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*The Resilience of Tradition: How Venetian Sport
Associations face Touristic Water Services and Broader
Lagoon Transformations*

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Table of contents

INTRODUCTION	6
LITERATURE REVIEW	9
HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF ROWING AND SAILING IN THE VENETIAN LAGOON	9
<i>Historical Significance</i>	9
<i>The Shift into Modernity</i>	11
<i>The Spirit of Competitions and Tradition</i>	13
<i>The Rise of Boat-Related Tourism in Venice</i>	14
STRUCTURAL AND OPERATIONAL ASPECTS TOURISM OPERATORS AND ASSOCIATIONS	17
<i>Organizational Landscape</i>	17
<i>Structure of Associazioni Sportive Dilettantistiche (ASDs)</i>	17
SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT.....	18
<i>Social & Cultural Relevance</i>	18
<i>Sustainability Challenges</i>	19
<i>Air and Water Quality, Moto Ondoso and Resistance</i>	20
CONCLUSION ON THE LITERATURE REVIEW	21
METHODOLOGY FOR THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH	23
MOTIVATION BEHIND INTERVIEWS AS A RESEARCH METHOD.....	23
PARTICIPANT SELECTION AND RESEARCH SCOPE.....	24
SELECTION OF INTERVIEW SUBJECTS.....	25
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE DESIGN OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES	28
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	30
TESTING OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE	30
THEMATIC ANALYSIS AS AN ANALYTICAL APPROACH	31
<i>Understanding Meaning Through Thematic Analysis</i>	32
<i>Application of Thematic Analysis in This Study</i>	33
FINDINGS	35
INTERVIEW FINDINGS RELATED TO ROWING AND SAILING ASSOCIATIONS	35
<i>Categorisation of Associations – Focus and Size</i>	35
<i>Socio-Demographic Profile of Members</i>	37
<i>Organizational and Financial Structures of Rowing and Sailing Associations</i>	40
<i>Cultural, Educational and Social Contributions of Rowing and Sailing Associations</i> . 42	
<i>Environmental Awareness and Lagoon Stewardship</i>	45
<i>Moto ondosso and Future Challenge and Perspectives for Associations</i>	47
INTERVIEW FINDINGS RELATED TO TOURISM OPERATORS.....	50
<i>Economic and Operational Dimensions of Tourism Operators</i>	50
<i>Target Group of Tourism Boat Activities</i>	51

<i>Future Perspectives for Tourism Operators</i>	52
ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS AND COMPARISON	53
DISCUSSION	58
COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW	58
LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH	66
CONCLUSION	67
REFERENCES	68
APPENDICES	72
THE OVERVIEW LIST	72
THE THREE QUESTIONNAIRES.....	76
<i>Questionnaire for Associations</i>	76
<i>Questionnaire for Tourism Operators</i>	78
<i>Questionnaire for Additional Interviews</i>	80
CONFIDENTIALITY DOCUMENT	81

List of Figures

Figure 1. Evolution of inhabitants (1871-2019) and overnight stays (1953-2017) in different sections of the Municipality of Venice (Salerno & Russo, 2020, p. 5)	15
Figure 2. Map of Municipality of Venice (outlined in red) from Google Maps, 2025, figure created by the author.	25
Figure 3. Map with the selection of rowing associations (left) from Google Maps, 2025, figure created by the author.	26
Figure 4. Map with the selection of touristic operators (right) from Google Maps, 2025, figure created by the author.	27
Figure 5. Spectrum of association focus based on interview findings, figure created by the author.....	35
Figure 6. Distribution of members by age group. Data courtesy of Canottieri Giudecca, figure created by the author.	38
Figure 7. Annual membership fees at the association for adults, figure created by the author.....	40

List of Tables

Table 1. Distribution of the different foundation years of 24 (not all) of the rowing associations in the city	12
Table 2. Evolution of traffic Development in the Venetian Lagoon. Data provided by Gruppo Insieme and retrieved from (Canestrelli et al., 2000; Insula Quaderini, 1936, 1971)	21
Table 3. Mapping thematic Areas to Interview Questionnaire Content (allocation of focus areas to Questionnaire section title).....	30

Table 4. Estimated Membership fee Turnover per Association per year 54
Table 5. Estimated Total and Per-Capita Membership Turnover 55
Table 6. Estimated Boat Stock Value of Selected Associations 56

Abstract

This thesis investigates the contemporary landscape of water-based activities in the Venetian Lagoon, primarily through an analysis of sport associations offering the popular *Voga alla Veneta* (Venetian rowing) and *Vela al Terzo* (Venetian sailing). Our primary focus is on assessing the current socio-economic position of the associations and how they are adapting to the lagoons changing conditions. This includes navigating the increasing presence of tourism-oriented water services and broader threatening developments like increased wave motion, environmental pollution and a strong demographic shift, characterized by a declining and aging population. The non-profit associations are highlighted for their strong cultural heritage, focus on community and sportsmanship, and value among island residents. In contrast, the sector of growing businesses of water-based experience tourism offers activities often on a one-time basis, more expensive and often disconnected from local culture.

An explorative qualitative approach was adopted where in-depth interviews guided by a standardized questionnaire, were used to quantify the associations and tourism operator's economic dimensions, external impact and role within the local community and sustainability. For this, association directors, tourism operators and other local stakeholders were interviewed. Crucially, this study reveals the indispensable socio-economic value of these associations as central preservers of cultural heritage and vital community hubs. Further, they underscore the need for more research to enhance awareness and respect for the lagoons and city's fragile environment, promote engagement in traditional associations, critically assess the role of tourism-oriented water services, and advocate for policy changes and greater public awareness to ensure a sustainable future for the lagoon, its residents, and its visitors.

Introduction

The Venetian Lagoon, a one-of-a-kind and delicate ecosystem formed over centuries through an interplay of natural changes and human intervention, has faced in recent decades an unprecedented fast change, causing huge environmental pressures both on its ecosystem, the city and its inhabitants (Casagrande, 2016; Chiu et al., 2002; Lionello et al., 2021). Rising sea levels, worsened by climate change, cause a direct threat to the city and its surrounding wetlands (Giupponi et al., 2024; Madricardo et al., 2019). Pollution caused by increased tourism and industrial activities further puts the lagoons biodiversity and water quality under pressure and the increasing volume of motorized traffic significantly contributes to the erosion of buildings (Cerasi, 2007; Chiu et al., 2002). The Venetian Lagoon is and has been for centuries a fragile environment shaped by the interaction of nature and its inhabitants, something highlighted but not limited to projects like the flood protection mobile barriers MOSE (Ravera, 2000; Turner, 2024). Operating within this unique and evolving space the core subjects of this research are rowing and sailing associations. Besides offering the opportunity to engage in sport activities in a city where space is normally limited by its geographical nature, they also serve as a safe space beyond tourist-overfilled plazas and expensive tourist-oriented restaurants and recreational activities to eat together, engage in social projects, transfer local traditions and knowledge, and present a crucial element of the contemporary social fabric in a city where the population continues to dwindle (Casagrande, 2016; Castelli, 2024). While both associations and the providers of tourism-oriented water services operate within the same environment, their fundamental activities, interests, impacts, and goals often diverge significantly. This study uses the perspectives of tourism operators and other local stakeholders as crucial supporting elements to understand the current position and challenges faced by these rowing and sailing associations.

Previous academic research into the social and economic dimensions of both touristic water services and rowing and sailing associations in Venice is notably limited. Existing works tend to focus on technical or historical aspects, or address these groups within broader discussions of social participation (Castelli, 2024; Rosetto, 2020; von Dach, 2024). Regarding specifically rowing and sailing there is also a significant amount of literature focused on sporting competitions (dei Brazolo, 1989; Tagliapietra, 2001; Testa, 2011; Testa et al., 1983; Testa & Rizzardini, 2011). This thesis focuses on the rowing and sailing associations within the Venetian Lagoon, exploring their interplay within the broader landscape of local affairs and their coexistence with tourism. Grasping the inherent value and operative scale of rowing and sailing activities is a prerequisite for informed analysis. This is necessary not only for an evaluation of economic parameters and development trajectories but also important for decision making on all political levels to ensure a sustainable preservation of

infrastructural and communal resources so that local populations can continue to have access to recreative activities and cover their human needs in an environment where less and less importance is stressed on locals, especially on the ones residing on the islands. Thus, the research question is:

How are traditional non-profit sport associations in the Venetian Lagoon navigating socio-economic and environmental challenges in relation to the growing presence of tourism-oriented water services and broader lagoon transformations such as environmental degradation and demographic change?

To answer this question, this study acknowledges the multifaceted nature of water activities in the lagoon and considers both the internal dynamics of sport associations and their interactions with tourism-oriented operators across five thematic areas:

1. Understanding the socioeconomic nature and economic dimension of the associations and tourism operators
2. Examining the structural and operational nature of associations and tourism operators
3. Evaluating the social and local community impact
4. Assessing the role in lagoon preservation and sustainability
5. Exploring future perspectives and identifying areas for further research

This thesis ultimately aims to demonstrate the crucial position of Venetian rowing and sailing associations within the wider socio-economic landscape of the lagoon, using a comparison with the city's tourism-oriented water service providers to highlight their distinct role. The findings indicate the vital role these associations play for the inhabitants of Venice and how they act as the central preservers of unique cultural heritage, foster strong community bonds and provide a space that, within their operational boundaries, buffers challenges posed by environmental change. The findings reveal an indispensable value of rowing and sailing associations, asserting their vital role as central preservers of unique cultural heritage and strong community hub for Venice's inhabitants. By uncovering the hidden socio-economic value of rowing and sailing associations within the Venetian community, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the lagoon's dynamics. It demonstrates that recognising these associations is vital for preserving Venetian heritage while also encouraging to think about the potential for a more sustainable and resident-friendly urban model, where people and community are put first, but coexistence with tourism is possible.

