types of tourists, distinguished by a variety of characteristics. The types can be defined by examining the meaning that the tourist experience has for the tourist in the context of his general attitude towards his society and the world around him. In particular, Cohen (1979) has distinguished five cognitive-normative modes of tourist: the recreational, the diversionary, the experiential, the experimental, and the existential.

The basic question for his analysis was where the "spiritual center" of the individual was located.

In recreational mode, the tour is a simple respite to the stresses and strains of daily life. Individuals do not find deeper meaning in the cultures around them because they identify with the cultural center of their society.

However, people who do not identify with their society do not automatically become pilgrims seeking authenticity in the center out there. Instead, there are different modes of tourist experiences of the alienated individual. The diversionary mode, for example, is the situation in which the individual neither has a spiritual center at home nor seeks it abroad; the journey is a mere distraction, a mere escape from the boredom and meaninglessness of routine and everyday existence into the forgetfulness of a vacation (literally "vacant," empty time).

The further modes represent progressive steps towards identifying the experience of the tourist with that of the pilgrim. In the experiential the tourist is aware of the fact that he cannot have authentic experiences in his home society and seeks them in other places and in other lives. In the experimental mode, the tourist immerses himself in alternative ways of life in search of a new spiritual center. In the existential mode, the tourist acquires a new, "elective" spiritual center to which he feels the same connection as the traditional religious pilgrim to the great centers of his religion.

The type of tourist I refer to in this work can be considered as belonging to the experiential mode and advanced-capitalist Western society, a condition that is still representative of a large proportion of visitors.

These tourists, like the pilgrims of antiquity, are in search of meaningful experiences.

However, the pilgrims were definitely more likely to have authentic and unadulterated experiences, as their environment was not yet shaped by capitalism, industrialization and internationalization. These phenomena have disrupted the way people relate to and experience the world, creating a distance from reality and a distorted view. My aim is to shed light on this

alienation in the context of tourism in order to illustrate the cultural intoxication of some tourist experiences. For the discussion, however, I need to start at the very beginning of the process.

1.2.6 Changed experiences

The forms of modern travel and its associated industry developed out of changes in the organization of Western societies in the late seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, particularly industrialization and the growth of the market society.

These changes were interrelated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing: the shift of population from traditional rural areas to urban centers, a rapid population growth, intensification, specialization and diversification of industrial production, distribution and exchange.

New machines, new professions, the factory system and enormous improvements in communications (especially in road, canal and sea transport) changed the old ways of life. The production of goods increased and international trade became more important.

These epochal upheavals resulted in the existing social and economic conditions being shaken; new rules of life were established and new connections created. Labor was separated from other activities of life, notably play and recreation, and transformed traditional forms of existence and experience. It proceeded to replace them, as Polanyi noted, "... by a different type of organization, an atomistic and individualistic one" (1944, p. 163).

I would now like to focus on the changes in forms of experience brought about by the new kind of society. To start, I would like to quote the philosopher Benjamin's interesting analysis of the different meanings of "experience", which I find very revealing and illuminating for what I am going to discuss here.

Since the philosopher is German, he draws attention to the fact that the term corresponds to two nouns in his native language, namely *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*, which have different meanings. The former comes from the verb *Erfahren*, "to go through", or experience as path, exercise, growth, enrichment; the latter, from *Erleben*, meaning "to be alive while a thing is happening", is a late 19th century neologism used rather to denote the experience that the individual subject undergoes as a punctual content of consciousness, in the immediacy of the individual experience of an object (Dithley, 1906).

We see that there is a significant difference between the connotations: The former corresponds to "individual events fixed in memory", the latter to "data accumulated in memory".

The acceleration of time that characterizes the transition to modernity has, as he argues, exhausted the possibility of experience understood as Erfahrung, indeed: "... with this immense

development of technology, an entirely new misery has befallen mankind" (Benjamin, 1933, p. 368), the poverty of experience. The world that surrounds man and woman today incessantly produces countless things and meanings without allowing them to anchor themselves stably in it (Salerno, 2020, p. 41).

Modern man and woman, who are equipped with an infinite number of possible or fulfilled experiences, would thus paradoxically find themselves without experience. Their orientation to things is impaired by the bombardment of signs and meanings, and they find it difficult to make judgments and commitments about what they should do and how they should live.

The increase in technical development for the production and circulation of consumer goods – both material and immaterial – brought the explosion of life possibilities and the freedom of choice, but people find themselves detached from the experiential contact with that traditional world that they could get their fill of.

1.2.7 Accelerated time, disjointed lives

"The process of exchange, circulation and commodification which characterize modern market society carry strong tendencies towards fragmentation because they only require fragments of the individuals personality to be involved." (Rojek, 1993, p. 216). This is an obvious fact in many forms of modern leisure. For example, we watch TV while we watch short videos on social medias and simultaneously think about an office meeting scheduled for the day after. Dedicated leisure activity is quite rare, which is why the people that give body an soul to an activity or hobby stand out so starkly. Most of us are content to jump from one activity to the next; we neither strive for nor claim expertise, our engagement is partial and episodic. Our free time allows us to get into a different rhythm of life and offers us a temporary distraction, but quickly awakened passions and interests are just as quickly forgotten.

Weber also draws a very clear contrast between pre-modern life and "civilized" modernity. The former was characterized by a cyclicicality without leftovers in which the traditional peasant died "in peace", satiated with meanings as life had brought him enough, and there was no puzzle for him to solve. Today, in contrast, a civilized person that participates in the enrichment of civilization through ideas, knowledge and problems, can become weary of life, but not satiated (Weber 1919, p. 21). Fullness, then, is the condition produced by organic (pre-modern) life, determined by an "having enough" of things and meanings; whereas exhaustion is typically felt by those who participate in a wealth of ideas, knowledge and problems.

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By transporting humanity from the world of destiny to the universe of choice, modernity breaks with cyclicality by introducing man and woman to the presence of the ever-new: "Accelerated time, i.e. our history, in fact shortens the spaces of experience, deprives them of their stability and in this way constantly brings unknown elements into play; thus, because of these unknown factors, even the present is withdrawn from our experience" (Koselleck 1979, pp. 25-26).

While pre-modernity was characterized by a continuous interaction between people and nature, the transition to modernity is instead characterized by the discrepancy between people and their environment. Paradoxically, people are becoming increasingly alienated from the world they themselves have created, since, as Simmel explains, "...in language as well as in law, in the technique of production as well as in art, in science as well as in the objects of domestic environment, there is embodied a sort of spirit [Geist], the daily growth of which is followed only imperfectly and with an even greater lag by the intellectual development of the individual." (Simmel, 1903, p. 53).

Objects become more and more complex, and recede from people in the same way that the object which the worker produces, the product of labor, is set against it as a foreign being, as a power independent of the one who produces it (Marx 1932, pp. 70-71).

1.2.8 Pseudo-events

"...Multiplication, improvement and cheapening of traveling... carried many more people to distant places", in parallel, however, the experience became "... diluted, contrived, prefabricated" (Boorstin, 1961, p. 79).

Until the first half of the XIX century, according to the historian Daniel Boorstin, travel was still an active, risk-taking experience in which people "put themselves out there". According to his interpretation, modern tourism, on the other hand, consists of passive experiences in which the visitor does not come into direct contact with the "reality" of places visited, but is given a series of surrogate experiences, characteristic of contemporary tourism practices. He calls them "pseudo-events", that is: "... an happening that (is)... not spontaneous, but comes about because someone has planned, planted or incited it... for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced... its relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous... usually it is intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy", in which one has the impression of encountering only what has been planned and announced beforehand" (ivi, pp.11-12).

The tourist seeks for confirmations of what has been created in him in the form of expectations, which today are raised by the advertising images that have triggered his departure. The authentic

essence of the places, their supposed reality, would be removed from the experiential possibilities of the visitor, who is rather directed toward the consumption of experiences prefabricated by tour operators and other actors.

This seems like a world without an outside, in which any attempt to escape the capitalistically organized working society is doomed to failure, since leisure is an integral part of the system. While it was originally an achievement of the working class (paid vacations, free time, weekends, etc.) it has now become an industry, conquest of neo-capitalism, an extension of the entire space of bourgeois hegemony (Lefebvre 1974, p. 365).

The organization of leisure time reflects the organization of the social structure: since he is an alienated worker, the tourist subject will make alienated experiences.

The modern traveler's search for authentic experiences must therefore be read in the broader context of the conditions of alienation in which humanity finds itself in advanced capitalist societies, this is why today it seems almost impossible to make adventure coincide with life itself in a synthetic unity of experience, as was the case in the time of the medieval quêtes (Agamben, 2015). Contemporary experience, on the contrary, reconfigure itself through the search for a series of disjointed adventures that traverse the length and breadth of the new global world. This continuous and feyerish search for adventures will be precisely what the cultural and tourism industry will benefit from in waning days of experience. It will enable it to re-inscribe the new territories of human experience on the global surface of the society of the spectacle, tailor-made for contemporary human beings.

1.2.9 The counterfeit other, the counterfeit authenticity

The scholar MacCannell takes an ethnographic approach to the study of tourism, and asserts: "the tourist is one of the best models available for modern-man-in-general" (MacCannell, 1976, p. 5). In particular, he emphasized the need for an understanding of the deeper cultural significance of tourism, which he believed had been excluded until his time. He criticized the overgeneralized view of the tourist and described it as pejorative. His analysis offers sociologists and social critics an important and highly original new approach to tourism: the tourist is not simply a nitwit undertaking a journey without meaning; his journey is a pilgrimage to the central symbols of human culture, the attractions, that in turn represent Society.

He ascribes - albeit metaphorically - a religious matrix to contemporary tourism, by defining it as a kind of ritual: "The tourist's journey... is nothing but a payment of "ritual respect for society"

(MacCannell 1973, p. 589). In fact, his incisive conclusion is that tourism is a modern functional substitute for religion.

Following his reasoning, international tourism would be equipped with a kind of unwritten but ideological manual that tourists rely on and that guides their decisions and indicates the places they must visit in order to feel that they have had a "recognized" tourist experience. This creates the image of the tourist site as a safe space, in which decisions are "... not self directed but externally enticed, as a tourist you go not where your own experience beckons but where the industry has decreed you shall go. Tourism soothes, shielding you from the shocks of novelty and menace, confirming your view of the world rather than shaking it up" (Fussell, 1990, p. 21).

But is not it more common to interpret the willingness to take a journey as an act aimed at distancing oneself from society – to break away from its rhythms and monotony – rather than as a declaration of belonging to it?

And it is MacCannell himself, later in his analysis, who supports this statement when he argues that the tourist's journey is not for mere pleasure, but for the search for the "other", the authentic, that which is not part of his cosmology.

Indeed, as Salerno also argues, "... As a result of Romanticism and the Industrial Revolution, the practice of tourism has been characterized as an attempt to regain what was lost in the affirmation of these epochal changes" (Salerno, 2020, p. 30), namely individual freedom, interpreted as something that can be achieved in distant and unspoiled lands, or amidst past history, monuments and folklore.

If these have remained the ideals of tourism to this day, the fact that he or she just rarely, if ever, experience authenticity is not due to the quality of the quest, but to the manipulations of the tourist establishment to which the tourist is subjected.

Still following MacCannell, the tourist's trust is therefore not in the culture and society of their origin, but in the environment they wish to visit, precisely because they imagine it to be different; a vector for understanding a deeper meaning to the logic to which they are accustomed. What they don't usually realize is that these places are instead perfectly embedded in the mechanisms of the capitalist market, of which they are also a part, and from which visitors therefore don't distance from when entering the tourist space, "It is always possible that what is taken to be entry into a back region is really entry into a front region that has been totally set up in advance for touristic visitation" (MacCannell 1976, p. 107).

The person in question thus moves in a kind of environmental bubble, or a "tourist bubble", which has been tailor-made to satisfy his or her need for authenticity.

1.2.10 Considerations on MacCannell's point of view

In order not to fall into generalizations, it is important to point out that what MacCannell has uncovered, while certainly reliable and common in reality, is nevertheless not the only possibility. Indeed, his thesis has often been criticized by various tourism sociologists, notably Cohen (1979), as being over deterministic.

While it is true that it is good not to fall into the generalized view of the tourist as a superficial subject frivolously seeking distraction, we neither have to fall into the generalized view of the tourist as a naïve person who cannot read between the lines of tourist manipulation, as MacCannell suggests during his analysis. Moreover, not all experiences correspond to the "staged authenticity" he reports.

In fact, Cohen points out that it is important to consider more dimensions in the tourist situation, as the type of scene the tourist experiences and the impression the scene creates in the tourist.

There are "real scenes", which remain untouched by the tourist establishment, and "staged scene", to which MaCcannell refers. Moreover, the tourist may consider the event spontaneous or recognize that it has been manipulated by the hosts. MacCannell, on the other hand, implicitly assumes that tourists always see the situation as inevitably real or authentic.

Travelers become increasingly aware of the alterations to which the sites they visit are subject. Once they realize they have been tricked, they may become suspicious or playful about the situation.

In particular, the playful approach has been analyzed by Rojek (1993), who described it as part of the "postmodern tourist", who is aware of the commercialization of tourist experiences and staged authenticity, but instead of being outraged, sees tourism as a game. This figure does not seek to appropriate new meanings, but is rather attracted to the experience as an end in itself.

Cohen criticizes MacCannell's over-generalization, stating, "It is one thing to discover through analysis that a superficial experience might have a deeper structural meaning; it is quite another to claim that this deeper structural meaning actually motivates every tourist or, in MacCannell's words, that every tourists is essentially seeking authenticity" (Cohen, 1979, pp. 22-23).

This obscures a problem of general sociological significance: the conditions under which deep structural themes surface, so to speak, and acquire motivational significance.

1.3 Experiencescapes

We have discussed the changing nature of the concept of experience over time and noted how difficult it is to represent people's experiences: because their phenomenological nature is inherently subjective, intangible, elusive and ever-changing, it is virtually impossible to interpret them.

A focus on the spaces and materiality of experiences may instead prove expedient to analytically engage with the cognitive, social and cultural processes through which they are defined and shaped.

Many assume that the "traditional" industrial society is losing its economic significance as it is gradually replaced by new types of industries and societies: the Post Industrial Society, the New Economy, the Information Society, the Experience Industry, and so on. The previously successful forms of industrial production are said to weaken.

The term "industrial" has always been associated with size, systemic production, dependence on standardization processes and a focus on profitability. Industry is also associated with businness, but in its early days the term was used in the context of manufacturing various types of physical products, such as clothing, metals, food. Today, the meaning of products has expanded to include not only tangible but also intangible elements, so that other industries have emerged, such as the music industry, the movie industry, etc.

These are sometimes summarized under more general terms such as "creative industry", "culture industry" or "experience industry"; definitions that sound almost oxymoronic.

But what actually happens when the word industry is associated to "experience" or "culture"?

The fact that something is industrialized usually means that it is commercialized, made more systematic and standardized. It is associated with large-scale production, cost efficiency and, at worst, negative phenomena such as exploitation and alienation (O' Dell & Billing, 2005, p. 38).

Johan Fornäs has written about the growth of the so-called experience industry. He sees it as:

> … a kind of rationalization, goal-oriented manipulation, commodification or industrialization of experiences, that can go hand in hand with a commercialization, institutionalization and professionalization of different activities that were previously more spontaneously organized. (…) On the other hand the experience-industry mind-set points to how the so-called postindustrial society aestheticizes or culturalizes production and distribution of goods and services and, in a more thoroughly planned manner, designs space and time. This side of things could be called an experiencification of industries. (Fornäs, 2001, p. 375).

Today, experiences are created, organized, sold, packaged and consumed just like commodities. So they are more than just random phenomena that exist solely in people's minds. They have a material basis that is anchored in space: they can take place in an infinite array of specific locations, such as museums, cities, shopping malls, neighborhood parks and well-known tourist attractions, but they are not confined to just one location, but can be designed in one place, developed in another and executed for consumption in a third (O' Dell & Billing, 2005). They can be compared to stylized landscapes that are strategically planned, laid out and designed by producers (as local marketers, local private companies and urban planners) and are actively sought after by customers to be consumed.

They are created through phenomena of global interdependence: although they are located in specific cultural geographies, they are also part of a larger global economy and are oriented towards the larger transnational cultural flows that are not readily tied to a specific place, nation or region.

The environment that people come into contact with in their daily lives has the potential, through processes of globalization, to shape both the imaginary and physical landscape of knowledge. O' Dell & Billing refer to these imaginary and physical lanscapes as "landscaped scapes", and more specifically by creating the neologism "experiencescapes" (ibid.).

The result of these landscapes can ultimately lead to different groups around the world connecting with eachother and others moving apart, and new transnational communities of people and ideas emerging (Appadurai, 1996).

These landscapes of shared knowledge are cultural reference points that are selected as critical parameters and connections through which a large cultural economy is created, and power and knowledge are not evenly distributed. Appadurai explains:

> The suffix -scape allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes, shapes that characterize international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles. These terms with the common suffix –scape also indicate that these are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision, but rather, they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors… These landscapes thus are the building blocks of what (extending Benedict Anderson) I would call imagined worlds, that is, the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe. (1996, p. 33)

These imagined worlds may seem ephemeral, but they are often actually built through the manipulation of the material culture that surrounds us, and a defined structure and a spatial organization can be maintained and produced.

It is important to point out that these experiencescapes are often areas that appear to be places of leisure and pleasure, but whose internal structure is anything but straightforward or conflict-free, often characterized by complicated power relations and conflicts of interest in which cultural identities are negotiated and sometimes distorted, and dreams are redrawn and redefined. Even if the offerings of these worlds of experience are often as elusive as they are intangible, their cultural, economic and political consequences are very real (Urry, 2000, p. 36).

There are various and very different experiencescapes. Some can be divided into categories, and the broader categories contain subcategories, which in turn can potentially contain other subcategories, as if they were matryoshkas, but the categories or ramifications of experiencescapes are endless and constantly changing. If we approach the experiencescapes container with a magnifying glass, we will find, among countless others, the "nostalgiascapes" (another neologism to indicate "... experiencescapes that derive much of their symbolic power from a series of romanticized images of a bygone era", Szilvia Gyimóthy, in her contribution to O' Dell & Billing, 2005, p. 111).