To address the research question, thesis is structured as follows: Chapter one is a comprehensive literature review highlighting the historical and present context, the organisational structure of associations and operators as well as the sustainability challenges

present which provides the theoretical framework and justifies the experimental qualitative research approach adopted due to the limited existing research in this area. Given the limited academic research in this field, an explorative qualitative approach was chosen. This methodology was assessed to be essential to allow for in-depth understanding of different socio-economic positions and lived experiences of association members and tourism operators. Furthermore, the complex interplay of cultural preservation and modern environmental pressures are aspects that currently have neither been captured by quantitative nor qualitative methods. Chapter two details the qualitative methodology employed in this research, including the rationale for the selection of interview partners and the development of the interview instruments. Chapter three presents the findings in a structured manner, separating them into thematic sections for clarity and comprehensiveness, this follows the previously listed thematic areas in the introduction as well as a separate assessment of the economic dimensions. Chapter four discusses and analyses deductions made from the findings and attempts at explaining the research question. Chapter five discusses the limitations of the research and chapter six concludes the thesis by summarizing the key findings, highlighting the contributions of this research, and suggesting avenues for future investigation as well as careful policy recommendations.

Literature Review

Key to comprehend the Venetian Lagoon and the water-based activities that take place within it, is understanding the historical context and existing body of literature on the subject. Providing a context offers valuable insights into broader trends concerning the evolution of traditional practices in the face of modernization, the socio-economic dynamics of water-based communities and the challenge of balancing cultural heritage, economic interests and environmental sustainability. It provides a theoretical framework upon which the qualitative research of this thesis can build, offering contextual depth, identify knowledge gaps, supporting key arguments, and justifying the chosen qualitative research approach (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 235; Patton, 2014, p. 380).

This specific literature review was developed and refined at the same time as the data collection took place and served as a dynamic framework that both shaped the literature review itself as well as the data collection. This ongoing exchange between interviews and literature ensured that the analysis remained balanced and grounded in existing knowledge while also being responsive to the Venetian Lagoon context.

The literature review starts with a first subchapter presenting a historical overview of rowing and sailing boats in the lagoon, tracing their evolution from everyday transportation and fishing tools to traditional cultural symbols, and their eventual transition that led them to end up competitive and leisure associations. Building on this foundation, the second subchapter explores the current organizational structures and economical dimensions of the associations and companies engaged in water-based activities. The third subchapter assesses the social and local community impacts of these activities, considering their role in fostering cultural continuity, social cohesion and community identity. Subchapter four examines the contributions of these actors to lagoon preservation and sustainability, as well as the environmental risks they face. A concluding section synthesises the findings from the literature tying information together and laying the groundwork for the empirical component of the thesis.

Historical Evolution of Rowing and Sailing in the Venetian Lagoon

Historical Significance

Long before *vaporetti* and motorized taxi boats navigated the Venetian Lagoon, the Venetian Republic fostered a long tradition of rowing boats and sails that over centuries adapted to the special shallow waters of the lagoon (Isnenghi et al., 2005, p. 45). Since the early days of *La Serenissima*¹ boats have been central to Venice's existence. Before the first

¹ Name for the Republic of Venice (ended 1797)

railway bridge was created in 1846 and the first motorway was built in 1931, boats were the only form of reaching the islands (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, p. 77; Testa, 2011, p. 19). This meant that boats were the only link to the outside world from the earliest settlements around the 5th century until the 19th century. The necessity for waterborne transport for all essentials like: people, food, water and goods led the inhabitants to the development of specialized boat designs perfectly adapted to the shallow lagoons and narrow canals specific conditions. Notably, both rowing and sailing boats developed a very distinct type of flat bottom to allow for transportation within the lagoon even in low tides and shallow regions (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, pp. 49–53).

But far beyond their fundamental design, Venetian boats continued to specialise. Different shapes and weights developed to satisfy the demands for fishing, hunting transport, religious events and even the visual expression of social standing (Baldacci et al., 2023, pp. 37–39; Distefano, 2023, pp. 28, 45; Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, p. 5). Beyond the shared flat bottom, most notably and shared by most types of rowing boats, a specific way of rowing emerged. Contrary to other traditions of rowing, like English rowing, Venetian Rowing, also known as “*Voga alla Veneta*”, was done standing and facing forward in order to see if one is approaching shallow waters or obstacles and to be able to navigate narrow channels easier (dei Brazolo, 1989, p. 4; Penzo & Pastor, 1997, p. 96). Further the rowing is done with a special oarlock called “*Fórcola*” which also allows for rowing with a single oar (Sbordone et al., 2005, p. 45). This allows for rowing by a single person alone, although other styles of rowing like “*alla valesana*” where one or two rowers row with two oars each are also still in use, especially in smaller lighter boats (dei Brazolo, 1989, p. 4). Oarsmen rowing one single oar is a type of rowing still widely used in modern day Venetian Rowing (Penzo & Pastor, 1997, p. 96). This single-oar technique is most famously seen today on gondolas, which were once a central part of everyday transport in Venice. At its peak in the 17th century an estimated 10,000 gondolas alone filled the canals and this figure does not even account for all the other types of boats that were in use (City Experiences, 2022). In comparison nowadays only around 400 gondolas are still in active use, and this almost exclusively for tourism purposes (ibid.).

Beyond their crucial role in everyday life, boats were also fundamental to Venice's military power in order to protect and extend their influence over their territories along the coasts of the Mediterranean (Wilson & Favotto, 2023, p. 555). Recognizing this dual importance, the early Venetian state prioritized their development, requiring both constant maintenance and the capability of rapidly building large numbers of ships (ibid.). Initially, boats were only constructed in various “*squeros*”, small boatyards around the city (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, pp. 87–93). Later, the Arsenale built in the 12th century was established as a major shipbuilding complex, largely centralizing shipbuilding, especially

concerning larger ships (Wilson & Favotto, 2023, p. 555). This dedicated a whole section of the city to be a shipbuilding complex, which became a major centre for both wartime and peacetime vessel construction (ibid.). Nevertheless, squeros remained relevant, especially for smaller, everyday boats (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, pp. 87–93).

Furthermore, sailing vessels facilitated transport over wider distances, and Venetian sailing was crucial for long-distance transport, playing a vital role in the Venetian Republic's infrastructure and its territorial expansion (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, pp. 81–86; Wilson & Favotto, 2023, p. 555). While rowing boats were mostly relevant for short-distance transport within the lagoon, Venetian sailing vessels were of immense importance for transport throughout the Adriatic (Testa et al., 1983, p. 10; Wilson & Favotto, 2023, p. 556). As previously mentioned, the flat bottom hulls allowed these ships to navigate shallow waters and variable winds while carrying large amounts of goods, although not all of them had this quality (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, pp. 49–50). These sailing vessels were key in maintaining Venice's economic infrastructure and a constant connection to other trading centres. This included not only goods, but facilitated communication and the movement of people necessary for maintaining influence over the *Serenissima's* territories (Wilson & Favotto, 2023). Important to note is that the Vela al Terzo, characterized by its trapezoidal sail and removable mast known today, only fully developed in its present form in the last centuries evolving from earlier square or Latin sails (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, pp. 75–76; Rossellini, 1990; Testa, 2011, p. 59; Testa & Rizzardini, 2011, pp. 157–160). Of large visual importance were also the colourful nature of the sails, often reflecting the sailors' families, which became a characteristic sight of the lagoon (Testa, 2011, p. 59).

The Shift into Modernity

The emergence of rowing associations in the Venetian Lagoon coincided closely with the decline of non-motorized boats as the primary mode of transport (Isnenghi et al., 2005, pp. 47, 68). Notably, the first rowing associations like the Reale Società Canottieri Bucintoro (founded in 1882) and the Società di Sport Nautici e Rari Nantes Francesco Querini (established in 1901) rose around the same period as the first public motorized transport service, the *vaporetto*, began operations in 1881 (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, pp. 43–48). Important to note is that these recreational sport associations predominantly first focused on English rowing styles and were reserved to the upper classes who possessed the financial means and leisure time for such activities (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, pp. 81–85; Isnenghi et al., 2005, p. 47). The introduction of the first motorized public transport service was met with a strong resistance by the gondoliers (Sbordone et al., 2005, p. 58). Concurrently, the initial appearance of motorized fishing boats also began during this period. A substantial acceleration towards this development took place after World War II, coinciding with

Italy's phase of significant strong economic development and industrialisation. This period also saw a resurgence of interest in rowing associations as a means to preserve old traditional practices and exercise sport at a time when traditional wooden boats and the lagoon seamanship started being increasingly neglected (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, p. 75). Table 1 shows how the growth and new foundation of rowing associations can be broadly categorized into three distinct waves: the historic & post-World War II surge associations, the ones that surged after the first Vogalonga in the 1970s, and developments from the 1980s onwards.

Association name	Foundation Year
Reale Società Canottieri Francesco Querini	1901
Reale Società Canottieri Bucintoro	1882 (1960)
Rowing Diadora ASD	1962
Voga Veneta Mestre	1974
Gruppo 3 Archi	1975
Remiera Francescana	1976
Remiera Canottieri Cannaregio	1976
A.S.D. Canottieri Mestre	1976
Serenissima	1977
Remiera Vogaepara Burano	1977
Gruppo Remiero Murano	1977
Remiera Nomboli	1977
Remiera del Ponte dei Sartori	1978
ASD Gruppo Sportivo Artigiani	1978
ASD Remiera Pellestrina	1979
Cantiere DLF	1979
Remiera San Marco	1981
Circolo Velico Casanova	1981
Associazione Velica Lido	1981
Associazione Canioteri Giudecca	1981
Voga Veneta Lido	1981
Associazione Settemari	1985
Remiera Casteo	1997
Venice On Board ASD	2014

Table 1. Distribution of the different foundation years of 24 (not all) of the rowing associations in the city. Table created by the author.

Many of the rowing associations that emerged in the 1970s originated as informal groups of friends who regularly rowed together and subsequently evolved into formal registered Associazioni Sportive Dilettantistiche (A.S.D). These associations extended their activities beyond mere sporting practise to encompass stewardship of the lagoon environment

(further explored in the chapter on Sustainability Challenges) and the preservation of material heritage through the restoration and maintenance of old traditional boats (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, p. 56; Rosetto, 2020, pp. 207–210). Beyond physical conservation these associations serve as crucial hubs for the conservation of knowledge, skills, and traditions associated with Venetian rowing and its surrounding waterways (Isnenghi et al., 2005, p. 72; Rosetto, 2021, p. 91). By actively engaging younger generations through initiatives involving members' children and projects targeting school children, these associations contribute largely to secure the future of both Venetian rowing and Venetian sailing (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, p. 56).

The trajectory of *Vela al Terzo* followed a similar pattern. The advent of motorized transport and the introduction of more efficient Bermuda sails led to a decline in the use of traditional sails for transportation, placing this unique tradition at risk of being forgotten (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, pp. 75–76; Testa, 2011, pp. 18–19).

Given that *Vela al Terzo* is a less accessible activity, often requiring private boat ownership and specific sailing conditions, its legacy is considerably more vulnerable than *Voga alla Veneta*. Formal conservation efforts for this tradition were secured in 1988 with the establishment of the Associazione *Vela al Terzo* (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, pp. 75–76; Isnenghi et al., 2005, p. 72; Testa, 2011, pp. 174–175). In 2011 the association *Vela al Terzo* had 327 members, a significantly smaller number compared to 3.772 active rowing members recorded in 2001, although some estimates go up to 6.000 active rowers (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, p. 59; Testa, 2011, p. 1; Wilson & Favotto, 2023).

The Spirit of Competitions and Tradition

The spirit of competition and tradition in Venetian boating finds its most prominent expression in its regattas, most notably the *Regatta Storica* (dei Brazolo, 1989, pp. 11–15). Venice's longest-running regatta and a significant annual event for the city, the *Regatta Storica* takes place annually on the first Sunday of September. It serves as both a vibrant celebration of maritime tradition and the stage for the most popular races to determine the best rowers of the lagoon (Testa et al., 1983, pp. 5–7). While its roots extend back to its formal establishment in the 14th century, the modern event features a captivating mix of elaborately decorated boats with costumed participants alongside competitive races showcasing the best rowers from the city's rowing associations (dei Brazolo, 1989, pp. 11–15; Testa et al., 1983, pp. 5–7). The *Regatta Storica* is a powerful symbol of Venetian identity, honouring its maritime past and the exceptional skill of its rowers and its reinstalment in 1895 is coined by the author Paladini as an "international relaunch of the city" (Isnenghi et al., 2005, p. 51).

The second most important event, the *Vogalonga*, serves a much more contemporary purpose. Initiated in 1975, it was conceived both as a symbol for boating heritage and as a protest against the detrimental effects of motor boats in the city, most importantly *moto ondosso* (wave motion), lagoon pollution, and the neglect of smaller islands (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, pp. 67–70; Sbordone et al., 2005, pp. 85–92). The inaugural *Vogalonga* included 545 rowing boats and has experienced rapid growth, attracting up to its cap of 2,000 boats in recent years (Davis, 2022, p. 86; *Vogalonga.com*, 2025). This non-competitive event also embraces a more inclusive ethos, welcoming an international array of non-motorized boat enjoyers. While the initial strong ecological message of the *Vogalonga* has faded into a more international event, it still contributes to the traditional practices of *Voga alla Veneta* and *Vela al Terzo*, fostering increased awareness of the importance of protecting the Venetian Lagoon and providing a unique annual occasion where the lagoon's traffic is exclusively non-motorized (Davis, 2022, p. 240; Sbordone et al., 2005, pp. 85–92).

Both the *Vogalonga* and *Regatta Storica* remain key annual events that not only celebrate the history and skill of Venetian boating but also play a vital role in its preservation for future generations. It is also worth noting that the municipality of Venice organizes approximately 22 regattas annually, highlighting that the *Regatta Storica* and the *Vogalonga* represent just a selection of the numerous and significant regattas in Venice (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, pp. 67–70).

The Rise of Boat-Related Tourism in Venice

Venice already being a popular destination long before, experienced a strong surge in tourism during the 18th and 19th centuries, just as the first railway bridge was being build and the first *vaporetti* started operations (Davis, 2022, pp. 139–162; Rizzardini, 2024, pp. 13–16). Over the following decades, the city started to increasingly adapt to its visitors and pedestrians in general, leading to the covering of many canals and the construction of additional bridges. The introduction of *vaporetti* and other motorized vessels posed a challenge to the livelihoods of gondoliers, resulting in a decrease in the number of work opportunities (Rizzardini, 2024, p. 44). Fast forward to the 21st century, and these initial trends have intensified considerably (Masiero, 2025, p. 3). Tourism has become by far the largest contributor to insular Venice's economy, representing an ever-growing ratio of tourists to residents in the historic centre, as visible in Figure 1. More recent data shows that the trend has only worsened, with the historical centre population falling below 50,000 in 2022 (Giuffrida, 2022). Furthermore, the implementation of programmes such as the 2024 introduction of an entrance fee to the city during peak visit periods shows what has been coined by researchers as a “Disneyfication” of Venice (Dlabaja, 2021). A palpable

commodification of the city is evident, exemplified by the ubiquitous availability of taxi boat services, which now constitute a majority of present-day boat traffic (Insula Quaderini N.12, 2002, pp. 17–19).

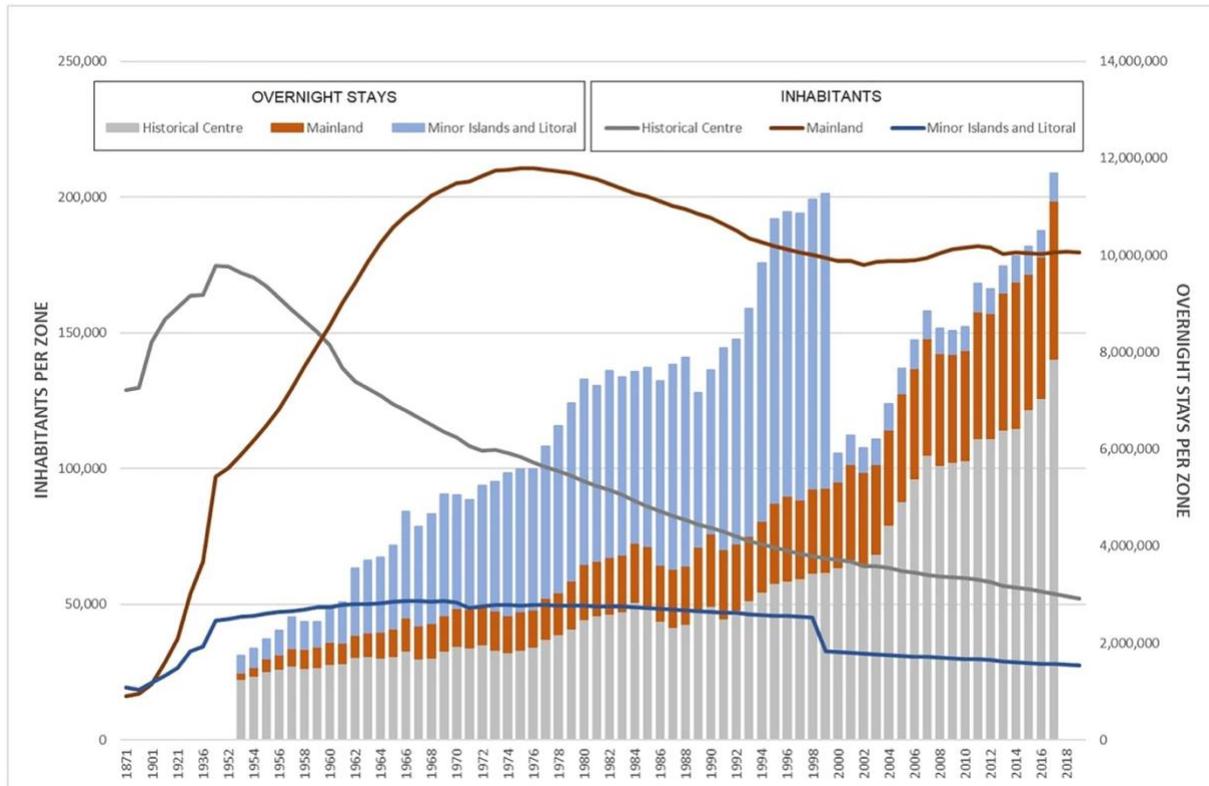


Figure 1. Evolution of inhabitants (1871-2019) and overnight stays (1953-2017) in different sections of the Municipality of Venice (Salerno & Russo, 2020, p. 5)²

Regarding water-based tourism, gondola rides and boat tours to neighbouring islands such as Burano and Murano are the most popular offerings. Having said that, a wide range of other tourism activities have emerged where the experience on a boat and on the water is central (Distefano, 2023, pp. 72–78). Important to note is that with a few exceptions these activities typically occur away from areas frequented by local boaters, feature prices significantly beyond what the average local resident could and would afford, and predominantly cater to mid- to high-income visitors. Many of these tours are directly coordinated by hotels and tourist operators.