1.3.1 The Nostalgiascape

The original meaning of nostalgia is "the sense of acute homesickness" (Soanes, 2003). In everyday language, however, it is often interpreted less as a pathological personal emotion than as a kind of "sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past" (ibid.).

There seems to be no consensus on the temporal dimension of nostalgic stimuli: Davis (1979), for instance, argues that they can be aroused by self-experiences and memories from the past, while Holbrook states that nostalgic feelings can equally be triggered by something one has never actually experienced, or by customs and ways of life that have either disappeared or are no longer common (1993, p. 103). These stimuli can be triggered by watching movies, reading literature and listening to stories, i.e. through contact with the immaterial or material culture around us.

Several marketing experts have noted that customers tend to valorize and select products that represent the past. They may identify nostalgically with places, people or things from past times through existential or esthetic appeal while at the same time distancing themselves from contemporary situations and objects.

Christina Goulding discusses the nostalgia epidemic that hit the tourism industry at the end of the last millennium and claims that nostalgia has become part of the postmodern condition (Goulding, 2001, p. 586). It is a "selective recall of the past"(ibid.) that holds the potential to reinforce the "fundamental condition of human estrangement" (Turner, 1987, p. 150).

While nostalgic representations always refer to the past, the motives for what should and should not be represented are a product of the present. Tourist attractions such as open-air museums, re-enactment centers and medieval restaurants flourish on a strategically stylized past, reinterpreting or even redirecting historical meanings (Goldman and Papson, 1994).

The designers of these experiencescapes reshape the uncomfortable features of the past into a coherent and conflict-free thematic narrative that corresponds to current consumer ideals.

Cities, regions or even nations around the world that flaunt their uniqueness – be it through nostalgia or through various other strategies – all follow, knowingly or unknowingly, a common and well-structured pattern (Ek, 2002, Henning Jensen, 2005, Åberg, 2002). Place marketing identifies experiences that travelers perceive as unique and novel, but it does so through a fairly standardized global recipe. Slogans that may seem superficial at first glance are in fact part of a larger reservoir of cultural tools that help tourists come to terms with and understand the destinations they are traveling to. But when tourists lack the local insight to experience the destination in the same way as locals, their experiences become reflections of their own cultural background.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, "nostalgiascapes" are used as a common denominator from the past, based on arguments of authenticity, genuineness and tradition, to guide contemporary social practices.

In the context of Venetian tourism, the combination of nostalgia for a bygone era and the uniqueness of Venetian urban morphology has long proven to be a successful strategy for attracting tourists to the city. There are several "Venetian experiencescapes" that can attest to this. To start, I will analyze the tourist product of the gondola ride, to then follow with other experiencescapes.

1.3.2 The gondola ride

Many claim that to understand Venice, you have to see it from the water. The water is one of the city's main attractions and there are many who want to experience the thrill of exploring the intricate system of canals, especially the smaller and hidden ones. However, the public transportation system in the lagoon is limited to the main canals, and the water cab is quite an expensive service. Therefore, according to Davis, foreigners in Venice are doubly strangers,

excluded both from the idiosyncratic culture of the city and from the prevailing logic of its organization (2023, p. 141).

In relation to this double separation between Venetians and tourists, the figure of the gondolier has long played the role of mediator, providing access not only to the aquatic dimension of the city, but also to the city itself.

This people are considered the epitome of Venice, as Venetian as the waterways. But although the firmly established profession originated centuries ago, its characteristics have not remained unchanged: the role has been constantly reinvented to meet changing market demands. Today, it is the result of adapting to the economic and social context of the city and, in particular, to the presence of tourists. What began as a simple transportation service has evolved into an attraction to satisfy tourists' desires, which therefore have become the designers of this particular iconic figure.

In order to understand the dynamics, I would like to look briefly at the history of the development of the figure.

The job of gondolier emerged probably in the 15th or 16h century and had a similar function to that of coachmen; he provided transport for aristocrats that lived in the city. In the late 18th century, they also began to accompany tourists, a business that became lucrative and indispensable until the end of the 19th century, when it progressively started to be replaced by the first steamboats, the *vaporettos*.

This passage meant both the defeat and the rebirth of the figure, who was able to reinvent itself by gradually abandoning the role of "chauffeur" and taking on a new and special one.

At first, they set out to offer a perfectly romantic atmosphere to all who sought it, showing couples the picturesque sights of the city, singing for them and accompanying them to theaters or clubs. Then, after the advent of motorized boat, the transport service was completely abandoned, making way for what became its definitive role from the post Second World War onward: the gondolier became the icon of Venice. From then on, the service they provided, the gondola ride, became an end in itself.

Standing on the Venetian waters in a traditional boat, thanks to the skills of a true oarsman, is today an experience unmissable for the average tourist. The gondoliers still have "the authority and responsibility to bring the visitor into contact with the waters, and thus with the true soul of the city" (ivi, p. 180). However, if in the past this highly recognized authority was in no way determined by the cost of the service offered (the prices of the first passages were derisory), today a gondola ride is worth a lot: 80 euros for the day and 120 for the evening; this detail, however, doesn't discourage tourists' demand.

But the gondolier is no longer the precious friend who is part of daily life, your double, your shadow, your complement, as Henry James once claimed. That intimate face- to- face relationship has become sporadic as the gondoliers work hard and non-stop to meet the high workload, and therefore are rarely relaxed and enjoy what they are doing.

When the gondolier loses his function as a mediator who brings the tourist into contact with the city through proximity and historical references, the gondola experience ceases to "...unlock the watery logic of the city..." (ivi, p. 160).

The massive presence of tourists has indeed profoundly changed the nature of the gondola ride.

The ride has a pre-planned itinerary, a tour of a few emblematic points such as churches and palaces, usually together with half a dozen or more gondolas in a caravan, and are often accompanied by a tenor tuning Italian songs that are not exactly representative of Venetian culture, but rather reinforce the stereotypical image of Italy. These trips require discipline and organization to navigate the city's canals. Although tourists have the impression of enjoying a relaxing ride, in reality it is as if their gondolas are moving on submerged rails, as if on an automated and monochrome track.

The tour groups then only see the two or three canals that their gondolas passed shortly before and to which they will return a few minutes later. This process seems more like a parody of the past, but is necessary to meet the immense demand. For the same reason, the duration of the rides has been reduced from 50 to 30 minutes.

Of course, this strategy has consequences: as the gondoliers only have half as much time as before, they have had to shorten routes, increase speed and interact less and less with customers, leading sometimes to the exacerbation of the cultural barrier.

What should therefore consist of a pleasant activity can become a particularly unpleasant experience for tourists and gondoliers alike, especially in summer, when a number of not very tempting factors combine, such as humidity, sultriness, blazing sun and jolting cause by other motorboats. But a gondola ride is a kind of sacred duty that must be fulfilled for a visit to Venice to be considered valid and in line with the moral structure of international tourism. It is one of the cultural reference points chosen by global culture that has led to the experience industry to the development of what we could call the "*gondolascape*". Thus what is offered is not just a ride, but an expertly packaged cultural product, an event that combines ritual and memory. The gondola is the emblem of Venice, perfectly combining romance, nostalgia for objects of the past and the uniqueness of a city-pearl built on the water.

The cultural staging that a gondola ride offers may reveal or conceal some sad realities, depending on one's perspective, but it probably does not offer the opportunity to get to know the

"true Venice of the Venetians", because on the contrary, the gondola takes its passengers even further away from what still exists of the real (and therefore non-touristy) Venice; nor does it show them the true logic of the city's waterways, as they are not transported to a specific destination (ivi, p. 158).

When you board a gondola, you are immersed even deeper into the tourist bubble that already surrounds most of the city. In fact, it is very likely - almost a certainty - that anyone sitting in a gondola, alone or in a group, is a tourist and as such is part of a scape that is only of interest to other tourists.

1.3.3 … As an example of cultural objectification

Many popular leisure and tourist attractions are based on idealized roles and stereotypical situations designed to convey a sense of security, to which the gondola ride fits perfectly: it offers a passive, rather undemanding consumer experience in a clean and safe environment, it can be relied upon to start and end on time, and the visitor can fit it into their leisure schedule. These attractions essentially satisfy the desire to be soothed by the experience of escape.

On the tourist side, it is noteworthy that their attention is often not focused on the external landscape and its details or the traditional rowing technique, but inwards, that is, toward themselves and the spectacular nature of the proposed experience, as if they were on a merry-go-round.

Excluded from the logic of the gondola, because its past form has been isolated from their lives, for Venetians, the traditional gondola has long since become the exclusive domain of tourists, and no more Venetians venture to embark in it.

The gondolascape is subject to the aforementioned process of "cultural objectification", i.e. the appropriation and valorization of cultural heritage by the tourism industry, which brings certain cultural assets to the fore by modeling (or, more simply, enhancing) selected features of the "past" and generating "new historical meanings" (Simonicca 2015, p. 57) that can influence the evolution of the social, cultural and economic forms of the contexts in which they operate (Salerno, 2020, p. 61).

In this context, objects (of various nature) have no other role than to make a profit by representing themselves. They are torn from the social context of their belonging: the threads that connected them to the local population and the role they fulfilled are cut off to be rewritten and redefined in the territory of tourism. They are no longer the means to an end, but they themselves are the end.

1.3.4 The touristification of Piazza San Marco

In places of tourist interest, the city normally functions as a stage for performances, that is, it serves as a container for the attractive elements that are housed there. But things are different in Venice: the city not only offers attractions, it is an attraction itself. A city built on water is a rare jewel.

As Scaramuzzi noted, "Venice suffers from a lack of attractions designed to arouse the interest of visitors: the city itself is the strongest attraction that can be created, and the attention paid to Venice is always and everywhere at the highest level." (Davis, 2023, p.82).

This can be seen in Piazza San Marco, Venice's most famous square, an urban element that, like the gondola, also serves as a representation of the city. While in the past it had an active, representative political, economic and social function for Venice, today, it has become a tourist area.

The process that led to Piazza San Marco losing its original identity began when the tourism industry recognized the profit potential of the imaginary "Venetianscape" created by the idealization of some of the cultural reference points of this particular city, which eventually led to the marginalization of the politically and economically weaker groups in the city. A new scape was created for tourists, which we will now look at in detail to identify its characteristics and reflect on its implications.

Piazza San Marco remains unmissable and is still the epitome of the Venetian tourist experience: every tourist is aware of its existence and knows that they have to go there if they want to experience Venice the full, and on the other hand it would be pointless to deliberately avoid it in search of a more meaningful or "authentic" Venice... But what exactly are they looking for? Or what do they expect to see?

The Square has been the symbolic and ceremonial heart of Venetian identity for centuries. In the past, it fulfilled important social, political and economic functions. It was the place where "*far el listòn*", an expression that symbolized the custom of the Venetian walk, but it also had a deeper social meaning, that of a special moment of conviviality and intimacy, where one walked in conversation with a friend, where one observed and was observed by other people, and exchanged notes at the small tables of the cafés.

In the politica arena, the square was the scene of important demonstrations, from the revolution of 1848 to the clashes between communists and fascists in the 1920s. In the 19th and 20th centuries, it also housed agencies, offices and banks, and was therefore frequented daily by various employees.

All these functions, which were constitutive of civic life, gradually disintegrated and were moved to other locations so that the city's later main industry could settle in without too much complication.

The listòn was initially absorbed by the tourist presence, albeit a cautious distance was maintained between them and the Venetians. However, that peculiar practice of intimate gathering and public display gradually became impractical as the presence of so many strangers increased, so it was moved to less frequented squares (ivi., p.75).

When the habit of taking walks was abandoned or reduced to an exclusively neighborhood practice, the central square no longer fulfilled its social function, that of making the inhabitants true citizens of their community. The Venetians, deprived of this particular dimension, which transformed from a public and representative activity to a generic and touristic attraction, were also deprived of a primary form of civic education about what they themselves called *venezianeità.*

Political activities also gradually lost their importance: the organization of demonstrations and events was abandoned in the hereafter of the Second World War, when Italy got pacified. But what on the surface may seem like a decision to maintain a peaceful state of affairs had a stronger motive: politics would prove to be a disruptive element for the tourism flowing into the region.

In the 1980s, economic activity began to leave the square, and today only a few hundred people work there in public institutions and in the jewelry and luxury stores in the Procuratie, which cater almost exclusively to tourists.

1.3.5 Why be there?

The most striking aspect of St. Mark's Square today is the many tourists who flock there. The square is no longer actively visited by Venetians. The cafés of the square today have no more charm or social function than an ordinary station bar.

Without the social value of venezianeità with which it was once endowed, the question arises as to what elements make up its tourist appeal. If not the social venezianeità, then perhaps the artistic or cultural one of the monuments, museums, the *Basilica* or *Biblioteca Marciana*? Or the desire to find the elements that can be read in the literary works of famous writers such as Byron or Ruskin?

Certainly there are those who are still searching for it. But the percentage of "sentimental" tourists in Venice is small and is probably deterred by the impossibility of crossing the Piazza for the presence of those who are there just to be there.

Davis (2023) gathered some impressions and assessments from guides and visitors and found that most tourists who go to the square are simply there to be there and look around; they are not curious to interact and mingle with Venetians or other tourists or observe Venetian life.

For most, sitting in *Café Florian* is a kind of tourist rite of passage, where sitting under the summer sun and paying ten euros for a single espresso are crucial experiences to talk about when they return home (ivi, p. 78).

The fact that St. Mark's Square continues to fill with foreigners despite its inconveniences and disadvantages reinforces the idea that, like other places such as the Taj Mahal or the Eiffel Tower, it has become a sacred site for tourism; it was born of imagination, and it will probably remain an imagined world, because no lively Venetian knowledge will be gained there.

Visitors flock there because the square is known worldwide both for its visual appeal and as a metonym for the larger cultural monument called Venice. This too is part of the moral structure of modern international tourism, a collective sense that certain things should be seen.

Many tourists in the square are clearly fulfilled and excited just to be in the midst of something big, that is, the teeming international crowd of other visitors in an extraordinary place.

As with many other sacred sites for tourism, not much more remains of St. Mark's Square than the physical shell that surrounds it.

1.3.6 A visit to some Murano glass factories

If, as Salerno (2020, p. 48) explains, the goal of the encounter is the encounter itself, this becomes fetishized and the other is distanced in a series of endless representations. This is what has happened to St. Mark's Square, where social events that used to be a moment of celebration of a community's social cohesion – when they were deemed distinctive enough to attract the attention of visitors and became shared cultural reference points - are "set up" and transformed into representations of themselves to become an exclusive domain of the tourist experience. If this process applies to both the gondola ride and Piazza San Marco case, the case of the Murano glass experience is even more meaningful and emblematic.

On this particular island, the major glass factories offer the tourist a true spectacle, where every detail of the performance has been meticulously organized and is constantly staged to satisfy the tourist's need for authenticity. The glassblowing demonstration is a good example of the concept of staged authenticity discussed by MacCannell (1979). We will see how staged authenticity is present on several levels in some Murano glass factories.

Murano is an island in the northern part of the lagoon, 1.5 km from the city of Venice. What has characterized it from the 13th century until this today in the art of glassblowing.

Although only a few traces of it remain today, Venice was characterized by various industries and crafts in the past. While in the 1900s Venetian industries began to close one by one in the face of foreign competition and the city gradually put its survival in the hands of tourism, the *Muranesi* were instead able to keep their factories open and proudly assert their identity as master glassmakers.

They knew how to work with the tourist industry in an original way and succeeded in attracting both the interest and the pockets of mainly the European and American tourist's middle classes.

They produced immense quantities of glassware such as plates, glasses, figurines, perfume bottles, Rialto bridges and gondoliers. In the 50s and 60s, an artistic glass art emerged, produced by small studios in remarkable quality and worthy of a museum gallery. Funds were raised, the *Vetro Artistico di Murano* brand was created, the *Museum of Glass Art* was renovated and training courses were organized to promote and preserve the tradition.

Nevertheless, towards the end of the century a combination of unfortunate factors including the removal of state subsidies and growing foreign competition put paid to the factories, and many were forced to close.

Today, there are less than a hundred factories left, employing less than a thousand people.

In recent years, the market has been flooded with cheap copies from abroad, which have been passed off as Venetian glass and even resold by major Murano's manufacturers.

Honest manufacturers have tried to compete the authenticity of their product by trademarking it, without curbing the problem: in 2015, according to the Venice Chamber of Commerce, up to 80 percent of the glassware sold in the city was not made in Murano. The sale of fake Murano glass guarantees many retailers a profit margin of ten times the purchase price, a factor that makes the business too lucrative to be abandoned.

The impoverishment of Murano's glass industry is linked to the island's population decline, which has fallen by more than 55 percent from the 1960s to 2021.

Some of the few remaining inhabitants continue to work with glass, but consequently also with tourism, the industries in Murano have merged to become one and the same.

As elsewhere in Venice, what was a vibrant commercial and productive industry in Murano has become a spectacle, a simulacrum of what it once was. In fact, the remaining 10-15% of people who still work in the glassworks spend much of their time staging Murano's ready-made tourist experience.

The glassblowing experience in some furnaces works like this: large groups of tourists are welcomed into the factory, where glass masters wait to give a live demonstration of blown glass. The heat in summer is almost unbearable, for the furnace must be hot for the glass that is to be blown to form the sculpture they are working on and which they will produce. There is a guide who explains the general steps of glassmaking.

The exhibition lasts between 10 and 15 minutes; visitors are then taken to the factory's exhibition room - which is the actual destination of the pre-planned tour – where they are presented with objects, most of which were not made in the actual furnace, but imported from elsewhere at a cheap price, to make the business as lucrative as possible.

The process is repeated again and again, several times a day, with different groups of tourists. The master glassmakers work hard, all day long, in an endless performance of themselves. The shirts they wear in the morning, white and clean, are grayish and sweaty in the evening. The glassmakers are exhausted.