² It should be noted that the observed increase in overnight stays in the littoral area might also reflect the administrative reorganization resulting from the creation of the Municipality of Cavallino-Treporti in 1999, which was previously part of Venice and includes many coastal tourist accommodations.

These activities can broadly be categorized as the follow: 1. Boat Tours, 2. Boat Rentals, 3. Rowing Experiences, 4. Other Water Sports (canoeing, kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding), 5. Miscellaneous.

1. Boat Tours: This category can vary a lot from intimate canal excursions within the historic city to tours around the lagoon or Murano. While normally the boats accommodate two to six people some more specialized options include niche outings like birdwatching or aquaculture (Inside Venice, 2025).
2. Boat Rentals: Consists of rental periods varying from one hour to several days. Some operators also offer larger vessels such as party boats or houseboats. Smaller boats below 40 horsepower do not require a license.
3. Rowing Experiences: Typically consist of single 60–120-minute sessions, where usually two students and one instructor practise *Voga alla Veneta*, occasionally including a refreshment “*cicchetti*” break.
4. Other Water Sports: Opportunities for canoeing, kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding are available. Single boat use allows for larger groups to participate in these activities. The university programme CUS Venezia also offer similar activities to students at a significantly reduced fare.
5. Miscellaneous: This category encompasses a wide range of other activities, from visits to historical and modern military boats docked to land to jazz and spritz tours on a catamaran around the lagoon, dinner parties on replica pirate galleons and event-specific tours on the water during events such as the Vogalonga, Regatta Storica or New Year’s Eve.

As previously mentioned, to limit the research scope, water-taxi operators, gondola rides, and destination boat tours are excluded from this study. Furthermore, to be included in this research, boat operators must be based in the municipality of Venice, thus excluding those from areas such as Chioggia or Lido di Jesolo. The actual impact and economic scale of the included operators is also a subject of this thesis's research. It is already clear that these activities have varying effects on the lagoon environment, local culture and the experiences of residents. For this research, a total of 27 tourism operators - representing the majority of the specified types of operations - were contacted and requested for an interview, although the list is not exhaustive. Their inclusion remains important to contextualize the challenges and pressures that sport associations are navigating.

Structural and Operational Aspects Tourism Operators and Associations

Organizational Landscape

Within the operational landscape of the Venetian Lagoon, and also in all of Italy, a clear distinction emerges between the for-profit tourism sector and the non-profit rowing and sailing associations. All commercial entities have to be registered in the *Registro delle Imprese* of the Chamber of Commerce (Camere di Commercio, 2025). Their specific legal structure ranges from individual sole proprietorships (*Ditte Individuali*) to partnerships (*Società di Persone*) and limited liability companies (*Società di Capitali*) (Codice Civile, 2025). Generally, smaller initiatives tend to have a sole proprietorship, while larger endeavours might include several stakeholders. Their primary objective is the generation of income through the provision of services.

This is contrasted by local rowing and sailing associations that operate as non-profit *Associazioni Sportive Dilettantistiche* (ASDs), a sport-oriented association structure that will be explained in detail in the next subchapter (Codice Civile, 2025, articles 36–42). While sport association also require a registration and to follow specific legal frameworks, they are fundamentally driven by community engagement, sportsmanship, preservation of cultural heritage, and the provision of recreational activities. Furthermore, it is typically prescribed that the work of the board of directors is unpaid volunteer work (ibid.).

Paid roles generally are limited to specific service functions for the association, such as cleaning or professional equipment operation. While some associations more oriented towards tourism compensate rowing instructors, in traditional associations, this instruction is typically provided voluntarily and without pay by other association members. This fundamental different motivations and core objectives are also what sets the interest of these two actors so far apart, also regarding aspects and their impacts on the local community and the environment. Therefore, one of the thematic areas of this thesis is to elucidate the financial aspects of both actors, given the limited transparency in this domain. Building upon this distinction, the specific structural elements of these non-profit *Associazioni Sportive Dilettantistiche* (ASDs) are outlined below.

Structure of Associazioni Sportive Dilettantistiche (ASDs)

The structure of ASDs under Italian law is specifically made to create a framework for amateur sports associations. Besides the strong non-profit profile, their primary purpose is

promoting sports and related activities. ASDs enjoy tax-exemptions and any type of surplus funds or reserves need to be reinvested into the institution, not allowing for any type of monetarily payout (Testo Unico Delle Imposte Sui Redditi, 2025, Article 148, paragraph 8).

In order to establish a balance of powers and control, every ASD is required to have a Governing Council (*Consiglio Direttivo*) that manages and administrates the association (Codice Civile, 2025, articles 36–42). They implement programmes, manage finances and develop internal regulations. Within the council different roles ensure a division of powers like: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, a separate Board of Auditors (*Collegio dei Revisori dei Conti*) and a board of Arbiters (*Collegio dei probiviri*) for disciplinary measures and internal disputes (ibid.). These seats are distributed democratically by the members (*soci*), who typically become members by applying and paying a certain annual or half annual fee. The usually annual Members Assembly (*Assamblea dei Soci*) is the event when budgets get approved and governing bodies elected. Membership grants rights (participation, facility access and voting) but also obligations like following the internal rules and paying the fees. Beyond this, many ASDs also affiliate with national sport federations (FIC, FICK, etc.) and additionally follow their rules. And in case of dissolution the remaining assets must be transferred to other associations (Codice Civile, 2025, articles 36–42).

Social, Cultural and Environmental Impact

Social & Cultural Relevance

As previously mentioned, unlike most tourism-oriented activities, rowing and sailing associations do not only provide meaningful sporting opportunities but, more importantly, serve as vital spaces for social, political, and cultural engagement (Castelli, 2024, p. 21; Testa & Rizzardini, 2011, p. 36). They offer accessible recreational options in a city where most sport infrastructures primarily cater to tourists (Castelli, 2024, p. 3). In her thesis, Luana Castelli (2024) underscores the significance of water sport associations as one of the few remaining “untouched” spaces where citizens can connect with an authentic Venetian way of life (pp. 42-44). Her research findings are of major importance to this chapter, forming a foundational basis for much of the analysis presented here.

Although not the central focus of this research, the transmission of local traditions and knowledge is clearly evident -an especially critical aspect in a city where the population continues to decline and traditional boatmaking skills are increasingly at risk (Casagrande, 2016; Castelli, 2024). By actively using, maintaining and restoring Venetian vessels, rowing and sailing associations facilitate the transfer of invaluable skills and knowledge across

generations (Rossetto, 2020, pp. 220–221). *Voga alla Veneta* and *Vela al Terzo* are celebrated here as living traditions, not merely historical relics, which is something Luana Castelli coins as “civic capital” (Castelli, 2024, p. 21). While the findings explore this topic in greater detail, a key challenge in preserving these traditions is fostering intergenerational connection through the successful transmission to younger generations and the cultivation of their involvement in these boat sports (Isnenghi et al., 2005, p. 48; Rossetto, 2020, p. 221). At present, very little written literature exists on the educational aspects of boating practices in Venice. This study’s interviews aim to provide an initial assessment of the current situation. Another demographic change of interest is the growing presence of non-Venetians and non-Italians, especially since Venice is a popular place of residence for foreigners (Bertocchi, 2023).

Of large importance is not only the sustainable preservation of cultural heritage and traditional practices in order to maintain the Venetian identity but also the protection of the city’s physical environment. This is especially of relevance in present times where globalization has led to a new age of mass tourism and economic exploitation. Here local associations serve as vital counterforces not only regarding cultural commodification but also regarding environmental degradation (Ravera, 2000, p. 29). This connection is particularly clear when discussing civic mobilization groups around environmental issues in the Venetian Lagoon (Castelli, 2024, pp. 12, 42). The next section explores the most pressing challenges and illustrates how citizen advocacy groups such as *Pax in Aqua* and its successor, *Insieme Contro il Moto Ondoso*, exemplify the strong connection between cultural identity and environmental stewardship.

Sustainability Challenges

The Venetian Lagoon has always existed as an interplay between natural forces and human actions, with each shaping the other over time. Historically, the Republic of Venice actively intervened in the lagoon’s natural processes, diverting rivers through canals to prevent accumulation of sediments and erected seawalls, the so called *Murazzi* to combat the erosion of the islands limiting the lagoon form the sea and offering protection to the city from storms and flooding (Ballarin, 1986; Bondesan & Furlanetto, 2012). In most recent times, the most prominent intervention has undoubtedly been the MOSE flood prevention system, which not only prevents floods but also significantly alters the ecological and social dynamics between the lagoon and its human and non-human inhabitants (Turner, 2024). While this long-standing interplay between the lagoon and the city is evident, the advent of the industrialisation of Venice in the end of the 19th century marked a turning point, exponentially accelerating the magnitude of these changes with the creation of the Marghera industry complex and the introduction of motorized boats consequently.

Rowing and sailing associations in the Venetian Lagoon face several significant environmental challenges, the most central being the poor quality of both air and water, as well as the wave motion, commonly known as “*moto ondosso*” (VeneziaToday, 2021). Closely related and intertwined with these primary issues are factors that have been long present, including the impact of large cruise ships docking directly in the historic centre (a practise banned since 2021); the ongoing oil tanker traffic in the southwestern part of the lagoon; the de facto unregulated motorboat traffic throughout the lagoon; the impacts of overtourism; the depopulation and displacement of island residents due to limited employment opportunities; and the scarcity of affordable long-term rentals, exacerbated by the proliferation of short-term accommodations like B&Bs and Airbnb’s (Berthiaume, 2023; Fabbri & Tattara, 2015; Salerno & Russo, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). It's important to note that while the negative impacts of these broader issues on the local population are not the direct subject of this thesis or thesis subjects, they almost always have indirect but significant consequences for these recreational spaces.

Air and Water Quality, Moto Ondoso and Resistance

The air and water quality within the Venetian Lagoon face significant challenges. Some estimates attribute 1200 premature deaths in metropolitan Venice each year to excessively high PM2.5 levels (C40 Cities, 2015). Exacerbated by the geographical and climatic location of the Po Valley, Venice experiences high levels of PM10, PM2.5, and NO2, surpassing or barely meeting EU limits (Prosdocimi et al., 2024, p. 273). While the historic centre is car-free, pollution can be attributed to Mestre’s traffic, domestic heating, Porto Marghera’s industry, the airport, and notably, maritime traffic (Ducoli, 2023). Diesel-powered vaporetti, taxis, and cargo boats all emit NO2, while large cruise ships, now docking in the Marghera port, emit sulphur into the air (Ducoli, 2023; Prosdocimi et al., 2024, pp. 274, 278). The overall boat presence increase can be seen in Table 2., showing how just from the 2000s there has been a doubling of motorized boats and almost a tripling of engine hours in the lagoon. Overall, the air pollution presents severe health risks. When looking at water quality the main problem are fuel and oil spills from the motorized boat traffic. They contaminate the lagoon's delicate aquatic ecosystem and the constant movement of vessels that stirs up sediments, reducing water transparency and potentially releasing pollutants trapped on the lagoon floor.

Year	Residents Historic Centre + Lagoon	Rowing Boats	Motorized boats	Engine Hours	Km Traveled
1936	198369	6000	250		
1961	186852	3650	4400	1 458 573	6 475 705
2003	95167	1050	31650	3 966 650	21 974 905
2022	76195	1150	60497	11 000 360	90 734 343

Table 2. Evolution of traffic Development in the Venetian Lagoon. Data provided by Gruppo Insieme and retrieved from (Canestrelli et al., 2000; Insula Quaderini, 1936, 1971)

However, although air and water quality pose significant environmental challenges, associations face the problem of moto ondoso (wave motion) generated by motorized boats far more acutely than other city actors. These waves pose a threat in various ways. For one, they make manoeuvrability more difficult, increasing the danger of accidents. In particularly affected areas, certain forms of water sport -such as English rowing and *Voga alla Veneta* -become impossible to practice, thus diminishing space for recreational activities and cultural heritage. Furthermore, these waves, especially those created by larger and faster vessels, relentlessly batter the fragile foundations of Venice's historic canal-side buildings, contributing to their gradual erosion and structural weakening (VeneziaToday, 2021). There is very limited research on the negative effects of moto ondoso in the context of Venice, making this topic of great importance for the interview section.

At the same time, resistance to moto ondoso has been growing. After the initial foundation and subsequent resolution of Pax in Aqua (Peace in Water), a working group created by 12 different rowing associations, and the successes of the organisation No Grandi Navi -founded in 2012 and, alongside pressure from UNESCO, crucial in stopping cruise ships from entering the historic centre in 2021 -the Gruppo Insieme Contro il Moto Ondoso, founded in 2019, is currently active (Gruppo Insieme, 2025; No Grandi Navi, 2017; Pax in Aqua Direttivo, 2002). This consortium of 41 associations of Venetian Rowing, Venetian sailing and Motor boat associations has gathered together to collect data and create pressure to introduce measures to limit moto ondoso in the Lagoon. In the findings of the interviews a part is devoted to members of this group and how touristic water services play a role in the issue of moto ondoso as well as how they could be part of its mitigation. This once again shows the relevance of water-sport associations for civic organisation and participation in the Venetian Lagoon.

Conclusion on the Literature Review

In conclusion, it is evident that rowing and sailing associations offer crucial insights for a more sustainable tourism, which is important especially regarding the rapid environmental

changes the Venetian Lagoon is experiencing. These associations are deeply embedded in local culture and the lagoon environment, making them play a key role in fostering more sustainable change. This research addresses the existing gaps by aiming at exploring how a shift towards sustainable tourism can occur. Specifically, by examining the practices and impacts of rowing and sailing associations. Current literature lacks specific socioeconomic data and in-depth understanding of social and cultural dynamics within rowing and sailing associations, justifying the explorative qualitative approach adopted in this thesis. Unlike mainstream tourism, these associations promote slower, traditional, non-motorized and community-oriented engagement within the lagoon. This emphasizes heritage and directly counters pollution and erosion caused by motorized traffic. Central to this research is the question of how the large disparity between sustainable rowing and sailing associations and current damaging tourism activities can be overcome, to encourage a more resident-friendly and ecological sound model. Ultimately, the aim is to uncover the hidden socio-economic value of the association and simultaneously determine their size reach and impact. This could suggest pathways for more sustainable practices to inform future tourism policies.

Methodology for the Empirical Research

This chapter outlines the methodological approach of using interviews to investigate the landscape of the Venetian Lagoon, focusing on sport associations, touristic operations and local stakeholders. It lays out the theoretical background and presents the reasoning for structuring the research into three different questionnaires, detailing their thematic areas. Furthermore, it provides a rationale for the focused selection and narrowing of the research subjects as well as it shows how the sections of the questionnaires are linked to the thematic areas. Finally, the last subchapter discusses the evaluation of the data collection process and the methodological framework used in this study as well as the ethical considerations.

Motivation Behind Interviews as a Research Method

The decision of choosing an explorative qualitative approach in the form of interviews to understand the attractiveness and use of the Venetian Lagoon was motivated by the scarcity of any previous academic research as showcased in the previous chapter. Even the limited presence of written recordings on the subject matter beyond technical books made fieldwork unavoidable. Thus, the methodological framework outlined in Patton's 2014 book *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* serves as the underlying resource for the design and implementation of this research methodology. Here, the focus is on being open to uncovering unexpected findings and laying foundational work that can later be expanded upon, as well as inviting interviewees to kick-off new impulses in the research: thus, while questionnaires follow a general pre-made path, in-person interviews allow for diversions from the protocol, particularly crucial in the testing phase, enabling a jointly constructed discourse and the exploration of unforeseen insights (Patton, 2014, p. 676). This methodology also excels at uncovering varied and often unarticulated lived experiences of those within the associations and the broader lagoon community. Building on this flexibility, Gubrium & Holstein (2016, p. 4) argue that interviews can shape how interviewees perceive and present themselves, turning the interview process itself into an active participant in the creation of new ideas.

Employing an inductive thematic analysis, this research aims to generate insights and deepen understanding of current conditions, focusing less on developing or testing universal theories and more on making sense of the specific context of the Venetian Lagoon (Patton, 2014, pp. 722-759). Given this approach, the collection of rich, detailed data is of uppermost importance, leading to a preference for in-person interviews where possible. This helps to utilize visual and auditory cues to not only understand the subject matter but also the interviewee perspective, although some of the data is collected also through phone

calls and emails (Patton, 2014, p.722-759). Furthermore, one of the thematic areas is not only to create a map of the current lagoon situation, but also to highlight and understand the complex social and economic interactions between the involved actors. These qualitative methods are particularly fitting to explore dynamic and ever-adapting situations, just like the changes in the Venetian Lagoon in the last 50 years, with a huge increase in tourism and boat traffic in the last two decades, where data from just a few years ago can seem outdated and not properly reflecting of present situations (Choi et al., 2024; Gleick, 1987).

To effectively navigate this dynamic and under-researched environment, and at the same time access a wide range of perspectives, the research was also conducted using snowball sampling, not solely to first understand the size and amplitude of actors but also to locate key informants, interviewees of importance due to their expert knowledge, connectedness to other research subjects and/or subjects that could not be allocated otherwise (Patton, 2014, p.451; Robinson, 2014, p. 37). This was especially important for the third questionnaire group “local stakeholders” that was created completely by this method. As with any qualitative research, particularly interviews, it is crucial to address the inherent subjectivity of the process. The interviewer’s role as an outsider is important to acknowledge, but also offers the benefit of ensuring a relatively objective approach. Prior to conducting this research, the author of this thesis was not affiliated to neither the commercial tourism sector, nor rowing or sailing in general. As a foreigner, the author might be more objective but also from an anthropological view it must be noted that he is perceiving the research field through his own subjective lens and thus nevertheless an unavoidable subjectiveness persists (Patton, 2014, p. 20) His limited proficiency in Italian is also important to acknowledge, as essential information may be lost in translation (Inhetveen, 2012).