This is precisely the representation of an economic activity that was once the soul of the Muranesi, but which has gradually been replaced by the obfuscation of themselves, a staged event that largely fulfills the expectations of tourists.

1.3.7 Masked realities

I have already discussed the outcomes that often results from the experiential tourist's need for authenticity, namely the offer of staged authenticity (p.15 of this thesis; MacCannell, 1979).

In the case of the murano glass experience, the concept of staged authenticity can be found on several levels: in the spectacularization of the traditional craftsmanship, which, having become a representation of itself, is stripped of its original character; and in the sale of counterfeit objects that are presented as authentic, which is the leading aim of the staged experience.

(Here I do not want to condemn the glass factories that have adapted this business strategy, since it is a very complex issue. Sometimes one has to put romance aside to be able to pay for gas, and other times it's a strong ethis that makes people roll up their sleeves and take more impervious and risky steps).

According to Barke and Harrop (1994), the commercialization of society has led to geographical areas and their folklore being packaged and advertised by different stakeholders. These representations of space are not "realistic" (attempting to capture different nuances and heterogeneity of the places in question), but rather have a mythical character (Barthes, 1972). They are created by marketing organizations that convey an image which stems primarily from their

conviction of what is sellable and what is not. To make this mythical representation as credible as possible, the general performance of the inhabitants of the place must coincide with the propagated image (the map precedes the territory) (Baudrillard, 1983).

When the tourism industry becomes a community's sole source of income, the survival of its citizens depends on the gaze of the tourists and the ability to offer a well-researched cultural product presented in a way that meets tourists expectations.

Staged events offered by Murano's tourism industry are often highly appreciated by tourists: as shows, they are relaxed, passive experiences and do not involve any real interaction between visitor and visited. However, these experiences only further distance tourists from the special and critical aspects that make up the place.

To conclude, the different "scapes" analyzed are fine but well-veiled veils that cover the city and its people. They are experiences contaminated by the culture that global society has propagated since capitalism. They conceal the soul of the city: the true essence remains hidden, what is chosen to be portrayed is its myth.

1.4 Considerations on the Experience economy

Contrary to what it might seem, experiencescapes are not temporally definable phenomena with a marked beginning and end (Löfgren, 1999, p. 95, Mossberg, 2001, p. 3). This is not to say that there are no symbolic boundaries, but that the experiences we immerse ourselves in consist of multiple beginnings, endings and boundary crossings. The Experience Economy emerged from a very complex interaction of experiences, that are interwoven, rather than something we enter by crossing a well-defined threshold.

People learn to "experience" in large part through their daily consumption behavior. It is therefore important to empashize that the Experience Economy does not take place exclusively outside the home. There is a connection between the public and private spheres, as experiences are expected, anticipated, dreamed of, and longed for at different times and in different places.

Whether we speak of "the Experience Economy", "the market for experiences", or "the experience industry," we are using metaphors that contrast with the domestic and private spheres (O'Dell, T., & Billing, P., 2005, p. 134). However, the basis for the creation of different experiencescapes is precisely the everyday, that is, the meanings, messages and images, as well as the entire cultural production that we absorb through our lives in contemporary societies. The ordinary thus provides the basis on which the extraordinary emerges, but it is not its opposite, it is rather the continuity of a process.

Rather than defining experiences simply as contrasts to the normal rhythms of daily life, or as "ruptures" (Fornäs, 2001, p .377), we need to understand the interplay between the ordinary and the extraordinary (Bassett and Wilbert, 1999) in order to dissect varied experienescapes and develop a critical analysis of their complex logic and implications.

The experience of the gondola ride, for example, is organized around a series of symbolic bridges that elevate the event to a level that is more than an ordinary aspect of everyday life, but which is nonetheless connected even to the realm of everyday life.

Closer examination of this linkage can prove extremely useful in understanding how trends develop and how people develop the competences that constrain or enable their participation in different experiencescapes. An important aspect of this process concerns time and its management: a truly successful experience is not simply something where we are immersed in the present. In hindsight, experiences are reflected upon and can be transformed into nostalgia to be longed for again. On the production side of this equation, we see an increasing need for companies to reinvent themselves and what they offer. All of this is part of a larger global-cultural economy in which, for example, a glass factory in Murano has to adapt to global cultural trends and begins to re-design the experience it wants to offer in order to become more attractive and successfully fulfill the wishes and expectations of tourists.

In this sense, experiences are in a constant state of revision and in a process of becoming that trascends (but is also anchored in) both space and time. Inherent in all of this is the realization that while the subjective element of experience is extremely important, experiences and the emotions associated with them are not simply personal impressions (which are psychologically embedded in us), but also social constructions that people talk about and constantly reshape. Experiences certainly have a subjective and individually bound component, but the Experience Economy is not exclusively driven by individual needs or economic desires. It contains elements of fun as well as social power structures. Behind the facade of the ephemeral experience there is a very material world of cultural, political and social interaction, as we will see in the last chapter. It is a world that trascends the traditional opposition between work and play, individual and collective experience, past and present, and the spheres of the everyday and the exceptional (O'Dell, T., & Billing, P., 2005, p. 134).

People want to pay more and more to feel something instead of having something. For individuals, the value of experiences comes from emotions and memories, and possibly from contributing to the acquisition of insights and identity formation. For the majority of companies and cities that produce and implement experiences, the value of experiences comes instead from the positive economic effects they are likely to generate. This leads to a continuous intoxication of

touristic experiences, where visitors are increasingly alienated from the real aspects of the places visited. But not all companies think in this way, as we will see later in this thesis: the experience economy is not negative per se. Rather, we can say that different actors have different interests and objectives, and cultural intoxication therefore results from the choices made by certain actors in the sector.

To summarize, in this chapter I have started from the very earliest forms of tourism in Venice, pilgrimages, to show how forms of traditional experience have been fundamentally undermined

by several interrelated factors that characterize humanity's entry into modernity and tend to intensify in the present: the exhaustion of traditional forms of sociability (with their identity of place, life and community) due to the change in the prevailing mode of production, the change in the labor relationship and the affirmation of wage labor, the change in the relationship to objects and the possibility of manipulating them, access to the consumer society, etc. All these elements profoundly changed the structures of human experience.

In a world constituted in this way, experience understood as Erfahrung, that is, as the integration of lived experiences into a coherent whole, seems to virtually disappear (p. 12 of this thesis), giving way to a fragmentation of experiences subject to the manipulation of signs that affect the subject in the specifically contemporary form of life that takes place in the metropolis (which is representative of both the home and the" touristic abroad", since the latter is the continuation of the former) (Salerno, 2020, p. 43).

Representation and commercialization thus prove to be two strongly intertwined aspects of a single process of touristification, whose vehicle is both the search for and the staging of a supposed "authenticity" whose connotation is not defined once and for all, but is negotiable in the various contexts in which it is called into question. This has also led to a trivialization of cultural heritage, which has been transformed into the commodified form of the tourist attraction.

Experiencescapes are metaphorical commercial landscapes of social interaction. They are shaped by carefully selected sensory cues and material props to maintain the illusion of an imaginary world. All the cues are designed to arouse desire in the customer and can therefore be considered direct or symbolic objects of consumption (O'Dell, T., & Billing, P., 2005, p. 87).

As we will see in the following chapter, the consequences of imaginary worlds, even if they may remain an illusion, are very real, not only in the cultural dimension but also in the environmental one.

As long as tourists live in the illusion that they can escape their everyday reality and society through the tourist experience, the cultural intoxication will continue to spread and have increasingly damaging effects. Deconstructing the structure of some experiencescapes was

important because it is relevant to the topic addressed in the second chapter: without deconstructing them and recognizing their critical points, and thus without a deep understanding of their dynamics and the realization that the underlying problem is cultural in nature, it would be pointless to discuss their environmental impacts.

2. Contaminated experiences, contaminated environment

In the previous chapter, I discussed some ways of experiencing Venice today. I highlighted different experiencescapes through which some tourists get to know Venice, acquiring a limited and intoxicated knowledge that increasingly alienates them from the real social and cultural conditions of the city, which remain hidden under the tourism veil. But the culture of globalization and international tourism generate lot of complex effects, and of different nature. As I have already pointed out, the imaginary worlds from which experiencescapes emerge may seem ephemeral, places of relaxation and leisure, when they are instead anything but conflict-free. The cultural, economic and political consequences are therefore very real (Urry, 2000, p. 36), even if they are not easy to recognize, because they are intangible, abstract.

The environmental impacts that we will consider in this chapter, on the other hand, are inherently material and concrete – though no less complex and even more worrying – because they arise from a real consumption of natural resources and affect the ecological relationships, which are essential for the very survival of the place and the well-being of its inhabitants (the flora, the fauna and the people); an issue that should be a prerogative of the city of Venice, but which the local administration seems to deliberately ignore.

2.1 Venice and its Lagoon

For those who travel to Venice only to enjoy its cultural and touristic attractions, it is not easy to recognize the true connection between the city and the lagoon, nor is it easy to depict the Venetian rios and the Grand Canal itself as lagoon meanders winding between islands and sandbanks.

But only by ignoring history and the long times in which earthly events unfold can one be dazzled by Venice and its beauty and see it triumphant and imperishable above the lagoon plain, as so many visitors have discovered, succumbing to the intoxicating feelings that a day - the first day in Venice - can trigger.

The city would then only be the extraordinary and wonderful staging of a spectacle to be enjoyed *hic et nunc*. But to understand the deep meaning of this spectacle, one has to look behind the scenes and forget the shines of marbles, colors and lights (Caniato et al, 2016, p. 3).

To overcome the inconstancy of daily perceptions and moods and to look at Venice and its lagoon with the desire to understand, it is necessary to forget the aspects that make a day in the city joyful and unforgettable and make an effort to perceive the sense of place and the sense of time, the intense and unpleasant smells, the gravity of the horizontal landscapes, the thread-like, water-

washed surfaces that contribute to the delineation of the lagoon space. It is necessary to understand the strong pressure to which the lagoon is subjected and the resulting fatigue.

The Site "Venice and its Lagoon" was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1987 for the uniqueness and singularity of its cultural values: It consists of an exceptional historical, archeological, urban, architectural, artistic heritage and cultural traditions embedded in an extraordinary environmental, natural and landscape context.

The Venetian lagoon is a good example of the relationship between human activity and natural dynamics and is home to most of the cultural assets and artistic expressions that have been layered over the centuries. The city and the lagoon are inseparable elements, and the history and geography of the city are inextricable linked to the history and geography of the lagoon.

Seen in this light, Venice and its lagoon are a very representative example of a socio-ecological system. On the one hand, the morphology and ecology of the lagoon have been profoundly influenced by human hands since the 15th century: anthropogenic interventions diverted rivers, built sea defenses, developed and expanded the industrial pole (Porto Marghera) and dredged artificial canals for shipping (D'Alpaos, 2010, Pignatti and Seminara, 2009, Ravera, 2000, Sarretta et al., 2010, Rova et al., p. 557, 2019a).

On the other hand, Venetian settlements and their cultural heritage have been shaped by the lagoon ecosystem, resulting in the unique lifestyle and landscape that we can observe in recent times and whose visual appeal is a magnet for so many people around the world.

If being recognized as a World Heritage Site implies representing the history and identity of every people and the preservation of the legacy of the past to pass it on to future generations, it is unfortunately becoming increasingly clear that Venice's inner attraction is becoming its undoing: with a preliminary number of tourist presences from January to October 2023 of about 8 million (that is 15.1 percent more than the previous year, statistica.regione.veneto.it) and an estimated 25 million day visitors per year, tourism is at the same time the most important economic sector of the region and a major socio-economic pressure compared to the number of inhabitants in the historic center of Venice (49,166 residents vs. 49,902 beds for tourists, ocio-venezia.it)

2.2 Tourism and Ecosystem Services

Venetian tourism is an important expression of the relationship between nature and society.

On the one hand, it emerges from past states of SES, i.e. it is the result of a long-term co-evolution between society and ecosystem, a historical process that has shaped the landscape (not simply a beautiful view or a panorama), which is now considered a cultural (and natural) heritage,

something of intangible value. As this coexistence has been harmoniously balanced, the landscape has a pleasant appearance and becomes desirable from a tourist point of view.

However, the attractiveness of an area can be both a strength and a disadvantage for the place: If the ecosystem is properly managed, it has the potential to sustain it, but it can also degrade it if tourism resources and other ecosystem services are over-utilized.

Since tourism is strictly dependent on an healthy environment, it is fully anchored on the concept of Ecosystem Services (ES). This concept is a good tool not only to recognize but also to measure the dependence of the society's well-being on nature (Costanza et al. 1997, Daily 1997, Costanza et al. 2017). ES are described as "the contribution of ecosystem structure and function – in combination with other inputs – to human well-being" (Burkhard et al., 2012).

The ES concept is relatively new and was first introduced in 1997 in a paper by Costanza et al., who attempted to estimate the value of ecosystem services and natural capital on a global scale. They tried to assess the value of the "services" provided by the biosphere as a whole in economic terms, even though most of those "products" were not and are still not recognized as services from the conventional market (i.e. if the total gross national product of the USA in that year amounted to 18 trillion, the average of ecosystem services was estimated at 33 trillion, so the double of the former. The comparison the authors made was to illustrate the significant dependence of our society on nature, Costanza et al., 1997, p. 253). The message of the paper was that ecosystem services are far more important to human well-being than conventional economic thinking believed, since ES are the condition that makes human life possible.

All ES have an inherent capacity and flow: the former refers to the amount of the ecosystem service that is available in an area (and is closely linked to the ecological status), while the latter is the part of capacity that is actually used (Grizzetti et al. 2019, ICES 2021, Rova et al., p. 3, 2022).

Looking at tourism as an industry, it is obvious that it relies on natural resources to provide goods and services to its customers. As TEEB (Economics of Ecosystem and Biodiversity) claims, "...many tourism businesses are fully or partially dependent on biodiversity and ecosystem services". Some of the ES on which tourism is based are the same ones on which much of Venetian life is based, so we speak of sharing if they are well managed, but this changes when resources are over-exploited by tourism and instead begin to be contested.

ES are differentiated among those of a direct-flow and those of a mediated- flow type (sensu Rova and Pranovi, 2017), the former, commonly represented by the category of regulating ES, are directly provided by ecosystem functions that take place independently of human interventions, while those of the second type, generally corresponding to provisioning and cultural ES, are instead provided by human activities that "exploit" the resource. The key difference between these two

types of ES is that the flow of direct ES does not consume resources and has no negative impact on the system, whereas the activities of mediated ES can consume the resource units on which they depend, and besides, they can have negative side effects on other resources (externalities). For example, fishing activities can have negative impacts on coastal habitats and thus affect the provision of other ES (Rova et al., p. 1048, 2019b).

Regulating services which represent the solid basis for Venetian life in general, and consequently for tourism activities, are climate regulation and prevention of sediment erosion (through salt marshes, seagrasses and bottom sediments), waste treatment (reducing eutrophication caused by pollutants through denitrification), and the nursery function (essential for the survival of populations of migratory marine animals). Additionally, Venetian provisioning services provide food (e.g. artisanal fishing, shellfish harvesting, recreational fishing and hunting), water and energy, to name but a few. And last but not least, there are cultural ecosystem services, since esthetic appreciation and recreational experiences are crucial to Venetian culture, such as leisure boating and traditions (e.g. "voga alla veneta"), on the one hand, and for visitor satisfaction, e.g. information for cognitive development (e.g. environmental education activities) and tourism itself, which, as already mentioned, takes place thanks to the intrinsic attractiveness of the environment of the lagoon and its islands, which is widely perceived by visitors and whose value is reflected in the high number of visitor presences (Rova et al. 2015, Rova and Pranovi 2017, Rova et al. 2019a, Rova et al. 2019b, Rova et al, Un Rova et al. 2022).

Tourism is classified as a mediated and cultural ES (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA), Ecosystem Services Framework (ESF), Economics of Ecosystem and Biodiversity (TEEB)). Cultural ES are characterized by inherently intangible values e.g. estethic and educational. The intangible value of tourism derives from the positive effects that the place hosting tourism activities can provide by being a place that has a value and the potential to be enjoyed and appreciated.

On the other hand, it is very important not to be trapped in the bubble that could arise if tourism is seen solely as a cultural and non-material resource: if the appreciation is intangible, the money is not.

Tourism is still one of the largest economic sectors in the world: it accounts for 1/10 of the economic system, 1/10 of jobs and 1/10 of GDP. In Italy, tourism accounts for 13% of GDP and 15% of jobs (direct and indirect), i.e. one in six to seven people live directly or indirectly from it (Bankitalia, 2019).

Seen in this light, the dependence of tourism on ecosystem services is obvious: a place that is attractive for tourism retains its attractiveness thanks to the ecosystem services that sustain it. If the potential to provide tourism services is exceeded because tourism flows are excessive, uncontrolled

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and therefore of poor quality, this becomes a risk for the preservation of the place, whose attractiveness obviously decreases and a series of negative externalities can arise. Keeping tourism at a sustainable level therefore means maintaining a balance between tourism services and the natural mechanisms that make them possible.

2.3 Nature-culture dichotomy in tourism

Why is it so difficult today to recognize this intrinsic interdependence with nature and therefore manage resources in a sustainably way?

In his book "Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital" (Verso, London, 2015), Jason W. Moore states that capitalism is neither a social system nor an economic logic – although it contains them – but a way of organizing life on the planet. Capitalism would thus be a "World-Ecology", an ecological regime, but not ecologist or ecocentric (Van Aken, 2017, p. 692).

Consumerist practices and relations to "things" have a strong impact on the environment and are interactions in and with the environment that are rendered invisible, and in fact involve a continuous process of removing relations to those living and non living forces that entail boundaries. Capitalism "... dialectically combines the endless accumulation of capital, the pathological pursuit of power, and the Promethean co-production of planetary life"(ibid.). For this reason, according to the author, today's climate crisis is not anthropogenic but capitalogenic (Moore, 2022).

Indeed, it was capitalism that conceived the concept of nature, in the modern era, categorizing and contrasting it with humans, whose superiority served to justify the first great movement of accumulation worldwide.

Human and Nature were "invented" and alienated from each other, just as the peasant class was alienated from the material means of re/production, the land, in order to be subjected to an ideological mystification of the relations of power, profit and life. This ideology is in fact based on a "fictitious otherness", a social construction that has evolved throughout the history of Western modernity, in which nature has been deliberately alienated and placed in a different realm from humans and culture.

The dichotomy between nature and culture that underlies common sense today, has been a "productive" denial and "liberation from" the singularity of the environmental elements (Van Aken, 2017, p. 687). The living and non-living forces on which we depend are seen as strangers, "stuff" "removed" from the mutual everyday interdependence. Nature has become an uneasy host precisely

in the historical process of "liberation" from its constraints and limitations through science and technology. It is seen as an infinite, free, available resource.

Descola (2005) considers that the separation between nature and culture, both the epistemological basis of knowledge and the ontological basis of our sense of reality, is our culturally stable (but ecologically quite fragile) ground: our particular cosmology ascribes meaning and value to humans as subjects separated from the environment, but this "abstract" cultural and ideological distancing is not accompanied by a parallel and effective physical and concrete distancing that protects us from adverse natural phenomena. This means that we too are subject to the rules that govern the ecological processes, including the carrying capacity, which depends directly on the fact that the available resources on the planet are limited. In short, we ideologically distance ourselves from nature and yet remain intrinsically intertwined with it.

Nature is thus characterized as a largely passive object that is made available to humans both for scientific research and for intensive exploitation. To make this possible, it is stripped of certain constitutive characteristics such as finitude, a central element of recognition in many peasant productions, to be idealized as fixity and coherence. This view departs both from empirical environmental knowledge developed by countless societies and tribes and from proven scientific data that have well showed the dynamics, discontinuity and heterogeneity of ecological systems.

Moreover, everything we use is used in a linear, non-cyclical perspective (resource extraction, consumption, and waste production), a mechanism that nature does not recognize and cannot control and which therefore exerts pressure on the planet. In fact, the functioning of a resilient and sustainable ecosystem is characterized by the exact opposite, following the four scientific principles of sustainability, namely renewable energy sources, biodiversity, population control and the closure of the matter cycle.

In short, our economic system runs counter to natural cycles.

Nowadays we travel constantly, ever faster, in ever greater quantities, consuming as many resources as possible without realizing or ignoring what this entails. This happens partly because the negative effects are deliberately concealed by the economic system, and partly because we are immersed in the logic of this economic system and think according to its guidelines.

Nature is subjected to a process of homogenization and sell-out in order to make it accessible and familiar to as many people as possible. It is all so beautiful and reassuring because it is carefully organized and camouflaged to make us feel safe, secure and light during our stay. Negative effects are avoided as much as possible during the touristic experience, because they would create a counterproductive, unfruitful feeling of discomfort that would discourage the tourist from being there. It is not easy for the tourist to realize the impact of his or her presence when it is

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added to that of millions of others and compounded by the poor management of the place. It is not easy because nothing shakes. Everything seems to be perfectly organized (or almost).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, international tourism is provided with a kind of ideological handbook to help tourists choose the places to visit. These are ready-made itineraries that aim to create a safe environment by reframing unpleasant features into a coherent and conflict-free space that conforms to current consumer ideals. Of course, this discourse also include "slices" of nature that are chosen. These are carefully selected and organized scenarios in which potentially discouraging, disharmonious or esthetically unpleasant parts are avoided or excluded, or smoothed and tamed in a state of visual equilibrium, as they would, on the one hand, reveal the limits of the tourism industry itself and, on the other, be economically counterproductive.

In this way, tourists are alienated on the one hand from the environmental pressures to which the landscape is exposed and, on the other, from the environmental pressures that they themselves cause by their presence and their way of traveling, thus following the same mechanism that alienates them from the social and cultural criticalities of the city, i.e. the crisis of experience in the tourist context caused by capitalism. This well demonstrates our disconnection from nature and the inability to recognize our ecological relationships and our position within the ecosystem, and thus the impact of our presence on the ecosystem and natural resources.

The acceptance of tourism as a cultural ES was found in the classifications of ES in MEA and Economics of Ecosystem and Biodiversity (TEEB), which are institutional reports of the Ecosystem Services Framework (ESF). However, the economic benefits generated by tourism were often recognized in the same discourses, and actually the assumption of tourism as an economic sector was the most prevalent (ivi., p. 5). Both frameworks contain many mentions of tourism that characterize it as a material and consumptive activity that sometimes even threatens ecological conservation: "Overexploitation of benefits arising from... cultural services (e.g., tourism)... could lead to a depletion of benefits and social trade-offs." (TEEB, 2011); "Increased fish catch can increase ecotourism opportunities (e.g., increased sport fishing opportunities) or decrease them if the levels are unsustainable or if the increased catch reduces populations of predators that attract tourists (e.g., killer whales, seals, sea lions)" (MEA, 2005).

Furthermore, both frameworks explicitly address the impacts of tourism on ecosystems. TEEB, for example, considers that "... although nature tourism depends on a healthy environment, there is no guarantee that the tourism industry will take steps to protect it". In the same vein, the MEA warns that: "The growth in the number of tourists and hotels has... generated detrimental effects on the environment... landscape and wetland alteration, deforestation of buffer zones, pollution of rivers, lakes and beaches, and changes in wildlife behaviour".

The environmental impact caused by mass tourism proves to be an useful tool for demonstrating the limits of the capitalist culture of unconditional exploitation.

In the previous chapter, I addressed the disruption of social and cultural dynamics caused by the culture of international tourism and globalization. But looking only at the social and cultural impacts of tourism is an incomplete approach, because we have already seen that culture is closely anchored to environmental resources. Culture and economy exist because there is an ecosystem that sustain them and sustain us. In order to exploit the cultural potential of a place and enjoy its benefits, tourism as an industry inevitably needs natural resources. In order to provide and enjoy tourism as a resource in the long term, we need to consider our position within the ecosystem and use natural resources in an appropriate and balanced way. We must also be aware of the negative effects that over-exploitation would bring, because as we have already discussed, unlimited exploitation sooner or later depletes or unduly endangers natural resources and therefore also tourism-cultural resources.

2.4 Assessment of the Lagoon's ES

It is time to relate what has been said in a general and theoretical way to the Venetian reality, in order to evaluate the trends in the use and interactions of the various ES and assess their sustainability.

To do this, I will draw on some recent research by Rova et al. (Un, 2019a, 2019b, 2022) who, starting from a zoning of the lagoon, have assessed the capacity and flow of several ES and the relationship between the flow of ES that require impacts from human activities (mediated ES) and the flow of those that result directly from ecological functioning (direct ES).

In general, the overall capacity of the lagoon's ES is greater than the overall flow, the latter being on average about half of the former (Flow/Capacity ratio of 0.53 (0.44-0.61) (Rova et al., p.7, Un, Rova et al., p.16, 2022)). However, in addition to the average value, some areas are characterized by a "saturation" of ES uses that are particularly high in terms of carrying capacity of the ecosystem.

About 53% of the lagoon is subject to the lowest level of ES sustainability. Here, the capacity is relatively low in relation to the flow, which in turn leads to an imbalance in favor of the mediated ES and at the expense of the regulating ES. The areas correspond mostly to the central-southern part of the open waters and open waters borders (including Chioggia and Lido, the inlets, and a shallow area off San Giuliano, Rova et al, Un). Some of these areas are in fact characterized by a particularly strong sediment erosion leading to a degradation of the lagoon's morphology (Saretta et

al. 2010), suggesting that the loss of the lagoon's typical features also means the loss of the multiple benefits we can derive from it (Rova et al, 2022).

Three mediated ES are likely to cause the greatest negative externalities: Clam harvesting, which leads to habitat degradation, increased siltation of the canals and impairment of the nursery function, caused by the use of mechanical harvesting measures (cfr. Pranovi et al., 2004, 2003, Rova et al, 2019a, Rova et al., 2019b); tourism, which has serious side effects associated with intensive navigation and leads to habitat degradation and increased siltation of the canals, and navigation, which, like tourism causes siltation of the canals and habitat degradation (Rova et al., 2019b).
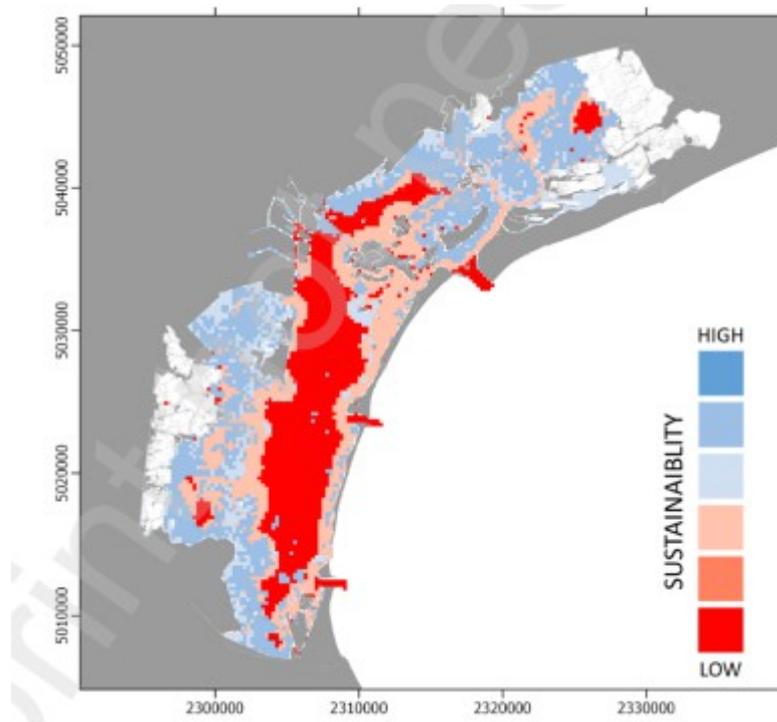

Figure 1. Classification of the sustainability of the ecosystem services bundles in the Venice lagoon. (file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/SSRN-id4436183.pdf)

The impacts of a business-as-usual (BAU) scenario characterized by increasing tourist numbers (assumed to be the main driver), decreasing residents, unbalanced consumption of salt marshes and increasing seagrasses were also assessed (Rova et al., 2019a; Rova et al., 2019b), and showed that if the use of the ES follows the current rythm, this will lead to a massive loss of ES characterized by a trade-off between the ES and tourism, whose significant increase is due to the growing number of tourists, and all other ES, which are instead characterized by a general downward trend (with the exception of erosion prevention, Rova et al., p. 1055, 2019b).

The ES characterizing at least half of the lagoon water bodies, most of which correspond to the not-confined water bodies (Rova et al, 2019a) are at risk of declining over time, with a faster decline in the cases with more negative trends (Lido, Val di Brenta, Tessera, Rova et al., p. 563, 2019a). ES patterns that are unbalanced towards the provision of mediated ES seem most likely to be unsustainable and, indeed, associated with a possible negative evolution of ES over time, due to the impact that human activities related to the provision of mediated ES have on ecosystem functioning (ibid.).

Figure 2. Ecosystem services (ES) variation (%) over time under Business-As-Usual (BAU) scenario. Regulating ES (A), provisioning ES (B), cultural ES except tourism (C), tourism (D). (file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Rova%20et%20al_STOTEN_19.pdf)

Combining the BAU trends with the effects of climate change pressures (effects of relative sea level rise and temperature rise, +50 cm +1 °C by the end of the 21st century, Rova et al., p. 559, 2019a), the ES that are still generally sustainable under the BAU scenario (provided by confined water bodies), will be compromised (and indeed the negative impacts of CC appear to be greater than in not confined waters).

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RSLR will have several impacts on the lagoon SES: negative impacts on salt marshes and bare (intertidal) habitats (Marani et al., 2007, Rizzetto and Tosi, 2011, Rova et al., p. 1053, 2019b) and seagrasses (Saunders et al, 2013, Rova et al., p. 1053, 2019b); a negative impact on residents and an impact on cultural heritage, which is initially positive because the flooding of urban areas is likely to increase the attractiveness to tourists, but then as the RSLR and the frequency and severity of flooding increase, the impact will gradually worsen.

The results clearly show that the BAU scenario is unsustainable. Increasing tourism pressure combined with the decline in population and the progressive degradation of the salt marshes leads to a downward trend in most regulating, provisioning and cultural ES. Climate change exacerbates these trends and worsening an already vulnerable situation.

2.5 The MOSE system

The most recent intervention, which was put into operation for the first time in October 3, 2020, is the MOSE, a system of mobile barriers at the lagoon inlets, which protects Venice from flooding by separating the lagoon from the sea during high tides events, and is intended to be an important adaptation measure in response to relative sea level rise (Rova et al., p. 557, 2019a). However, more flooding will require a higher annual frequency of MOSE closures (Carbognin et al., 2010, Umgiesser and Matticchio, 2006, Rova et al., p. 1053, 2019b), which entails both social and environmental impacts: on the one hand, the impact of RSLR on inhabitants and cultural heritage is offset, but on the other hand, it has a negative impact on the environment due to the altered exchange between lagoon and sea associated with the closure of the inlets, with negative effects on submerged habitats, life cycle maintenance and the self-regulating capacity of the canals.

If the effects of the CC scenarios and the MOSE scenarios are combined, they will lead to a gradual reduction of all ES under more extreme CC scenarios. Mose has a positive effect on tourism, with this effect becoming larger under more extreme scenarios. In any case, the MOSE system alone is not sufficient to prevent the impacts of climate change on the different ES and must therefore be combined with additional management options (Rova et al., p. 1056-1057, 2019b).

MOSE can also be interpreted as a good tool for reading the boundaries of capitalist culture, in which the decoupling between the human being and the environment takes on concrete form.

This system of mechanical barriers is supposed to "save" the city by protecting it from flooding caused by rising sea levels. But what is actually being saved?

The design of this hydraulic structure did not take into account the negative ecological effects resulting from the separation of the lagoon from the sea, i.e. it was not the result of an holistic view

of the problem. The interaction between the sea and the lagoon generates a large part of the ES seen so far and is an indispensable prerequisite for life in Venice as we have known it up to now. Rather than protecting and preserving Venice and its lagoon as an ecosystem, the mechanical barriers protect the Venetian economy. While it is in the nature of things that in the long term it will alter certain ecological relationships that are fundamental to the lagoon ecosystem, the fact that it aims to maintain an unsustainable economy that could potentially deplete resources in the future is an illuminating example of understanding our disconnection from the intrinsic interdependence that connects us to nature: with MOSE in operation under conditions of intense climate change, jeopardizing environmental resources will mean the failure of the tourism economy, and then it will become clear that it is not money that sustains our lives, but ecosystem services.

2.6 TCC and negative externalities

A place has a certain capacity to offer tourist services, but this capacity is finite and limited. When used excessively, it leads to a progressive degradation of ecosystem services, as we have just discussed.

On the other hand, if the tourism industry does not take measures to mitigate the impacts and conserve and protect the resource, but rather contributes to its degradation and over-exploits other ES, the risk of multiple negative externalities arising increases.

The tourism carrying Capacity (TCC), that is, "the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic and socio-cultural environment and unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction" (UNWTO, 1981) of Venice, in 2020 was estimated at around 52,111 people per day, which corresponds to 19,020,515 visitors per year (Bertocchi et al., p.11, 2020).

Data on the average daily number of visitors and the total number of visitors in 2023 are not yet available, but already in 2022, Venice exceeded its TCC, witnessing a return of tourists with numbers even higher than before the pandemic: 70, 80, 90 thousand and more visitors per day. The preliminary number of tourist presences from January to October 2023 is of 7,955,712, which is 15.1 percent more than the previous year (statistica.regione.veneto.it) .

Exceeding the carrying capacity of a system generates negative externalities. The concept of externality is defined as follows: "the set of external effects that the activity of an economic entity (individual, company, public administration) produces on the surrounding environment outside of market transactions. They can be positive or negative." (Bankitalia study, 2019).

Today we know very well that there is a relationship between the production of wealth and the

production of environmental impacts. Since tourism is a very important sector of the economy, it is responsible for generating several negative externalities, suffice it to say that 10% of global GDP generated by tourism is associated with 8% of greenhouse gas emissions (wttc.org).

But you don't have to "look that high" to see negative externalities. In Venice, the most famous and immediately visible negative externality caused by exceeding the tourism carrying capacity is the phenomenon of congestion of calli and campielli, which has to do with the morphological limits of the city. However, externalities are not only determined by the excessive human presence. The cultural and social effects discussed in the previous chapter can also be considered negative externalities. But there are other side effects that all too often remain hidden and undetected, or underestimated and ignored, and which furthermore underline the feedback effect of a poorly managed tourism ecosystem service on the ecological state of the environment.

2.6.1 Water

Keeping an eye on the dynamics and balance of the lagoon was a prerogative for the life of Venice and its inhabitants from the first centuries. Even if they occasionally turned their gaze away from it, attracted by external feats, protecting and preserving the interests of the nation at the expense of the interests of individuals or collective groups that could lead to internal unrest, has always been the goal (Cessi, 1946, Coniato et al, 2016, p. 10), as evidenced by the laws and secrets of the Great Council: "...whoever harms the public waters is an enemy of Venice, for it is founded on the waters and on the waters its existence depends." (Giovan Battista Egnazio, 16th century, Caniato et al, 2016, p. 10).

The health of the environment was a priority for the Serenissima, to be observed especially by those who carried out activities that could compromise the quality of the air and water. While each association of tradesmen was internally autonomous, it was also subject to external behavioral constraints, of which those dictated for reasons of public hygiene were particularly relevant and inflexible,"… since, above all things in the world and by natural instinct, one must try with all diligence to eliminate every cause that is even suspected of producing any infection in inhabited places; taking into special consideration that Venice is founded on marshes and therefore exposed to particularly harmful miasmas, it seems necessary to seek every possible remedy (...)", began a resolution of the Maggior Consiglio in 1413 (Caniato et al, 2016, p. XXIII), which was to prohibit the use of organic substances in textile dyes.