Subjectiveness is even more obvious when addressing the interview subjects. A president of a rowing association, will most likely speak positively about his association as much as a tourist boat operator will be less motivated to also talk about the negative consequences of his business for the environment. To a degree the subjectiveness should even be embraced as long as its presence is communicated and there is an awareness of it (Peshkin, 1988).

Participant Selection and Research Scope

The initial challenge of preparation for the data collection was limiting the geographical dimension of the research within the Venetian Lagoon. The subjects of examination, this being the associations, tourism operators and other local stakeholders are spread over all of the lagoon including the Venetian Island, Mestre, Murano, Burano, Lido di Jesolo, Punta

Sabbioni and Chioggia. Further, there is also a small presence of tour operators along the Wetlands in the south like the ATN Laguna Sud which offer tour rides (*ATN Laguna Sud. Homepage*, 2025). In order to facilitate research and specify the research space, the decision was taken to decrease the research scope down to the municipality of Venice as outlined on Figure 2. This meaning that only the Venetian Island, Mestre, Murano and Burano Lido and Pellestrina are included. Relevant for this restriction is the port of exit and not the location of the tour. This meaning the location where the activity begins and not where it takes place. While the scope of this research was limited to the municipality of Venice, it is important to acknowledge that Chioggia's substantial presence of larger boat tour operators warrants further study.

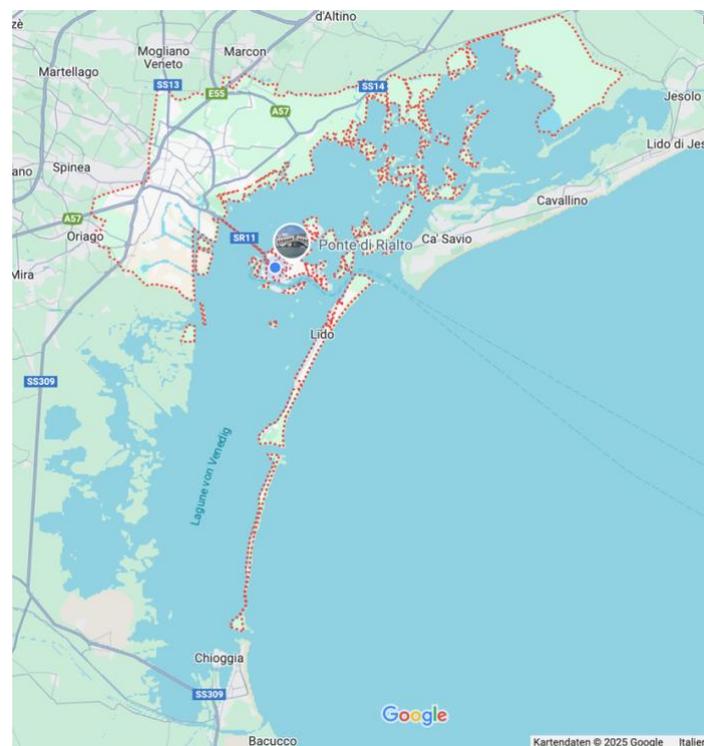


Figure 2. Map of Municipality of Venice (outlined in red) from Google Maps, 2025, figure created by the author.

Selection of Interview Subjects

To ensure the completeness of the research universe as no official list of the present rowing and sailing association in Venice exist, an initial list of candidates had to be created by the author. Shortened versions of all three Overview Lists are provided in the Annex. For finding the associations a cross-reference was done of:

- Google and Facebook searches with the keywords “Remiere A.S.D Venezia” and “Vela al Terzo Venezia”

- A list by the national coordinator of Voga alla Veneta Associations (VogaVenezia.com, 2010)
- The blog Conoscere Venezia's rowing and sailing association map (Conoscere Venezia, 2023)
- The master thesis by Manuel Rosetto about the ethnographic Heritage of Small Boats that already contains a past attempt at classifying the rowing associations (Rosetto, 2021)

To assess the lagoon's intrinsic recreational and touristic economic potential, the list of activities excluded tour operators using the lagoon solely for transportation to other destinations. This includes water taxis, boat tours to Murano, Burano, Torcello, etc. Further also Gondolas were excluded due to the already existing research and the time limit of research (Altun, 2022; Dunn, 2005; von Dach, 2024).

To ensure a relative completeness of the research universe of the touristic section a cross-reference was done of:

- Supervisors Giupponi's Excel Overview of Touristic Activities, already filtered from Tripadvisor data
- Google Maps, Google search and TripAdvisor results for the keyboards "Boat rental Venice", "Boat Tour Venice", "Boat Experience Venice"

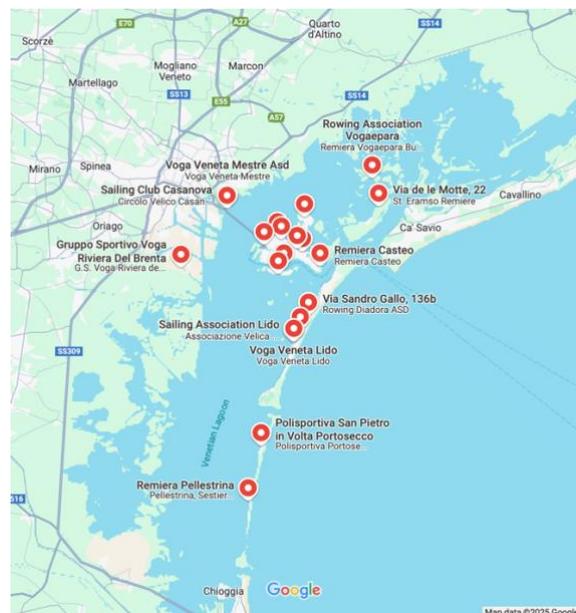


Figure 3. Map with the selection of rowing associations (left) from Google Maps, 2025, figure created by the author.

For Figure 3 and the first section of the excel data collected on each association included: name, foundation year, adult annual membership fee, member count, number of owned boats and offered sports activities.

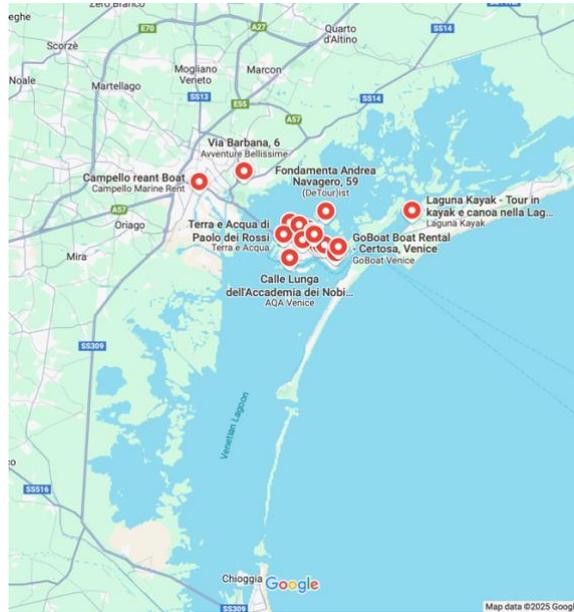


Figure 4. Map with the selection of touristic operators (right) from Google Maps, 2025, figure created by the author.

For Figure 4 and the second section of the Excel data, entitled 'Tourism Operators,' the following information was compiled: name, tourism experience category and website.

The third section of the final overview excel included in the appendix named Overview Recreational Lagoon Activities is the section Local Stakeholders.

This section created a space of collected recommendations using snowball sampling, here the expert's location was not relevant as long as they had trustworthy references. The data visible in the Appendix collects data on the third interviewee section "Local Stakeholder" regarding Occupation, Origin and Relationship to the Thesis. The first references were given during interviews with the first two groups and are a mix of: local artisans which were interviewed to find out more about the relevance of rowing associations regarding the conservation of traditional artisanry; a tour guide to know more about the tourist landscape in Venice; researchers that had worked on similar topics; association members to include the views from a non-director perspective and a spokesperson from "Gruppo Insieme". The last one was crucial to understand the perspective on what already early in the research showed to be a major issue for rowing and sailing associations: moto ondoso.

Theoretical Framework of the Design of the Questionnaires

As previously hinted in the chapter “Motivation behind Interviews as a Research Method”, the decision to carry out in-person interviews aided by a questionnaire was taken to create a balance between, on one side, data that allows for the discovery and exploration of new aspects of the research topic, and on the other, the need to categorize and compare findings. However, following Gubrium & Holstein (2016, p. 13), it is crucial to recognize that asking questions not only retrieves but also influences and shapes the interviewee's understanding of their own experiences. Therefore, to empower interviewees to express their genuine thoughts, this research moved beyond a purely standardized approach, embracing a more flexible format that encouraged open dialogue (Gubrium & Holstein, 2016, p. 15). Ultimately, an open-ended interview model was chosen that is based on Turner III & Hagstrom-Schmidt (2022, pp. 754–760) interpretation of Gall et al. (1996) original framework. The model allows for a good mix of structure and flexibility. Essentially it consists of a pre-written questionnaire that facilitates comparability and allows for spontaneous follow-up questions if new interesting topics emerge. This flexibility proved to be especially important given the exploratory nature of this research. The question design adhered to three core principles: using open-ended questions, maintaining neutral phrasing, and avoiding compound questions (Hart, 2024).