The waters of the lagoon were extensively taken care of and safeguarded, starting with the rios, possible containers for household waste and the remains of commercial and artisanal activities.

They were protected by a series of strict regulations, compliance with which was entrusted to the districts and the aforementioned associations or schools under the direct control of the *Provveditori della Sanità*. Countless serious rules, often colorful and detailed, regulated trades harmful to the environment, in particular the tanning of hides, the dyeing of fabrics, chemical activities in general and the processing of metals, of which slag and harmful fumes were particularly feared.

Directives were so meticulous and detailed as to verge on nitpicking, justified on a case-by-case basis with descriptions of inconveniences to be avoided and abuses to be suppressed. Together with the regulations for those whose profession could deplete natural resources (such as the fish in the lagoon or the forests on the territory of the Republic), and with the large, extensive interventions, especially of a hydraulic nature (which were also carried out to avoid the "mixing of fresh and salt water", cause of malaria), they gave rise to talk of an "ecological" policy of the Serenissima.

Although the general objectives pursued by these concepts and, of course, the corresponding terminology were unknown to the Venetians, who were not even scientifically aware of many causal relationships between various phenomena (such as, e.g., the the transmission of malaria by mosquitoes breeding in the marshes), and although their approach was empirical and dictated by their exclusive interest, it seems that the mere fact that they understood this interest in a truly collective sense and equipped themselves with appropriate institutions and management methods to pursue it, in fact led them to a behavior toward the lagoon environment that is still in many ways a desirable concrete example and a demonstration of the compatibility between human beings and nature (ivi, p. XXIV).

The start of the 19th century witnesses, instead, the historical process which the geographer Kaika calls the "removal" of water (2005), with its transformation from a highly symbolic liquid into a "technical stuff", its concealment in pipes that made it possible to construct the idea of the city and the "modern house" as autonomous, separate and independent from environmental processes. Thus, water becomes a fetish, it is separated from society throughout the typical power of commodities, becoming available in a double process of concealment: the system of water production (i.e., the technical, administrative and political system) are deprived by presenting it as "natural", but at the same time the environmental relations are deprived by being "nature" controlled by technology, whose networks and relations remain hidden from us.

In Venice, water has always been the condition for the success or failure of the city. Today it is assumed that the prerequisite for success is to control the water level, to monitor and contain the tides so as not to interfere with the normal functioning of the Venetian economic system.

But it's not just about that. As we have seen, water is a fundamental condition for the production of all the ES, from climate regulation and lifecycle maintenance to fishing, tourism, navigation, traditional rowing and therefore for human well-being.

In current times, while lagoon water holds an endless fascination for those approaching it for the first time, it is an everyday element for those who live there, so much so that it is taken for granted as a resource and, in extreme cases, a space to hold trash. But water does not absorb or dispose of it forever, it instead contains it and keeps it hidden (albeit to a certain extent) from our eyes.

The interpretation of water as an element from which one can draw indefinitely is a good example of the great process of distancing I highlighted earlier, a troublesome obfuscation as a social and cultural phenomenon that disconnects us precisely where we are most interdependent. This means that in the not too distant future, all the ES it can offer us could potentially come to an end, to the detriment of our wellbeing.

2.6.1.1 Newer and older sources of concern in the lagoon

The water of the lagoon is a treasure chest of intricate, hidden and highly complex ecological relationships. The lagoon appears like a laboratory open to the experiments of the most imaginative.

As I mentioned previously, negative externalities arise not only when the carrying capacity is exceeded in numbers (over-tourism) but also from the way resources are exploited and managed. A new source of concern in Venice are emerging contaminants, chemicals used in a variety of areas, from personal care and hygiene to industry, agriculture and boat maintenance. Some are emitted constantly and in large quantities, others in smaller quantities and others have even been banned, but this does not completely eradicate their presence in the lagoon. Different combinations of several contaminants lead to more or less risky outcomes for wildlife and human health, such as chronic toxicity and estrogenic effects (Charles and Darbre, 2009; Zhang et al, 2012).

A major contributor to the spread of chemicals in the lagoon is the fact that Venice historical center is almost lacking a sewage system, so waste substances used by people living in or visiting Venice are discharged directly into the canals. Considering the diary production of 250 liters of untreated wastewater per person (Zhang et al., 2013), it is obvious that the greater the anthropogenic presence, the greater the danger. These contaminants include Fragrances Materials, contained in Personal Care Products (PCPs) such as Salicylates, the use of which has increased significantly in recent years due to the very low prices of these products (under $5/kg). Among them, Benzyl Salicylate, a sunscreen listed in the EU list of allergenic fragrances (Heisterberg et al., 2011) was recently found to induce estrogenic responses in human breast cancer cells, possibly

promoting the development of the disease (Charles and Darbre, 2009) (estrogenic activity comparable to bisphenol A (BPA), Zhang et al., 2012).

The spread of ormono-like substances such as EE2, a synthetic hormone (CAS: 57-63-6), which is mainly used in birth control pills and is classified as an endocrine disrupting chemical, cannot be ruled out either, as it has been frequently detected in the aquatic environment. These substances can sink into the sediment and eventually accumulate in biota: The effects of exposure to an environmentally realistic concentration of these substances together with herbicides (glyphosate, a regulator of plant growth) in mussels (M. alloprovincialis) show a potential ecotoxicological risk affecting haemocyte and biochemical tissue parameters.

Sediments are another unconventional source of pollution, as substances often accumulate there and can be redistributed by many factors. For example, waves generated by boating (Cecconi et al., 2002) and local clam harvesting techniques (especially Rupitapes philippinarum), in combination with tidal fluxes and wind fetch, can influence local hydrodynamics and lift sediments and are therefore a realistic source of redistribution of pollutants, even those that are no longer used (Berto et al., 2007), such as TBT compounds, described as "probably the most toxic chemical compound ever deliberately introduced by societies into natural waters" (Goldberg, 1986).

These organotin compounds have entered the lagoon through antifouling paints, which were used as cost-effective biocides to prevent biological fouling of boat hulls (Alzieu, 2000, Terlizzi et al., 2001). Following their ban in the first 2000s, their use has declined, but they are still present in the marine environment (Sousa et al, 2007, Rato et al, 2009, Ruiz et al, 2008, Barroso et al, 2011, Cuevas et al, 2014), confirming that sediments are an important reservoir and secondary source of these compounds, as the degradation rate of TBT in sediments is low compared to water: re-suspension and desorption processes re-mobilize them in the water column and ensure that they easily accumulate in organisms (Santos et al., 2004, Sousa et al., 2007). The most frequently detected effect on the studied molluscs (N. Nitidus) at the endocrine system level is imposex, the superimposition of male traits on female molluscs (Smith, 1971), which has additionally been widely used as a specific biomarker to monitor TBT exposure (Titley-O'Neal et al., 2011).

After the ban, TBT concentrations and imposex levels observed in the N. nitidus populations from the Venice lagoon decreases compared to the pre-ban situation, but indicated that there was still significant TBT contamination, confirming that anthropogenic activities leading to resuspension of sediments could be considered as a source of TBT pollution (Berto et al., 2007), as higher concentrations were found in places with intensive recreational, public and commercial boat traffic and in the vicinity of harbors, shipyards and marinas (e.g. San Nicolò del Lido, Celestia, Tronchetto, Val da Rio, Murano, Pellestrina).

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Any disturbance of potentially contaminated sediments, such as that associated with the dredging of new navigable canals, can result in organic pollutants being resuspended in water columns and entering the aquatic food chain (Frignani et al., 2005, Teatini et al., 2017, Corami et al., 2020). In fact, many sediment cores taken near the Porto Marghera industrial area were found to exceed the limits set by the European and Italian regulations for the maintenance of a good environmental quality status.

In addition to local anthropogenic emissions, which are mainly associated with the discharge of untreated or partially treated wastewater (Pavoni et al., 1990, Vecchiato et al., 2016, Ostoich et al., 2018), and shipping (Contini et al., 2011, Gregoris et al., 2016, Scarpa et al., 2019), the lagoon is exposed to runoff from the neighbouring urban and agricultural areas, to the inflow of irrigation canals and industrial effluents during periods of heavy rainfall (Sommerfreund et al., 2010), and vehicle emissions transported from the mainland (Stortini et al., 2009).

POPs and n-Alkanes still pose a significant threat: Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), Organochlorine pesticides (OCPs), Polychlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxins and furans (PCDD/Fs), and n-Alkanes are due to both legacy pollution (sources no longer discharging into the environment) and still active emission sources, such as the direct or accidental discharge of petroleum-related substances from the petrochemical plant in Porto Marghera (Pizzini et al., 2021).

2.7 The need for an holistic approach

The environment of the lagoon is the condition that makes not only Venetian tourism but also Venetian life possible: it is the territory that Venice has sewn around its natural frame, its useful space, minimal but essential territory, "the Valva, in which Venice is the pearl" (Caniato et al, 2016, p. 3).

If we fail to recognize our ecological dependencies and our position in the ecosystem, the illusion could arise that the exclusive use of the city and the lagoon as a tourist resource could be a possibility. This may even be possible, but not through the current forms of exploitation, and the concept of Ecosystem Services has effectively demonstrated this. In relation to the Venetian context, they were particularly useful in illustrating the impact that tourism can potentially have on environmental resources. Indeed, the discussion has shown that the promotion of the local economy through conventional tourism is very much linked to trade-offs between the traditional exploitation of nature and the conventional tourism-based economy, which has become an indispensable resource on which the survival of the place is based, but which at the same time also threatens its survival.

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While it is true that tourism as a cultural resource is based on intangible values, it is important to reflect on its consumptive (nature-based) nature so as not to obscure the way in which resources are over-consumed and negative, even unexpected, externalities are generated, otherwise the tourism bubble can potentially be reinforced (Pueyo- Ros, p. 10, 2018).

However, if tourism is well-managed, and considered holistically, it has the potential to preserve the ecosystem and natural resources on which it is based. In the third chapter we will see how.

3. Sustainable alternatives

3.1 Forms of resistance: Poveglia Per Tutti

"Mass tourism" was born as a great opportunity, a positive "conquest". What had long been the exclusive preserve of the bourgeoisie was extended to the sphere of everyone; the "masses". That was the positive aspect of the phenomenon. But if the contrast of conditions between "at home" and "far away", the attraction of discontinuity, was at the heart of travel culture, the rise of mass tourism seemed to weaken it. "Leisure (…) is not the antithesis of daily life but the continuation of it in dramatized or spectacular form" (Rojek, 1993, p. 213), we could use this sentence to frame the point "theatrically". But in a more elementary way we could simply say that there is a continuity, an interconnectedness, and I hope I have been able to show that in this work.

People have gradually started to realize that this wonderful opportunity is not just an economic and commercial fact, i.e. the consumption of goods and services in a place other than one's own home, but something that has much broader implications and consequences.

In addition to those already mentioned, there is also the economic aspect, which is absolutely not to be neglected, since conventional tourism reinforces the dynamics of wealth concentration: generally, a large part of the revenue brought by tourists remains in the hands of investors (with very little benefiting the local community), and affects the local economy by creating volatile jobs that lead to an increase in local price. The purchasing power of tourists is often greater than that of locals, leading to price increases that cause gentrification (Ruth Glass, 1964, from "gentry"), making life unaffordable for residents in the long term.

The socio-spatial consequences are considerable if urban regeneration only affects the built environment and not the socio-economic sphere (by not stopping speculative phenomena): over time, the social fabric of the affected neighborhoods becomes detached and identity changes drastically. The local culture remains only in a plasticized form, impoverishing and trivializing the tourist experience.

In Venice, I met with Giancarlo Ghigi, former president of the association "Poveglia per tutti" to talk about this aspect and about venetian's forms of resistance to the matter.

Giancarlo tells me that he is part of the community of those Venetians and acquired Venetians that has been trying to swim against the tide for long. In his opinion, Venice today looks like a diffuse hotel or an open-air shopping center that also houses residents. He happened to see a city in Sweden that resembles the tragic fate that could one day befall Venice, that of a city built as a

theme park, where arts and crafts are reproduced for the use and consumption of tourists, with customs, architectural and urban typologies that no longer exist, but which are nevertheless simulated because they effectively create an atmosphere that no contemporary Swede experiences, *"... come un distillato di quello che non hai più e quindi vuoi vederlo attraverso questa forma, rappresentazione, una specie di teatro della realtà"*.

At the same time, Giancarlo believes that Venice can exist again as a city, *"... la maggioranza di questi nuotatori in cui mi comprendo, tende ancora, con una parte di sé, a salvare la città, o quello che ne resta"*, and that the right option is to think about how the city can be rebuilt, rather than trying to revive a bygone era.

Today some of the ways of life that characterized the city until a few decades ago, which no longer exist and cannot even be remembered, have been reborn in the form of simulations, and that is the hardest thing to get rid of. Giancarlo gives the example of the gondoliers, *"... anche il tour della gondola è un giro di giostra"*, as Guccini said in the song: the thirty-minute gondola ride is a representation of an earlier use, namely romantic tour, which also arose from an earlier use, namely that of means of transportation, a reality that no longer exists today. What we see is its sublimation, which has become the thirty-minute gondola, and which will probably one day be replaced by another sublimation *"... poi la successiva sarà la gondola virtuale e la gondola robot, non lo so dove andremo.."*.

The same logic goes for listòn:

> ... Il listòn di piazza San Marco me lo aveva raccontato la mia bisnonna, che era del 1890, io l'ho conosciuta che aveva 93 anni... la mattina in cui crollò il campanile, stava facendo il listòn, la passeggiata lungo quella che mio nonno chiamava "il salotto di Venezia", e seguiva questa traccia, una traccia bianca, che si faceva avanti e indietro per incontrare gli altri, ha dei ghirigori questa piazza, fatti di marmo e disegnati per terra, e siccome tratteggiano una linea, ecco il gioco del listòn, camminare nel listòn, almeno così lei me la raccontava... (Giancarlo's interview 2024).

The Listòn - if not a sublimation of a previous practice - was part of a new phase of the city; the city was becoming something else, since the squiggles used for listòn were previously used as place markers for stalls selling fruit and vegetables. So we can visualize the image of a completely different city, in which San Marco Square was a market center. When the market left the place, the Venetians reappropriated the square in the form of the promenade and redefined the space according to its use, *"Ecco, quello che ci è stato trasmesso come memoria, diremmo tradita, è che*

non potevamo fare più neanche questa passeggiata; quello di cui non abbiamo più memoria è che fosse una piazza di mercato che potesse essere un centro". So it almost seems as if, with each cycle, memory reinterprets the last thing it has experienced, but continues to forget what preceded it. And so Giancarlo asks with this vision how many things have been completely forgotten and we can only reinvent them today in a sublimated form of an idea that's been constructed.

According to Giancarlo, it is more realistic to reinvent ourselves, to accept the fact that what we have not experienced or witnessed in its becoming cannot be reconstructed in these terms, but must be reinvented, and this is a challenge for traditionalists:

> ... tutori della tradizione, ancorati proprio in senso letterale alle pietre di Venezia. Io mi ancorerei piuttosto allo spirito, o a, se vuoi, l'eresia di Venezia, per costruire una nuova eresia, ma non tentare di trasformare un'eresia in una nuova chiesa. Tanto per capirci: non vorrei inginocchiarmi all'altare di Venezia, mi piacerebbe che accogliessimo la sfida di andare oltre... Io credo che la città in quei termini non possa più esistere, o sarebbe una simulazione, un parco a tema, un luogo per nostalgici, poi di un tempo che nessuno ha vissuto, tra l'altro. Ecco io accetterei la sfida di re inventare questa città. Questa discontinuità serve anche a noi Veneziani, ed è quello che io vado dicendo ai miei amici che continuano a difendere questo tessuto urbano, per rendersi conto che la sfida va fatta su un tessuto un po' diverso. (Giancarlo's interview 2024).

A way needs to be find for the city to renew "the way Venice tries to resist in its origins" (Gregotti 2012, pp. 95-96). The city cannot be considered only "from a contemplative point of view, but from that of the progressive construction of a machine for living together that responds to a coherent set of functions and meanings" (Bettini 1978, p.52): beyond the myth, in short, and for it to continue to function, one cannot disregard the people who inhabit it. In the words of Wladimiro Dorigo: "It remains to be said that in the face of the 'monument' of Venice, which must be restored and preserved, it has been forgotten that restoration and preservation are unimaginable or pointless and empty, without coming to terms with the community that nevertheless lives in the monument, with the monument, of the monument. A city is not restored like a painting, simply by cleaning its color" (Dorigo 1973, p.28).

This is the meaning of Giancarlo's partecipation in the life of the associative fabric, and in this specific case Poveglia per Tutti. The adventure began one day in 2014, when a friend of his, Andrea, the owner of a bar in Giudecca, learned from the newspaper that the municipality of Venice was not making any choice with respect to a decision of the State property to put up for sale the island of Poveglia, an abandoned medieval island full of history and actively frequented by the

community, which the Ministery of Finance had already tried and failed to sell for a ridiculous sum in the 1980s.

The island was perceived by the "water Venetians", i Veneziani d'acqua, as the last island not yet privatized, an integral part of the city, actively lived: they still go there to swim, barbecue, row, and spend time together. The small Giudecca community perceived the lack of reappropriation of the island by the government of the time as a kind of betrayal, *"abbandonata dagli amministratori e da chi avrebbe dovuto averne cura e messa in vendita come soprammobile usato che si è stanchi di guardare... ma la storia non si vende"*. So Andrea proposed a meeting, and he was surprised to encounter such heterogeneous participation. There were Giudecchini who represented different political identities, *"... c'era quello che faceva il commercialista, quello che come idea per il futuro dell'isola diceva: "costruiamoci un porticciolo, ci arricchiamo tutti quanti"..."*. Here, however, the idea that it was abandoned and being sold through an auction base, had led them to say "let us do something". The ideas were not just about protection, they were mixed, there were those who wanted to protect it, those who wanted to use it as an opportunity, those who imagined it as a park, those who imagined it as an utopia. *"... Io stavo demolendo le pareti di una mia casetta, ero andato lì credendo poco in quest'iniziativa sinceramente, vestito in tuta da lavoro sporca di cemento, e avevo in tasca una busta delle lettere e una penna, non c'avevo altro. Mentre siamo lì che parliamo, nel retro della busta delle lettere sentendo proprio quello che viene fuori dalla riunione, scrivo tutte le cose che proprio non mi piacciono"*. Giancarlo noted what it was proposed and what he disagreed with: from "we want to turn it into a port" he wrote "the island will be environmentally friendly", from "we will divide it up, we will make shares" he wrote "the island will not be divided up by shares, it will be a kind of foundation that belongs to no one, taken care by everyone", and so on. Four were the important points Giancarlo noted. At the end of the evening, he read out the draft, which contradicted practically half of the things proposed.

Surprisingly, they were all enthusiastic, so much that they asked him to become the president of the association. Those four main points became the project's constitutional charter: "1. The green part of the island will be dedicated to freely accessible and free public parks and urban gardens. 2. The built part of the island, which can generate profits – the characteristics and ethical limits of which we will decide together, in accordance with these founding points – will serve to cover the operating costs of the public part. 3. The management of the island will be non-profit and environmnetally sustainable. All profits will then be reinvested in the island itself. 4. Should we obtain the management of the island, the share subscribed will entitle the member to participate equally in the decisions on the fate of Poveglia, but it is not and will not be intended as a form of

profit-sharing, nor as a shareholding, nor as a source of privileges of any kind for any member" ([poveglia-grande-new.pdf (povegliapertutti.org)](poveglia-grande-new.pdf)).

Member's meeting held on June 2nd, 2014 at the Tese dell'Arsenale (Federico Sutera's photo)
(file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/poveglia-grande-new%20(2).pdf)

Giancarlo tells me this anecdote to illustrate how the Venetian mind is always torn between guardianship and the idea of "taking part in the city's banquet". *"... Questa cosa è abbastanza irrisolta, alcuni di quelli che si mobilitano per la tutela di Venezia, poi nel privato fanno anche cose contraddittorie per vivere e continuare a vivere in questa città"*. It's a contradiction that eats away at the soul, *"... e questa cosa è una cosa con la quale tutti scendiamo in qualche modo a patti. Banalmente una casa costa 400000 euro, 400000 ce li ha un ricco che vive di rendite, e una persona che lavora con un lavoro impiegatizio non può certo averla, quindi ci sono mille contraddizioni"*. What the Poveglia project discovered, however, is that an unresolved spirit is also oriented towards protection, in fact this ambivalent feeling felt safe in the hands of Giancarlo: *"... perchè è quello che propone che non facciamo solo un disastro anche in questo caso"*. So this other soul awakened as if in an act of life. This was the key that led the association to raise half a million euros over the next two to three months, *"... cioè, c'è stato un risveglio di questa dignità che era speculare a quello che stava accadendo in quella stanzetta, e che ha coinvolto praticamente tutte le famiglie della città, perchè avere 5000 iscritti in una città di 50000 abitanti vuol dire che ne hai uno per famiglia che ha messo 100 euro per comprarsi un pezzo di nulla, che non comprava nulla"*. The news at this point became international, then national, and then it rippled back across the city

with a blast. So the association of tour guides, hoteliers, gondoliers, they all bought shares in this "science fiction" mission, and that is precisely due to that unresolved soul, *"... ci sono addirittura due associazione di guide turistiche e si sono iscritte entrambe facendo una donazione importante. Perchè? Perchè siamo spezzati, forse qualcuno ha anche donato per lavarsi la coscienza, per dire: almeno su quello mettiamoci il cuore, su tutto il resto la tasca, ma su quello mettiamoci il cuore"*. It is important to read about this "bipolar" soul of the Venetians, *"... Perchè è un aspetto che sennò ti fa vedere solo le ombre o solo le luci della città"*. These are very contradictory images – perhaps it's simply because we live in a city that is so focused on tourism. A city that is beautiful on the one hand and ugly on the other. It is hideous precisely because it is so extremely beautiful, *"... non so come dire... non contrasta con uno sfondo, non è uno sfondo grigio che non contrasta col grigio, è uno sfondo colorato che contrasta con qualsiasi grigio, e quindi se tu sei lì, e crei un edificio grigio, ti senti subito in colpa perchè sembra di rovinare un qualcosa, e allo stesso tempo per vivere dentro questo mazzo di fiori, devi reciderli, quindi è un irrisolto"*. Nevertheless, Poveglia per tutti is a very vivid association, or perhaps that's the unresolved soul to make it a vivid association, but historically these kind of associations have never included certain categories, such as that of taxists, *"... ecco, il fatto che i taxisti si siano iscritti in massa in un certo momento... ti dice che persino le categorie diremo più ciniche, senza offesa per i cinici, come i taxisti, hanno avuto cuore, un' idea che qualcosa dovesse restare in un'altra dimensione"*.

What made people identify was the intention to buy the island to let nobody have it; that was the message in a nutshell. It was a language that was recognized. In its statutes, Poveglia did not use the language of typical heritage associations such as "defend, prevent", but rather "we want to buy", because only the community is able to protect a common good to the end, "... and any other structure in an intermediate instance betrays the action instead", thus achieving a boom in membership.

On a national level, this caused a great stir, because it was the years immediately following the government's attempt to liquidate a large part of the state's heritage, some 15 billion in the form of privatizations, which included castles, villas, etc., various cultural assets, that triggered an indignant reaction throughout Italy. The case of Poveglia, i.e. a small town community taking possession of an estate to prevent it from ending up in the cauldron of privatized estates, captured the imagination at the time. But how did it end?

The privatizations took a bit of a back seat, and so the alarm that partly created the ground for the culture of these initiatives died down, for a while the State also blocked the privatizations, everything was slowed down (it no longer reacted, it no longer called the auctions, it did not create grounds for the council, it let things go quietly). The association has suffered a little from this

dilatation of time, but it still exists and still meets. State ownership has never made this concession, so they have not been able to do anything other than temporary initiatives. The association still keeps almost all the money it has collected: 72% of members believe that they will find a way to achieve something.

The purpose of the association is not only to protect, but also to demonstrate a different way of dealing with heritage. They want to invest half a million and create a way of experiencing this place that is not touristy or commercial, that is a little utopian and combines elements of the past with those of "a "post-future" through a participatory method: *"... questo, a mio modo di vedere, è quello che ha spaventato i poteri forti, cioè concedere esperimenti da "isola delle rose" a questo gruppo di squinternati che però si dimostrano anche molto pratici raccogiendo 102 tra architetti e ingegneri per creare un piano di riqualificazione serio... ciò spaventava, spaventa perchè faceva venire meno il ruolo di mediatore di questo fenomeno... questo effettivamente è il motivo che ha fatto convergere tutti nel tenerci lontani da Poveglia"*.

Today, the ambivalent and unresolved soul tends more towards the local entrepreneurs represented by the current municipality *" ... che ha colto molto bene l'altra metà dell'anima veneziana. L'ha colta perfettamente, e loro si sentono tutelati di più, nei loro interessi"*, but it is still a bipolar soul, the other polarity is still there, it is wide, and it is evident from the dialogues, the mobilizations and the defense of the public good gradually becoming privatized. Giancarlo reiterates *"... c'è una seconda anima, è un irrisolto"*. Of course, the other side, that of profit, has the upper hand in this moment, *"... e forse, perdendo altri 5-6000 abitanti in centro storico, sarà assolutamente più forte"*.

Poveglia's island as seen from the lagoon (Gabriele Lazzarini's foto)
(file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/poveglia-grande-new%20(2).pdf)

3.2 VERAS

Another form of resistance that deserves to be mentioned is VERAS, acronym of "Vignole Energia Rinnovabile Agricoltura Sana", a non-profit association founded by a group of inhabitants of the island of Vignole. Unlike Poveglia per Tutti, the community managed to obtain a unused state-owned area of more than four hectares, where they initiated an environnmental restoration plan to develop initiatives to enhance the area. The project has two cornerstones: to produce healthy food in the natural environment and to generate clean km0 energy.

Luigi Di Prinzio, the main initiator of the project, tells me how he came up with the idea, *"... sono arrivato a Venezia ad Ottobre 1963, avevo 17 anni. Ero uno studente, mi ero iscritto allo Iuav. La città era una cosa che tu non puoi nemmeno lontanamente immaginare... c'erano 110-120000 mila abitanti, più del doppio di adesso... c'erano ancora botteghe e artigiani... c'erano ancora i contrabbandieri, c'erano le bancarelle dove tu compravi 5 nazionali... non te lo puoi immaginare, sono cose immaginabili"*. Luigi tells me that the problem for young people today is that they are unable to connect the image they see in front of them with the situation of fifty years ago. And why should this transition have started fifty years ago? From Luigi's point of view, the inability of the economic and political class to express an idea other than that of tourism began at that time, *"... il turismo è la cosa più semplice: città storica, fatta apposta..."*. The great industrial crisis of Porto Marghera, the petrolchemical crisis, generated the inability to imagine a different economic-productive model. Venice was then a reality that was not yet the subject of project politics, and the world of contruction tourism was born without thinking about how to build – if in a negative sense, but nonetheless at least rationally – this project of systemic exploitation that began with the impetus of great initiatives, as the Expo and Pink Floyd concert, to bring boundless crowds to Venice:

Io personalmente, non sono Veneziano ma ho conosciuto una Venezia completamente diversa, l'ho sempre amata e la amo moltissimo, ma non posso sopportare... e la ragione per cui sono qua alle Vignole è esattamente questa. Allora, ti spiego. Martedì per esempio sono andato a tagliarmi i capelli. Ho preso il battello alle 10:07, mi sono tagliato i capelli, sono andato a prendere qualcosa alla coop là vicino, sono tornato con il battello di ritorno delle 11:25. A Venezia ci vado soltanto... per ragioni importanti... all'ospedale, vado, e il primo battello che trovo io torno. C'è troppo casino, le masse sconfinate... un turismo veramente sgraziato. (Luigi's interview 2024).

For Luigi, life in the historic center of Venice became increasingly unbearable. He therefore decided to move to Vignole, a small island of the lagoon just a few minutes by vaporetto from Venice, which is mainly used for agriculture, craft activities in the field of pleasure boating and for the maintenance of the navigable channels of the lagoon. The island has an extraordinary heritage: an environment rich in vegetation and biodiversity, with organic crops of high quality, and an exceptional horticultural production including the purple artichoke, *castraure*, a Slowfood Presidium.

Luigi tells me, *"... Io sono arrivato qua dieci anni fa ... intanto ho dovuto passare un paio di anni per farmi conoscere, perchè sono stato visto come uno straniero che arrivava a colonizzare, tipico dei piccoli paesi... poi man mano ci siamo conosciuti..."*, at the beginning it was not so easy to establish a relationship with the inhabitants of the island, but from November 12, 2019, the day of the historic, extraordinary flood, things changed completely, *"... quando siamo andati tutti quanti sott'acqua. Io qua mi sono salvato per un pelo, sono riuscito a mettere le paratie, è entrato proprio un filo di acqua... Davanti alla finestra... vedevo... le onde con i cavalloni qua davanti... era veramente impressionante"*.

The water exceeded the half-meter mark on the island, a condition to which the inhabitants had to adapt for more than a week, and triggered a spring, a mechanism of mutual aid, *"... ha fatto scattare un qualche tipo di riflessione... intanto si è messo in moto questo meccanismo di solidarietà reciproca"*, and then a committee was formed, *"... e da lì abbiamo cominciato a ragionare su un futuro per questa isola"*, for a sustainable future, *"... il comitato dei residenti delle Vignole ha figliato uno spin-off. Uno spin-off che è Veras... Dopo un anno dal '19 sono riuscito a mettere insieme le persone dell'isola, quasi tutti"*.

Carlo Zangrando, on the morning of November 13th, 2019
(Energia bene Comune evoluzione progetto Vignole (1).PDF)

This surreal event had been a moment of reflection for the community, a shock that led to the realization that something was not working in the system. Luigi, that neighbor who had once provoked skepticism, instead proved to be the key to bringing people together at such a delicate time, to think together about a project that would enable the community itself, and young people in particular, to become the protagonists of a collaborative and supportive future that would promote the conditions for living and working on the island, *"... godendo della sua preziosa qualità ambientale, delle sue risorse e delle sue potenzialità"*.

As chance would have it, this extraordinary culmination coincided with the European push for commitment to renewable energy: the European Red2 Directive of 2018 (turned into law by the Italian government in 2019), which introduced the concept of the prosumer, i.e. the producer and consumer of locally energy from renewable sources, in the forms of self-consumption.

The problem of land abandonment in the Venetian lagoon is an ongoing process, dramatically illustrated by the decline in the resident population on the large lagoon islands such as Murano, Sant'Erasmo and on the small island of Vignole itself. For many years, since the 1980s, a new cultural and social awareness has been developing of the need to redevelop and reuse abandoned places. The Veras Association project arise from a profound reflection on this state of abandonment and has two cornerstones: the production of clean energy in km0 as part of a renewable energy

community through a small photovoltaic system, and the ecological rehabilitation of the area for the production of healthy food on a small scale.

This is already happening on the island, and the project intends to improve this tradition and make it better known by creating the Vignole Public Agro-Environmental Park, where a system of small gardens for the schools of the area can create opportunities for awareness and culture of healthy food and its relationship with health and proper behavior in the territories and cities. The two points are integrated into a series of awareness-raising and educational activities aimed primarily (but not only) at school-age youth and relevant institutions, promoting understanding of the links between the development of new clean energies and healthy organic agriculture:

> ... c'è un laboratorio dove facciamo piantare una piantina piccolina o dei semi... ognuno ne pianta due o tre, spiegandogli la pianta, facendogli vedere che delicata che è, che piccolina che è, come piantarla, poi l'annaffiano e... quando tornano dopo un mese si trovano la loro insalata, o il sedano che sia, o la rapa che sia... ognuno raccoglie le piantine che ha piantato e se le porta a casa... un altro gruppo li porta a fare il giro dell'area, immergendosi nel bamboo, facendo un momento di libertà assoluta dentro al bamboo, gridando, cantando, girando intorno i rami di bamboo... un altro laboratorio li porta nel sentiero delle erbe aromatiche dove gli facciamo annusare, toccare... pianta per pianta spiegandogli le varie differenze, quello che stimolano, e poi ognuno si prende qualche fogliolina mista e si compone la sua acqua aromatizzata nella borracia... ascoltando tutto ciò che circonda nella zona, c'è un silenzio immenso però si sentono tutti i suoni della natura... un altro è un laboratorio con le lenti di ingrandimento in un'altra zona boscosa... dove vanno a scoprire tutto quello che popola il sottobosco, quindi i vari insetti, lombrichi, i funghi... conoscendo il micromondo che c'è sotto di noi... quello che noi calpestiamo ma di cui non ci rendiamo conto... Al camp estivo di quest'anno invece verrano proposte varie attività tra cui l'esperienza della voga, dell'arrampicata sugli alberi, e quella della pesca con le canne di bamboo... (Francesca's interview 2024).

The importance of the project can really be summarized in these four terms: Development of natural land relations, organic agriculture, clean energy, health.

Veras is one of the very first experiences of building an energy community in Italy and immediately found an energy supplier willing to finance the project. Unfortunately, the municipality is delaying the whole process of building the greenhouse with photovoltaic panels, *"... perchè siamo fermi da tre anni? La ragione è molto semplice: perchè tutto quanto passa esclusivamente sul tavolo del sindaco che mette o non mette un timbro. Questa, siccome rispetto alla città è... una formica rispetto ai dinosauri, è lì che giace..."*. But at least this reality cannot be

bought. However, a decisive step has now been taken: the urban planning department of the municipality of Venice has drawn up the urban planning variance, a document that serves to coordinate the contents and specific drawings of the project with the master plan, *"... dovremmo essere veramente molto vicini al timbro, per andare in giunta, poi in consiglio comunale e... avere la strada libera. Andando avanti con grande testardaggine e volontà in questa direzione"*.

Luigi proudly tells me that Veras is not only a 'non-profit organization', but also an ETS, a third-sector company whose special feature is that it is run on a voluntary basis: from the president to the hundred upright members, everyone is a volunteer, no one is paid.

(https://www.instagram.com/p/CzwH3uSqKbR/?img_index=1)

3.3 Sustainable tourism

Collective organizations such as Poveglia per Tutti and VERAS are valuable sources for pragmatically rethinking the city as an integrative fabric, as a living organism, against the individualism that has long permeated it and has crept in even in the most unlikely places. But could we also reimagine tourism, rethink, revalue it and shape it as something positive, or is it too late, since contempt is total?

In this context, I asked Giancarlo what he thought about the possibility of distributing the flow of tourists across the city, which should theoretically relieve some important sights and make traffic in the city more fluid. He replied, *"... penso sia una dissuasione"* it's not a new idea, various administrations had been thinking about it since the early 00s. One councilor at the time had already proposed creating access points in less frequented areas such as Castello, because the logic was that the impact on local conditions would be milder if the whole city had some of this concentrated tourism, but Giancarlo sharply criticizes this proposal, *"... una incapacità totale di lettura del tessuto cittadino. Noi Veneziani percepiamo Piazza San Marco e Strada Nova da decenni come un qualcosa di esterno al nostro tessuto cittadino. Solo le periferie - e non queste arterie principali, queste "autostrade"- ci appartengono, siamo come i topi, i topi che evitano le strade principali... e lì ci sono i nuovi listòn, i nuovi punti di ritrovo, ci sono baretti come questo, ma sono fuori dai flussi. Questo baretto non può essere in Strada Nova"*. Spreading tourism throughout the city calls into question the last places that Venetians identify with, such as those little bacari which are frequented by the community, *"... quindi il motivo per restare in questo posto"*. Expansion, according to Giancarlo, would not be the solution, but a naive, childish way of solving a serious urban planning problem, *"... adesso però non ci sono riusciti loro ma google maps... leggi la recensione che dice che si tratta di un baretto frequentato solo da locali, e ti dà anche la stradina nelle callette... google maps è riuscito a fare quello che volevano, spalmare i turisti in tutta la città e infatti i luoghi che diremo "dei veneziani", o non ci sono più o si contano sulle dita di una mano"*.