Since there are 3 distinct interview subject groups, 3 different questionnaires were developed aimed at covering each sector's most relevant fields regarding the relevant fields for each sector. Here, the associations and tourism operators were relatively straightforward, since each group presents similar characteristics and ensuring a certain comparability was the main goal. The focus area of the associations being: I. association profile, II. membership and participation, III. economic and financial aspects, IV. social and community impact, V. local community and sustainability. The attention of the tourism operators is centred in: I. business profile, II. customer profile and services, III. economic impact and business performance, IV. Operational challenges and market dynamics, V. local community and sustainability. Conversely, the local stakeholder's questionnaire was designed to be comparatively simple since the subjects interviewed ranged between local artisans, researchers, activist movements spokespersons to tourist guides. The inherent heterogeneity of this group called for a streamlined questionnaire, with follow-up questions generated during the interview.

Acknowledging the diverse backgrounds of the participants, all questionnaires were originally written in English and then translated into Italian and German. The Italian translation was crucial to accommodate the majority of interviewees, whose mother tongue

language is Italian or the closely related Venetian dialect. The German translation was included to meet the needs of a smaller group of native German speakers and to capitalize on the interviewer's fluency, ensuring clear and accurate communication. When possible, the main method of data collection are in-person interviews, since, for one, they allow to build a rapport with the participants, it allows to observe nonverbal cues and last but not least facilitates to gather rich, detailed responses with follow up questions that would be not be possible to be asked over email for example. Nevertheless, video call, phone calls or emails are in that order the alternatives to still achieve to collect data if meeting in person is not possible. Non-responders to the first invitation email were contacted again with a follow-up email normally 2 weeks later. If a participant was considered of uttermost importance the study's aims, a third attempt was made via telephone. Table 3 illustrates the areas of inquiry explored in interview questionnaires for each participant group and outlines how these sections relate to the main thematic areas. The complete questionnaires for each group are listed in the appendix.

Focus Area & Alignment with Thematic Areas	Rowing & Sailing Associations	Tourism Operators	Local Stakeholders
Profile & Structure/Operation	Association Profile, Membership and Participation	Business Profile, Customer and Services	Interviewee Profile
Economic Aspects & Structure	Economic and Organisational Aspects	Economic Impact & Business Performance, Operational Challenges & Market Dynamics	Socioeconomic Aspects
Social & Community Impact	Social and Community Impact	Local Community and Sustainability	Local Community
Sustainability & Lagoon Preservation	Local Community and Sustainability	Local Community and Sustainability	Sustainability
Future Perspectives & Further Research	Implicitly covered in discussions within other areas	Implicitly covered in discussions within other areas	Implicitly covered in discussions within other areas

Table 3. Mapping thematic Areas to Interview Questionnaire Content sections (allocation of focus areas to Questionnaire section title). Table created by the author.

Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure the participants to feel comfortable sharing information that may be confidential (business revenue, opinions on competition and other associations and generally also the negative aspects of operating in the lagoon) a document was developed to be signed before every interview to inform and ensure each interviewees anonymity. This document can be found in English in the Appendix.

The signed document gives permission to record and transcribe the interviews for solely the research of this thesis and ensures: anonymity and the secure (files on a password-protected computer) and subsequent deletion of the recordings once the research is finished. The participants are also informed that they can revoke their permission at any time. In order to protect the privacy of the interviewed individuals their names were anonymised in order to comply their privacy rights unless specifically asked for permission to cite them. The Venetian Island is a small city and most participants know each other so that great attention has to be given to anonymity in order to not cause any conflicts unless permission is given.

Testing of the Questionnaire

The initial questionnaire, designed with five to seven bullet point questions per focus topic, underwent pilot testing following interview schemes for qualitative research (Hart, 2024; Turner III & Hagstrom-Schmidt, 2022). After a total of six initial pilot interviews - one with an association, two with tourism operators and three local stakeholders- various key improvement were identified to improve free flow of conversation, allow easier evaluation, comparability and understandability.

To foster a more natural conversation and ensure consistent data, bullet point questions were replaced with fully written questions, ensuring perfectly equal questions and thus uniformity across interviews, allowing for more comparable answers. Further, the wording was improved to formulate question in a more neutral manner and to minimize wording that could be interpreted in any way as judgemental.

The interview structure was segmented into four to five sections, with an added “further suggestions” section, allowing for easier later evaluation. A few questions, especially those regarding the assessment of the economic dimensions of tourism operators were refined to

elicit precise values and a reminder of interview anonymity was added to encourage candid responses. Questions that caused confusion or yielded limited information such as “What are the social values that the association is creating?” or those that were too open-ended, or repeated similar previous questions were removed.

Furthermore, the interview flow and structure were optimized with slight changes in the question order, minimizing interviewer interruptions. Timing wise it was assessed that depending on the willingness to share information the interview script duration was estimated to range from 20 to 40 minutes, with an additional 20 minutes allocated for exploring emerging topics of interest. All in all, the questionnaire design was an iterative process and minor adjustments continued beyond the testing phase.

Interviewee feedback was consistently positive; however, the topic of participants sharing business revenue remained sensitive and will require ongoing careful handling. Preliminary themes and the direction of the thematic areas also emerged such as the split of associations into associations with different interests or the difference of touristic audiences for these “experience activities” and the traditional sightseeing tourist in Venice.

Thematic Analysis as an Analytical Approach

This subchapter lays out the analytical approach taken to interpret the qualitative data gathered through the interviews. The goal is to go beyond a descriptive account of the interviewee’s experiences and opinions, aiming to interpret these findings by identifying reoccurring themes and, by doing so, address the research question:

How are traditional non-profit sport associations in the Venetian Lagoon navigating socio-economic and environmental challenges in relation to the growing presence of tourism-oriented water services and broader lagoon transformations such as environmental degradation and demographic change?

To help unpack such a complex question the analysis focused on five different thematic areas:

1. Understanding the socioeconomic nature and economic dimension of the associations and tourism operators
2. Examining the structural and operational nature of associations and tourism operators
3. Evaluating the social and local community impact
4. Assessing the role in lagoon preservation and sustainability
5. Exploring future perspectives and identifying areas for further research

Following the transcription of each recorded interview, to address these thematic areas, the interview data was evaluated through thematic analysis, focusing on the identification and interpretation of reoccurring themes, as detailed in the following subchapter. To facilitate understanding the analytical approach, the next section explains the theoretical background of thematic analysis, followed by an explanation of its application in this study and how the evaluation and analysis were performed.

Understanding Meaning Through Thematic Analysis

The primary analytical framework employed in this study is thematic analysis. Given the scarcity of existing research on rowing and sailing associations in the Venetian Lagoon, thematic analysis was chosen as an appropriate research method for exploring this understudied area. The theoretical foundation is laid by Braun & Clarke (2006) publication and the approach is based on Patton (2014) and Creswell & Poth's (2017) book.

Thematic analysis, as presented by Braun & Clarke (2006) is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into pattern of meaning, in this thesis categorized as "themes" across a qualitative dataset. It focuses on identifying shared meanings and experiences within the data -in this case within the recorded interviews - allowing the researcher to interpret complex narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 165). This makes it especially valuable for understanding nuanced and lived realities of people involved in traditional rowing and sailing associations, especially since there is not any academic preexisting research regarding this group.

One of the central strengths of thematic analysis is its flexibility. There exists both inductive and deductive thematic analysis. Inductive analysis allows for themes to emerge directly from the data, without referencing pre-existing frameworks, while deductive thematic analysis codes data into preexisting theoretical lenses, testing and redefining preexisting concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 12). In this study both approaches were used: while overarching themes were informed by an existing framework and the research question (deductive), the final analysis remained open to uncover new patterns and thematic subcategory's that came up organically from participants narratives (inductive). Using this dual approach enriched the understanding of traditional water sport association and their challenges, and thus thematic analysis provided both adequate structural and interpretive depth to allow for an initial exploration of its role, structure, struggles and future outlooks.

Application of Thematic Analysis in This Study

Initially, the final research question and general themes were still broad, aiming to find out more about actors within the Venetian Lagoon. After an initial overview of associations and tourism providers, and after conducting preliminary interviews, the thesis focus narrowed down to sailing and rowing associations, as well as tourism operators. The limited number of water-based tourism operators willing to take part in the interviews and the growing group of additional local stakeholders related to associations caused to shift the focus towards the associations. Subsequently, after initial testing of the questionnaire, the central topics of the thesis, beyond a general socio-economic perspective, were defined. As the focus narrowed, five thematic areas were defined to cover the most pressing topics for the associations and provide essential general information, thus allowing for a foundational overview in this initial research. Following this initial more inductive phase of familiarization with the data and the subsequent refinement of the research focus and thematic areas, a primarily deductive thematic analysis was undertaken, guided by the five pre-defined themes. While the overarching themes provided a clear structure for the analysis, the process continued to be open to inductive insights, allowing for new sub-themes to emerge with more interview data collected. The goal throughout, being to identify the similarities and differences across diverse interview participants.