This, according to Giancarlo, is the basic idea that has permeated all management programs since the early 1900s aimed at accelerating the landing in the Venetian dimension in order to make it more usable, purchasable and buyable. But this is the opposite of Venice, *"... l'idea di costruire la Venezia da dieci minuti è proprio il contrario della città... tu devi metterci 5 ore solo per entrare secondo me, se ci metti 5 ore solo per entrare, fai sì che solo chi ama questa città ci arrivi! Se ci metti 30 secondi, fanno il teletrasporto dalla luna solo per fare un selfie in Piazza San Marco, cioè hai ottenuto proprio la volgarizzazione massima del tuo prodotto"*. If we think about Venice as a

product, because after all it is a product, then it is valuable when it is not easily accessible, *"... non puoi fare un ascensore nell'Himalaya, perde tutto il suo senso"*. It is the crossing that makes you realize the importance of a place, *"... se invece ci piombi con il teletrasporto non sai niente..."*. *"... Io mi ricordo, lavoravo in piazza San Marco, vendevo cartoline, dovevo pagarmi gli studi, sono l'incarnazione della bipolarità, e quando lavoravo lì le domande erano assurde"*. The faster you speed up, the more you tour, the more congestion on Saturdays and Sundays, and you find yourself leading tours where the customer asks: where are we today? In Turin, in Milan, where are we? Where is the Tower of Pisa? But we are in Venice, ma'am! It is not difficult to notice the feeling of confusion among tourists.

The most recent innovation introduced by the city council is a system that charges a fee of 5 euros to enter the city on 29 days in 2024, which have been characterized by a very high turnout in the city historically. *"...Se vogliamo restituire l'immagine a noi stessi, che viviamo in un museo, bigliettiamo tutti gli amici che ci vengono a trovare, allora dopo di che, te hai ancora l'identità di un essere umano o sei un essere umano e anche un bigliettaio?"*. And what about the restricted access? Instead of privatizing the city, Giancarlo would rather close the international airport, *"... che la gente per arrivare a Venezia ci deve mettere 8 ore, non una. Deve scendere a Milano, prendere un treno e arrivare qua, e allora arrivano solo quelli che amano questa città, che io voglio averli tutti qua! Di quelli non voglio lasciarne a casa neanche uno. Non voglio trovarmi gente quì che non sa neanche dov'è"*.

As early as 1902, Pompeo Molmenti stated: "I also believe that, as much as the stones in Venice are better and more beautiful than the people, the people also have their rights, and that it is not rightful to condemn living people to live within the cold walls of a museum for the sake of art ..." (Molmenti 1924, p.253).

Economic exclusiveness and public inclusiveness are not necessarily impossible, but are very difficult to combine. In the worst scenario, the uttermost causality of "geoeconomic warfare" is democracy itself (as democracy is conceptualized in the western world, as the rights of citizens to influence processes that affect their everyday lives not only through electoral systems, but through the possibility of playing a role as participators in different place development processes).

Basically, the key issue is "finding alternative sources of local income to compensate for use restrictions (which are) essential for the long-term success of any protected area".

"È un mondo fatto di tanti interessi. Cercare di sradicare questo turismo è difficile. E' un investire continuo senza alcun tipo di ripensamento, senza alcun fine sostenibile, ma invece sempre economico... Ma il turismo non è di per sé negativo, dipende da che visione hai, da che obiettivo hai" (Nicolò, Cao Rio).

The impacts of mass tourism started to become increasingly apparent already in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the idea of an alternative model began to mature, one that would take responsibility for its effects.

Among the documents that bear witness to this realization is the Manila Declaration, 1980, which:

- Recognized the environmental damage caused by a heavy tourism presence, the potential conflict between tourism use of resources and the survival and the integrity of those resources, and the possible links between the presence and growth of tourism and environmental protection.
- It stressed the responsibility of States, public institutions and governments, and the need to promote tourism and thus enhance its value in societies, considering the phenomenon as much more that a mere economic-commercial fact, that could be left to the dynamics of supply and demand of the market alone, but as a phenomenon that must be managed and directed.

In the course of time, various other milestones of Responsible tourism were created. Among them, the Cape Town Declaration on responsible tourism, 2002; the "Charter for sustainable tourism", Lanzarote Conference, 2005; "Tourism, basic principles for sustainable development", World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 1996; "Making tourism more sustainable – a guide for policy makers", United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNWTO, 2005; "Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European Tourism", UE-COM 621/07, 2007.

3.3.1 Sustainability Mediators

There is no single answer to a problem as complex as Venetian over-tourism, but I think that given all the negative impacts analyzed in this work, adopting the concept of sustainable tourism would be a good starting point for rethinking the future and the adaptation of the city (for the sake of clarity, I will use the terms "sustainable" and "responsible" interchangeably, because if they were originally considered separately, with the former referring to the environmental and the latter to the socio-economic dimension, today this distinction is no longer valid and the three dimensions are considered interdependent, i.e. sustainability is only achieved if these spheres are kept together).

In this context, the figure of the mediator plays a fundamental role. In tourism, the figure of the mediator, in all its facets, is well present, and plays a role of great responsibility. Tourists are highly dependent on mediators such as guidebooks, tour operators, tour leaders, etc. who help them frame

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and understand the cultural realities they encounter. Mediators not only explain what tourists should see and do, but also play a crucial role in explaining why tourists should see certain places and engage in certain activities. In a sense, they are attention managers who strive to keep tourists on the right path and focused on the "right" sights while ignoring others, and they are an essential part of the tourist experience that many tourists rely on.

Typically, conventional marketers and tourism organizations work with the tension between what is known about a place and what is ambiguous or "unknown" in the eyes of tourists, such as ambiguously understood qualities of the place that are touted to create an exciting aura that leads to mystification and emphasizes the exotic or different. In other words, they exploit the stereotypical division between "home" and "abroad". In this way, not only are tourists' gazes directed, but also their interpretations of tourist attractions and places.

I believe that certain mediators can reverse this logic, since they hold the potential to bring us back into contact with elements from which we have turned away, and to bring us back into a dialog with them. I believe what we urgently need today are sustainability mediators. In tourism, sustainable mediators play an important role in the current context of the crisis of disconnection from the Other - be it the environment or another human being - and the crisis of experience, and have great potential when it comes to connecting or reconnecting the other to the environmental and cultural context of a place, by making them aware of the connection that links them to the world that's around. The strategy is not creating a tension between the "known" and the "unknown", the "home" and the "abroad", to rely on what we may call "the attraction of discontinuity", but to show "dedifferentiation", the deeper character of globalization, that is, interconnectedness. They have to show a place's peculiarities, both the attractive and unattractive ones, they have to "unmask" the panorama, to really give the tourist access to the place so that he or she understands how the place works and how it can be best preserved. This assumes that the sustainable tourism mediator is driven by a strong ethic of sustainability and conservation and not just acting for profit, in fact the motivation goes beyond profit, and is environmental, economic and social justice.

In Italy, the sustainable tourism movement focuses mainly on one organization that emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s: the AITR, the Italian Association for Responsible Tourism, which brings together various organizations, associations and cooperatives active in the field of sustainable tourism (including Arci, WWF and Legambiente).

The AITR defines Responsible Tourism as "... Tourism conducted according to the principles of social and economic justice and with full respect for the environment and cultures. It recognizes the central role of the local host community and its right to play a major role in the sustainable and

socially responsible development of tourism in its territory. It promotes positive interaction between the tourism industry, local communities and travelers" (AITR, Cervia meeting, 2005).

3.3.1.1 Cao Rio

In Venice, I had the opportunity to talk to some sustainable tourism operators.

Nicolò and Aleksandra from *Cao Rio*, a tour operator that offers kayaking tours, rowing activities and cultural hikes, explain to me the meaning of their chosen name: *"Ca vuol dire testa, rio sono i rii. Caorio significa tuffarsi di testa. Il messaggio è: il passato è il futuro, e noi cerchiamo di farlo concretamente. Vogliamo dimostrare che se tutti pensassero come noi, non ci sarebbero più barche a motore e inquinamento, e i bambini potrebbero tornare a nuotare in canale, come una volta"*.

Cao Rio was founded only recently, in 2023, and has its roots and ideology in rowing clubs, especially the Querini. Nicolò actually starts off with: *"Non sono un gran fan del motore. Più stai in giro a Venezia e più vedi che non è una città fatta per le barche a motore"*. And why not? *"Beh lo vedi, Venezia è una città storica, il motore non esisteva nel contesto storico in cui è nata. È come dire, mettere dei camion dentro alle città medievali della Toscana... non ci passano! Non sono pensate per queste tipologie di mezzi"*.

One of the value of sustainable tourism is the delivery of greater economic benefits and the improvement of the well-being of the host community, as Nicolò explains, *"Da quando il fruitore viene con noi cerchiamo di farlo entrare nella realtà Veneziana, quindi partendo quasi sempre dai canottieri, dalle società di canottaggio, per far capire che a Venezia le gondole e le barche non esistono solo per quella mezz'ora, ma sono anche fatte per muoverci, per fare sport, uno tra i più antichi al mondo, e poi perchè noi vogliamo che una parte del nostro introito venga investito nelle società Remiere"*. In fact, their biggest goal is that the revenue stays in Venice and is used to promote youth sports and cultural activities, which in turns lead to an increase in the population. They want to convey to tourists, and not only to them, the importance that associations like the Querini have in the Venetian fabric. In fact, rowing clubs are one of the pillars on which the culture of Venice is based. They are an important historical tradition, but one that must remain alive.

Another important feature, both for Cao Rio and for other sustainable realities, is the active participation of tourists. They want sporting activities in the city to be perceived as demanding and interactive, rather than passive and leisurely. To learn something really meaningful, you have to get involved. It is also important for the tourist to prepare for the activity, as there are requirements that need to be met. That is, it is important to come with the right equipment and the right ideas.

They then explain how an excursion with them works. *"Tu non sei mai andato a vogare alla veneta? Vieni alla Querini per la prima volta... Vedi come si prende il remo in mano, impari ad impugnarlo, a muoverti, lo fai prima fuori dall'acqua, e capisci il il movimento e l'equilibrio. Capisci che sei in una struttura che si muove, è difficile... impari a conoscere la marea, l'onda, il vento... ti rendi conto del contesto ambientale dove ti trovi e poi piano piano inizi a riprodurre in acqua quel movimento che ti ho insegnato a terra. Voghiamo insieme e intanto ti racconto ciò che vedi"*. In short, to show everyday Venetian life without masks, and to help concretely, *"... non solo un ritorno economico per seguire il solito trend e fare ancora introito, che poi porta sempre ad arricchire l'imprenditore impoverendo la città, e fa chiudere i luoghi storici... per poi ritrovarci con queste poche famiglie che hanno una grandissima importanza e potenza economica e politica in città... Venezia non mi sembra più una Repubblica come è stata, ma quasi una monarchia, un'elite..."*.

Another typical effect of the tourism industry is that it does not involve the local community in decision-making or in the production of goods and services.

In some tourism contexts, you can stay in one place for two weeks and never come into contact with the local community, except with the person who prepares the room or drives the bus. The community is not involved and does not benefit from the presence of the tourism industry, but pays the consequences in terms of impact on the environment, society, etc.

The traveler who chooses responsible tourism aspires to interact with the local community, not just to walk through a place without touching it, but to immerse themselves in it, to interact with it in every way. Cao Rio also involves the host communities in decision-making and in the production of goods and services, and encourages and promotes interactions and mutual respect between tourists and locals through a more engaged relationships and understanding of the Venetian culture. If Venice needs new people, new ideas and innovations that come from outside, *"... storicamente nella Serenissima l'innovazione è sempre venuta da fuori"*, then the answer does not lie in the large extraterritorial companies that exploit the attractiveness of places; in this way, the proceeds do not benefit the community. Against this trend, Cao Rio wants to make the city more attractive to the people who live there and involve not just tourists but the whole community in its activities, so as not to run the risk of reinforcing the division that has always separated tourists and residents. The attempt is to create links with Venetian realities and to pay a fee for promoting activities to the people who work and live in the city:

> ... le attività economiche decentralizzate stanno uccidendo le piccole realtà cittadine... per questo
> li portiamo sempre in un luogo che sia legato al lavoro artigiano veneziano… così i turisti

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capiscono che Venezia non è solo un palcoscenico, e che anche loro, attraverso il loro contributo, sono protagonisti, e che noi non ci lavoriamo e basta, ma che Venezia è la sede della nostra vita quotidiana... noi abbiamo una visione e l'idea del futuro la costruiamo noi, che è un futuro positivo perchè non sfrutta il patrimonio culturale che è già sfruttato in tutti i modi possibili quì... il turista si sente valorizzato, non fa onda, non inquina, anzi viene educato. Raccogliendo anche solo una bottiglia di plastica da una barena crea un valore aggiunto, ha pulito la città, ha aiutato il bambino che va ogni giorno ad allenarsi … se tutti facessero un turismo del genere, noi in dieci anni potremmo avere una città sicuramente più vivibile, a misura d'uomo e non un parco. Vogliamo dare un input per affermare che si può fare la differenza. Non un turista cattivo che crea fastidi, ma un turista- viaggiatore. (Nicolò and Aleksandra interview's 2024).

3.3.1.2 Luana Castelli

I also spoke with Luana Castelli, an Interpretive nature guide, owner of an organic farm and founder of Limosa, a cooperative found in 1987 that was among the first in the Veneto region to offer sustainable nature and environmental experiences. Limosa had around fifty operators, including members, employees and environmental guides, and collaborated with schools and the Natural History Museum of Venice. Unfortunately, the cooperative was closed in 2020 due to Covid, along with "Slow Venice", a tour operator made up of a network of operators including hoteliers, small boat owners and environmental guides who specialized in promoting eco-friendly tourism in the lagoon. However, the heart of the cooperative has always been environmental education, which was also promoted throught the dissemination of materials and the organization of seminars that prepared operators on sustainability issues.

Luana today is self-employed. As she is very sporty and a boat enthusiast, she is often out and about in a canoe, but also by bike and on foot. In the city, she offers a walking tour for women outside the main streets, one called "*nissoeti dei mestieri*", which tells the story of the city through the toponymy of the professions; one about greenery and gardens, and then in the lagoon, that of Venice and that of Caorle, and then Lio Maggiore, Lio Piccolo, the Colli Euganei the Sile River Park. Luana talks about dunes and their conservation, shellfish, the birdlife of the lagoon, Venetian food and biodiversity. She is full of initiative and is determined, but also realistic:

… ti immagini come sarà la città? Verremo qua a insegnare ai turisti a vogare, perchè abiteremo tutti in terra ferma… Oggi guardi in internet e dici: *Ah che ben*! con dieci euro vado a Barcellona...Venezia la vogliono vedere tutti, e oggi questa è una grande condanna... Eh... ci

vuole tanto impegno per creare un'educazione, a cominciare da quella alimentare... anche nel turismo bisogna educare le persone... accompagnando i turisti però facendo delle scelte consapevoli, visitando le realtà locali, cosìcche il turista possa sostenerle creando un contributo, mangiando in un posto piuttosto che in un altro... sai... io lavoro con bambini, ragazzi, con adulti italiani e adulti stranieri, ho un pubblico variegato... l'uomo, l'umanità, la persona, ha perso la propria relazione con l'ambiente e la natura in particolar modo. Siccome io sono nata in campagna, *e me so sempre rampegada sui alberi*... allora per me vedere le persone che hanno questa grande distanza mi fa spavento, perchè non essere capaci di sopportare il caldo, il freddo, la formichina che cammina sulle gambe... sono cose terribili. Dunque la relazione con l'ambiente è fondamentale ed è fondamentale avere occhi! Tu dall'ambiente puoi capire tante cose e le cose di base le puoi utilizzare per guardare qualsiasi ambiente... ma devi avere occhi... e fermarti a farti delle domande. Ma perchè quì si pesca così? Ma perchè in laguna si voga in piedi? Ci sono i gondolieri in città... ma perchè? Se si fa più fatica a stare in piedi, perchè non andare come in canoa?... Eh! Ma prova a pensare cosa vedi se stai seduto come in canoa e cosa vedi se stai in piedi con la barca. Poi la gondola... bella! Ma guardala: è asimmetrica, ormai ha la prua e poppa fuori dall'acqua, ma non era così. Perchè?... Questi sono gli elementi importanti: le minuzie... la cosa più piccola ti deve incuriosire... e poi per me è assolutamente fondamentale lasciare le persone con degli elementi di rispetto per l'ambiente. (Luana's interview 2024).

I was very impressed by the book Luana wrote in 2014 with Karl Johaentges, a German photographer, entitled: "Die letzten Venezianer", the last Venetians. Karl approached Luana at the time to take deeper look at the city and Luana started working with him when the work was already underway: *"... gli ho detto: tu non puoi parlare di Venezia senza la laguna, per cui io se vuoi ti aiuto però questo tuo lavoro che hai fatto, per me non è sufficiente... e abbiamo cominciato a lavorare insieme...".*

She showed me the pages:

...Vedi questa foto fatta dall'elicottero, con questa vista della città unita ad altre realtà attraverso l'acqua? Ecco questa è Venezia, è la Laguna... Venezia è una piccola città dentro ad un ambiente molto grande. Anche questo è un tentativo per spiegare a chi viene a Venezia che non puoi venire a Venezia e capire cosa sia... sai... questo luogo, come per tutti i luoghi... Se tu vai a Parigi e non capisci la sua storia e non la conosci, è bellissima lo stesso però perdi degli elementi. È che con il turismo che abbiamo oggi effettivamente è difficile visitare la città... (Luana's interview 2024).

The book did not begin with that intention, it was the questions Luana asked that gave it meaning. Every element, every subject dealt with, developed from the questions. *"... Siamo andati a vedere Poveglia, un'isola abbandonata. Ma perchè è abbandonata? Ci siamo andati a remi, per esempio, e allora abbiamo parlato anche della voga... Un giorno lui arriva e mi racconta del porto... Siamo andati allora agli Alberoni, dove c'è la torretta di controllo dei piloti per capire perchè le navi entrano in laguna... abbiamo parlato delle navi, delle crociere, abbiamo parlato con il movimento No grandi Navi... Siamo andati a vedere la protezione delle barene che si fa con le burghe..."*. The book is narrated by 106 people, 106 Venetians living in the city or in the lagoon:

... abbiamo parlato con Carlo Montanaro, lui che è uno dei più grandi conoscitori della storia del cinema in Italia... non è conosciuto e ha un museo a Venezia, suo!... siamo andati a parlare con gli anziani di Burano, poi con chi davvero lavora ancora a Murano... Per esempio qui ci vedi con le donne di Burano... Emma, lei fa il merletto, era una maestra, è morta a centouno anni. Nel libro ne aveva novantasei... lavorava senza occhiali, per lavorare il merletto ad ago!... questa invece è una signora che fa il tombolo, vedi? A Burano si fa ad ago, a Pellestrina il tombolo, vedi?... nella stessa laguna, due attività completamente diverse... siamo andati a conoscere le barene, il pescatore che scrive poesie... siamo andati a remi a vedere i fenicotteri... e poi i bambini che si tuffano in laguna... negli squeri San Trovaso e Tramontin, la famiglia più vecchia di Venezia.... le case occupate a Venezia... foto di cani vestiti, a Karl piacevano tanto! Trovava molto comico il fatto che i veneziani vestono i cani... poi io ho scoperto che ci sono quasi più cani che abitanti in città... 4800 ce n'erano, all'anagrafe. (Luana's interview 2024).

Inevitable, then, the allusion to Acqua Alta:

... Karl arriva un giorno tutto divertito, e mi dice: avevo gli stivali ma poi facendo una foto mi sono chinato, l'acqua è entrata e sono tutto bagnato!"... sì ma l'acqua non è divertente, forse per i turisti ma non per noi... e allora siamo andati al centro maree, lì ci hanno dedicato mezza giornata per capire come funziona, come mai sappiamo come funzionano le maree... allora capisci, per me questo è un modo per raccontare... questo è stato uno delle conquiste in città, avere un ufficio di monitoraggio e che avvisasse la popolazione quando c'è l'acqua alta. Capisci... e poi lui è venuto a fare la voga longa, con noi. Gli ho detto: vuoi le foto della voga longa? Vieni in barca con noi... vedi, queste siamo noi, questa sono io... e ha partecipato alla nostra voga longa con le donne della canottieri Giudecca, ha fatto delle foto bellissime... insomma Venezia è una grande città, o meglio potrebbe essere una grande città.... a Venezia ci sono delle storie veramente incredibili... e stiamo perdendo tutte queste cose... guarda che biblioteche che abbiamo... pensa che patrimonio si sta distruggendo. (Luana's interview 2024).

Coming back to tourism, I asked her if her customers have increased over the years and whether their approach to life is really sustainable, she replied: *"... sicuramente la sensibilità rispetto all' ambiente è aumentata, ma non la consapevolezza... sembra un ossimoro... può essere una contraddizione... ma avere una sensibilità per l'ambiente è un cosa ampia, non è solo porsi la questione di non buttare le bottiglie di plastica in giro o le sigarette, che sarebbe già molto importante perchè ce ne sono tantissime anche in giro per la città...".*

Luana made it clear to me that for her, responsible tourism should not be a niche practice, but the consequence of a sustainable lifestyle, and this requires proper environmental education, *"... In questi anni è aumentato l'interesse per la natura ed è aumentata di conseguenza la richiesta in questo senso, ma fare turismo responsabile è legato a quello che si è quotidianamente. Tu non puoi inventarti di fare turismo responsabile, della serie "ah io vado in giro la domenica con la bicicletta quindi faccio turismo responsabile"... non è quello. Secondo me un turista responsabile ha un atteggiamento nella vita che è in questo senso, e dunque l'educazione ambientale è importantissima in questo senso. Si spera che qualche seme germini...".*

3.3.1.3 Il Sestante di Venezia

Another reality that I interviewed is *Il Sestante di Venezia*, a cooperative of educators, trainers, psychologists and nature guides that has been contributing to the development of the region through education, training, animation and sustainable tourism since 2000. Filippo explains:

> Il turismo di massa per Venezia è... un po' come voler mettere tante macchine, più macchine possibile dentro un parcheggio; ad un centro punto i posti finiscono. In quel parcheggio cosa si fa? Le macchine si mettono in coda e aspettano che un posto si liberi, mentre a Venezia ci stringiamo per farne stare un altro po', e questo mi sembra che non sia utile alla città perchè porta molti soldi subito, facili, ma sono soldi che poi non restano quì e quindi generano una specie di miraggio del benessere. Perchè in una città in cui ci sono tantissimi turisti, sempre di più, è sempre più difficile abitare, e di conseguenza anche per chi lavora in questo settore non piace abitare in una città che è sempre più caotica, sfruttata, frequentata... perchè in quei momenti in città non si cammina, non si riesce a passare da un posto all'altro, non si riesce a giocare in un campo, i bambini non riescono a giocare perchè c'è troppa gente... e di conseguenza anche molti di quelli che lavorano nel settore turistico, di questo tipo di turismo, preferiscono abitare fuori... e come dargli torto. E questo genera un loop... che io definirei negativo perchè se sempre meno gente abita in una città, sempre più quella città cambia volto e diventa un posto da utilizzare in modo diverso rispetto alla città. (Filippo's interview 2024).

Like Luana, the cooperative has chosen to give people the opportunity to experience the area and the city of Venice not just within its four walls, but as a whole embedded in the ecosystem of the lagoon:

> ... perchè quello che c'è fuori è uno degli elementi costitutivi della città... Come dire... non si capisce Venezia – sempre che l'intento sia quello di capirla – se non si conosce che cosa c'è fuori dalla città. Dal punto di vista ecosistemico potremmo dire che Venezia è una delle componenti, certamente la più famosa, ovvio, perchè quella antropica, e noi derivando da una cultura antropocentrica pensiamo sempre che siano questi i centri importanti, ma non sono gli unici, o meglio – e lo diciamo spesso ai bambini e ai ragazzi con cui lavoriamo - che Venezia è Venezia perchè c'è e c'è stata la laguna, la laguna è laguna perchè c'è e c'è stata Venezia. (Filippo's interview 2024).

Filippo tells me that he disagrees with those who say that there is no idea of the city today. He thinks that the idea is there and that it is also very specific, *"... quella di utilizzare e sfruttare la città a fini soprattutto turistici ed economici..."* but that in their opinion these are not the only possibilities.

And what are the others? *"... sono quelli legati alla tradizione, all'ecologia di un territorio, cioè di capire da una parte, quindi con la testa, e dall'altro di vivere, quindi un pochino con il cuore, cosa c'è di tipico, di specifico, che si fa solo quì, ma non perchè sia migliore... una volta che li ho venduti, uno due tre quattro cinque, poi non frega niente più a nessuno...".*

And what are they actually doing for the place? If today's mass tourism thrives on speed, by moving so many people quickly in an "unit of time", they have made a different choice: they take few people in long units of time, because their excursions last a day or half a day and not two or an hour, as in those big boats which transports masses of people to visit Murano, Burano and Torcello in a hurry, which I know well beacuse I have worked in the context.

To illustrate their point, Filippo gives the example:

> ... se le crociere... sono un modo di turismo se non di massa ma quasi, di spostare le persone... il contraltare potrebbe essere una barchetta a vela che va pian pianino, sposti meno persone, certo, ne influenzi meno, ovvio... la nostra barca porta cinquanta persone e i lancioni granturismo spostano cinquanta persone al minuto... ma noi non ce la facciamo e non vogliamo neanche farcela... non ce la facciamo perchè la nostra barca va più piano... Siamo molto meno

significativi, incontriamo meno persone, spostiamo una percezione un comportamento meno significativamente... (Filippo's interview 2024).

Fifty people in a day is a speck of dust compared to the numbers that Venice handles in a day:

> ... perfettamente non considerabili. Ma se il criterio non è solo il numero, allora noi ci sentiamo un po' più valorizzati, perchè se il criterio è la soddisfazione, non del cliente, ma la soddisfazione dell'incontro tra le persone, allora le nostre esperienze sono esperienze nelle quali ci sembra di poter dire che abbiamo incontrato delle persone che alla fine della giornata sono rimaste soddisfatte dell'uscita, della laguna, del silenzio, dello stare insieme, perchè, insomma non è solo bucolico, si fa anche un po' di casino, per fortuna si ride, si scherza, si sta in compagnia... (Filippo's interview 2024).

And how does Il Sestante di Venezia specifically pursue the idea of sustainable tourism? The typical excursion is the one that transforms the concept of speed as much as possible into the concept of slowness and consists of a few stops where people have the opportunity not only to see, but also to hear, smell, touch, listen, in other words to adapt a more direct, immersive methodology of what they will see, *"... Un itinerario tipo è al di fuori di quello che già di tuo potresti vedere se un giorno venissi per i fatti tuoi a Venezia, come San marco o Rialto... per quello c'è già la possibilità. La proposta è quella di vedere, conoscere, scoprire, annusare e assaggiare quello che magari non pensavi esistesse ma che dà un senso a Rialto San Marco e Venezia; come Sant'erasmo, le Vignole, Torcello, le barene, la laguna nella quale si sta fermi e si guarda quello che c'è..."*, that is, a more engaged relationship with the host community and understanding of local culture and environmental issues, and the promotion and cooperation between producers:

> ... incontriamo le persone che vivono nel territorio, perchè il territorio è la somma dei significati. Andare a Sant'erasmo non ha nessun pregio in apparenza, è quasi forse inaspettato... Ci vai a vedere cosa? Che musei ci sono?... Ci sono i campi coltivati e la gente che li coltiva... in particolare il carciofo di Sant'erasmo, però diventa più bello ed interessante andare ad incontrare non i carciofi, ma le persone che coltivano i carciofi, che ti raccontano cosa significa coltivare, perchè l'hanno fatto, cosa c'è di unico nei carciofi... gli incontri con le persone di un luogo aggiungono gusto ad un territorio, perchè il territorio non è solo quello che vedo... quello che vedo è una parte del paesaggio. Così, a qualcuno sorgerà la domanda: "perchè a Sant'erasmo ci sono questi carciofi?". Eh! Chiediamolo a quelli che li coltivano! Cosa faccio, ti rispondo io che non coltivo carciofi? Fattelo raccontare da lui... (Filippo's interview 2024).

Filippo also encourages active observation and awareness through reflection and questioning, as well as direct contact with the city's inhabitants: *"... Sentiamo chi fa le forcole... fatti raccontare cosa significa fare una forcola... perchè le barche di Venezia, quelle tipiche, sono a fondo piatto? Sembrerebbe solo folkloristico... no, è funzionale, non folkloristico... se tu usi una barca a motore la cosa più ovvia da avere è una chiglia fatta a V, se tu usi una barca a remi la cosa più efficiente è avere una barca a fondo piatto...".*

To observe and reconnect with nature, it's important to go slowly, because you see things you can not see at speed... *" In laguna ci sono un'incredibile varietà di specie di uccelli, molte delle quali è abbastanza frequente incontrare. Quando si va più lenti, quasi sempre le persone domandano: "E quello che cos'è?" al di là di dare la risposta con nome e cognome è interessante la domanda, perchè ti sei accorto che esiste qualcosa di diverso, che a Venezia non ci sono solo i gabbiani che rubano i tramezzini, e qualcuno ti dirà: e quindi cos'altro c'è?...".*

There is a difference between traveling by car and by bike. It's more strenuous on a bike, you have to push, but you see things that you do not see in a car. Similarly,

> ... Nella nostra barca senti caldo quando è caldo e freddo quando è freddo, perchè non c'è l'aria condizionata in barca da noi, ed è più faticoso... però è un'esperienza più a contatto con gli elementi. A volte quando vai in un supermercato non ti accorgi se fuori sta piovendo o se è inverno, perchè c'è sempre la stessa temperatura. Da noi te ne accorgi, non è piacevolissimo perchè se è brutto tempo e non hai la felpa fa freddo. Ma questa è la nostra natura, e forse c'è più esperienza nel sentire freddo piuttosto che nell'immaginare che il clima sia sempre uguale, ecco non lo è, non lo è! … (Filippo's interview, 2024).

But people, even those who meet the cooperative by chance and decide to participate in the activities, are filled with the experience, for it is different from the conventional ones. It is a discovery, *"... come se fosse stato un bel colpo di fortuna esserci incontrati, perchè dicono: "ah non pensavo che si potesse fare così!"... ".*

Filippo makes it clear to me that if the idea of collective justice drives the cooperative, the idea that this is the only option is not an answer for Venice, but rather openness to others, sharing ideas and being welcoming. Defining a proposal as the only possible proposal, no matter how sustainable it is, is a cop-out, and limiting. One must always remain open to innovation, be able to re-evaluate and welcome, and be as inclusive as possible. Filippo therefore wants to emphasize that his idea is not necessarily the only or the most just one, because in a globalized landscape there are many ideas of justice, and it is very challenging, complex and important to put them together. *"... Non*

posso escludere che ce ne siano di migliori, per questo è bello incontrare le persone, perchè le nostre idee possono crescere dall'incontro con gli altri, possono essere modificate, e devono essere confrontate, altrimenti un po' me la faccio e me la racconto. Dirsi bravi da soli è da sfigati. Dall'incontro con gli altri io modifico, cambio, spero di migliorare l'idea di turismo che io ho...". Il Sestante di Venezia has the ambition to preserve the city. They have a different idea of the city's consumption, their boats is an old fishing boat with a hybrid engine, but by going slowly, they consume less and make less *moto ondoso, "... ma l'impatto zero non esiste... però diciamo che in qualche modo diamo il "là" per considerare il concetto di impatto... il concetto di valore a questi impatti che poi noi applichiamo ce li fa definire migliori o peggiori ma è un concetto etico, che assegna un valore ad un numero, i numeri però sono diversi, punto. Sui numeri non c'è molto da dire, è sulla questione etica che diventa interessante assegnare un valore a quei numeri. Ma che uno sia inferiore a dieci è ovvio. Ecco, noi dobbiamo considerare però quanto sia sostenibile, accettabile, modificabile, il dieci, l'uno, e questo è un discorso puramente etico".*

Sustainable tourism mediators are still participating in the Experience Economy, and thus actively participating in the capitalist market, but they hold the potential to re-connect us to the concept of experience understood as "Erfahrung". The problem, according to Giancarlo Ghigi, *"... tu apri una fetta di mercato, che non va ad intaccare quelle già esistenti, che ovviamente sono più criticabili, però aggiungi entropia ad un sistema già saturo...",* is that while sustainable tourism is a good idea, it does not solve the problem at the root. All Venetian tourism should then convert to sustainable tourism!

4. Conclusions

This work was born out of a sense of frustration I felt last summer, when I found myself working with Venetian mass tourism. In fact, I did not really "find" myself working in it, I rather embarked on the adventure, albeit I was not yet fully aware of the specific dynamics of that world. I felt confused, ambivalent feelings; it was an inner struggle between fun, superficiality and a deep sense of guilt. Getting on the boats as a non-Venetian, dealing with a culturally diverse audience, talking about Venice, its islands, its art and history, is a powerful feeling, almost a dream. But over time, this romanticism turned into cynicism.

Rather than working to explain Venice, one worked to cash in. And to do this effectively it was necessary to homogenize the information as much as possible so that it was few, general and stereotypical; to translate it into as many languages as possible in order to reach the widest audience, and that as many people as possible got on the boat, sometimes a hundred, even a hundred and twenty (and even if the boat risked breaking down), to devote fifty minutes to each island, in what we might call a race against time. In short, the exact definition of hit-and-run tourism.

During the experience I touched upon the nihilism of Venetians who have grown up with the idea that working in function to mass tourism constitutes the only possibility for the city, and for their lives. These are disillusioned, rushed, tired and work-worn people who hate tourists but have to deal with them every day because their survival depends on them. These are the same people Luana talks about " .. ragazzi... a cui dico "andiamo piano!" E loro: "*anca se Venessia me fonda non me frega niente*"... sì, ma forse siamo tutti uniti... se il mare si alza, anche tu... affondi!"...". Then I met those people who fall in love with Venice at first sight, but it is a fleeting love, a total idealization, a kiss of a consuming love, that enslaves the city to a non-existent presence.

And I myself have participated in that crisis of experience, I have seen it, and for this reason alone I can say that I know people are disconnected, disoriented, they do not recognize the effects of their actions... they are too enthusiastic or too disillusioned... anyway too busy participating in this society.

I was confused too. I feared that my pragmatism and my strong spirit of adaptability were making me conform to this model and pushing me towards this other polarity that Giancarlo portrayed well. I was a living contradiction: I talked about sustainability, talked about preserving the lagoon in a boat that was damaging that lagoon.

But the guilt never stopped gripping me, because I am sensitive and, unlike others, I am privileged. When the season was over, I decided to no longer participate in this banquet that causes depopulation, excessive wave movement and pollution, and exacerbates the crisis of experience.

People like me, people that are aware, must be the first to take a step back and resist the seduction to that world. That is why I know I have to make different choices, because I know, because I can, and because I believe it is right. That's why I wrote this thesis, partly to relieve that guilt and partly to usher in what I hope is a new beginning. I am sorry that I could not solve the problem of Venice with this thesis, but I cannot solve it alone, the only solution is to work together, to listen and discuss with people like Giancarlo, Luigi, Nicolò, Aleksandra, Luana and Filippo and all the thousands of Venetian microrealities fighting for the city, and to start involving children, and educate them on sustainability.

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