Given the extensive quantity of data collected due to the nature of qualitative research, comprising a total of over 18 hours of recorded interviews, a systematic approach to analysis was essential. And so, in addition to the manual review of interview recordings, the speech recognition system Whisper was utilized to generate initial transcripts (OpenAI, 2022). This process facilitated the identification of reoccurring themes. Crucially, the generated transcripts were only used as a first draft and subsequently manually reviewed against the original audio to ensure complete accuracy.

Following the transcription and organization of each recorded interview, the data was systematically sorted according to the pre-defined research themes. The characteristics of associations, tourism operators, and local stakeholders were categorized as presented within the overarching themes detailed in Table 3. Any information gaps identified during the analysis were also noted. These five thematic areas provided a structured lens, facilitating a clearer understanding of the data and enabling a more effective approach to addressing the research question. For instance, a meaningful comparison of the economic dimensions of associations and businesses within Venice's tourism-driven economy necessitates a prior understanding of their fundamental operational nature. This analysis did not only identify the pre-defined themes but also remained open to related inductive insights, allowing for the emergence of new sub-themes. The authors own interpretive analysis played a crucial role in making sense of these themes, an inherent aspect of qualitative research (Creswell

& Poth, 2017, p. 523). Ultimately, the goal of this methodological process of analysing the qualitative data is to provide a foundational overview of the key issues concerning the actors within the Venetian Lagoon. The subsequent chapter will present these findings.

Findings

Interview Findings Related to Rowing and Sailing Associations

Categorisation of Associations – Focus and Size

While all rowing and sailing associations in the Venetian Lagoon share a similar structural framework, the interviews revealed that they can generally be classified into three broad categories based on their primary focus: competitive, social, or educational. Although most associations integrate common aspects, their primary emphasis varies substantially. Figure 5 visualizes these variations along a spectrum of association types.

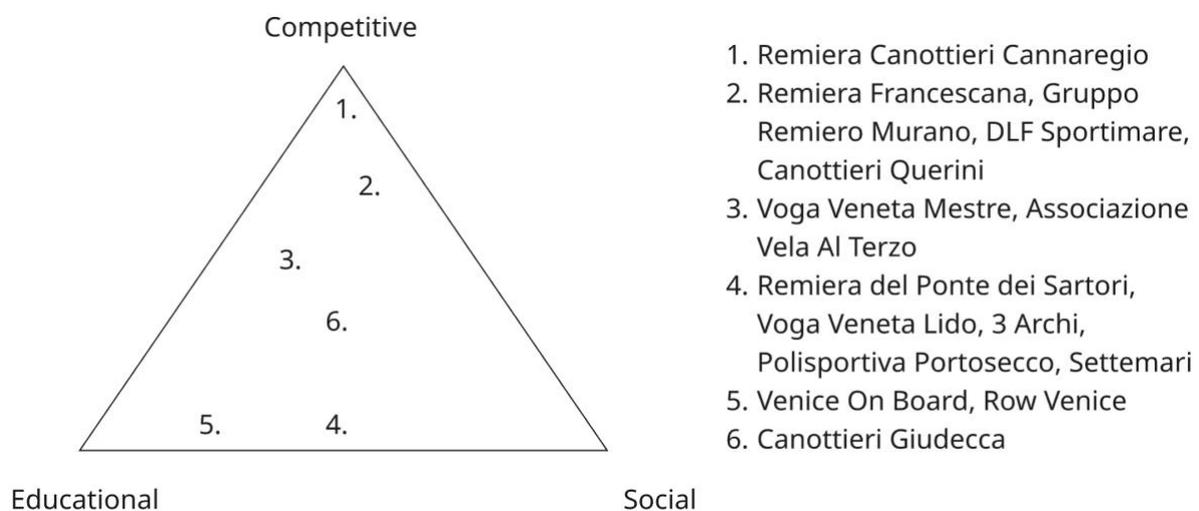


Figure 5. Spectrum of association focus based on interview findings, figure created by the author.

At one end of this spectrum are the most competitive, sport-focused clubs. These include the Remiera Francescana, Gruppo Remiero Murano and the DLF Sportimare. Here the focus is training and performance, attracting mostly experienced rowers who often have independent key access to association’s facilities. Interestingly, while Remiera Canottieri Cannaregio was not directly interviewed, it was consistently described by other respondents as the most competitive of all associations. Occupying the middle ground are hybrid associations like Voga Veneta Mestre and Associazione Vela al Terzo. These associations successfully blend a competitive drive with an educational mission, regularly offering introductory courses to newcomers. Finally, a significant number of the interviewed associations, including Remiera del Ponte dei Sartori, Voga Veneta Lido, 3 Archi, and Polisportiva Portosecco, place a greater emphasis on social and educational aspects, combining social outings with the instruction of new members.

Certain associations exhibit distinctive characteristics. For example, Settemari is notable for its regular, multi-day rowing expeditions. Associations at the more educationally focused end of the spectrum include two of the newer and less conventional associations. Venice on Board combines features of a conventional association with a strong educational orientation, offering social evening events and teaching rowing as a form of transportation—a practise they call 'a rowing stroll' (*voga di passeggio*). Row Venice, on the other hand, is the most education- and tourism-focused group, primarily dedicated to teaching tourists how to row, often by experienced competitive female rowers. Lastly, the Association Giudecca presents the most varied profile and is also the largest, with over 440 members, encompassing all three areas: social events (book presentations, film evenings, social lunches), competitive participation (Regatta Storica), and educational outreach (collaborations with local schools).

Another important factor of differentiation of the associations is their size and accessibility. The median size of interviewed associations was 135 members. The 14 interviewed rowing associations represent a combined total of 2,222 members, while the only purely Venetian sailing association, Associazione Vela al Terzo, has 120 members. This indicates the comparatively smaller scale of sailing relative to rowing, with estimates of total rowers ranging from 3,700 to 6,000, including unregistered participants with privately owned boats. Various association presidents also stressed how the associations required a certain minimum number of members to work. Some presidents noted that they have held their roles for several years simply because no one else was willing to take on the considerable time commitment and responsibility involved. Silvio Testa emphasized that association regulations in Italy are primarily designed for large organizations, which makes compliance more burdensome for smaller ones. Nevertheless, almost all associations reported that their membership numbers—aside from a temporary dip during the COVID-19 pandemic—have remained largely stable over the past two decades.

The turnover rate of members differs largely between association. While the President of the A.S.D. Settemari Luisa Vianello states that “we prefer members that don’t come and go” and the association Voga Veneta Lido states that more than 60% of his members that have been members for more than 10 years, most other associations experience more dynamic membership turnover. For example, Ermanno Antonioli from the Remiera Sartori estimates that around 80% of members change within 10 years. Again, Venice on Board and Row Venice fall out of this category. The former acts more as a rowing school than a traditional association, with most members participating for 1–3 years before moving on to other A.S.D.s or private boats. Row Venice, meanwhile, has very few regular members at all, as most activities take place with tourists.

These differences in size and accessibility stem primarily from the composition of their membership and the ease with which individuals can join each type of association. Generally, associations do not advertise; prospective members typically learn of them through word-of-mouth, often via direct referral from a current member. In some cases - such as at DLF Sportimare -membership is exclusively by referral, with current members responsible for introducing newcomers to the Remiera. Active advertising by associations is infrequent, with a notable exception being Gruppo Tre Archi's Spring 2025 Voga Veneta Course, which explicitly invites non-members to participate in an 8-lesson introductory course package. Two of the interviewed foreign association members stated that Venice on Board acted as their "entryway into the world of rowing", after which they later joined more conventional associations. Venice on Board even reported that many gondoliers send their children to them to learn how to row the gondola, partially because they offer specific gondola classes and partially because also many other associations do not allow their new members to row in the channels. Several interviewees expressed difficulty in joining associations, but once accepted, reported a strong sense of community.

Socio-Demographic Profile of Members

This subchapter shifts focus from associations themselves to the members they host. The profile of the association significantly influences the origin, residence, gender, age and occupation of its members. To better understand how the "typical" association looks like, and to what degree they differ from each other the Canottieri Giudecca kindly provided data of the makeup of the Association in April 2025.

Age Structure and Generational Gaps

As shown in Figure 6, there is a bimodal age distribution: a small peak among younger members and a larger, wider peak among those aged 50–80. This leaves a noticeable gap in the 30–50 range, which several interviewees attributed to work and family responsibilities. As Pierpaolo Vianello (Polisportiva Portosecco) explains: "In the past people used to have time for a hobby after work, but due to the economic development in recent decades this is now the time people spend working a second job to sustain themselves and their family, leaving no time for venetian rowing." The challenge is more severe in associations that do not actively cater to younger generations. For example, the Voga Veneta Lido reported that of its 127 members, only 8-9 are children, with the majority being retirees. As a result, social activities have shifted to weekdays, as many members have a more flexible schedule, thus possibly allowing less for participation of working members. This demographic trend also reflects the aging population of Venice's historic centre, where nearly 50% of the residents of Venice Island are over 50 years or older according to the end of 2024 census (Leoni, 2025). In contrast, associations that are easier to reach for people not residing in the historic

centre like the DLF Sportimare that is situated next to the St. Lucia train station have attracted many students and young workers. The association noted that half of its members are young and that demand for joining the association is high, reporting receiving several calls each week from people interested in joining, as the association’s accessibility by car and train makes it especially attractive for its members coming from all over Mestre and Spinea, Padua and Ferrara. In fact, only 3 of their members reside on the island.

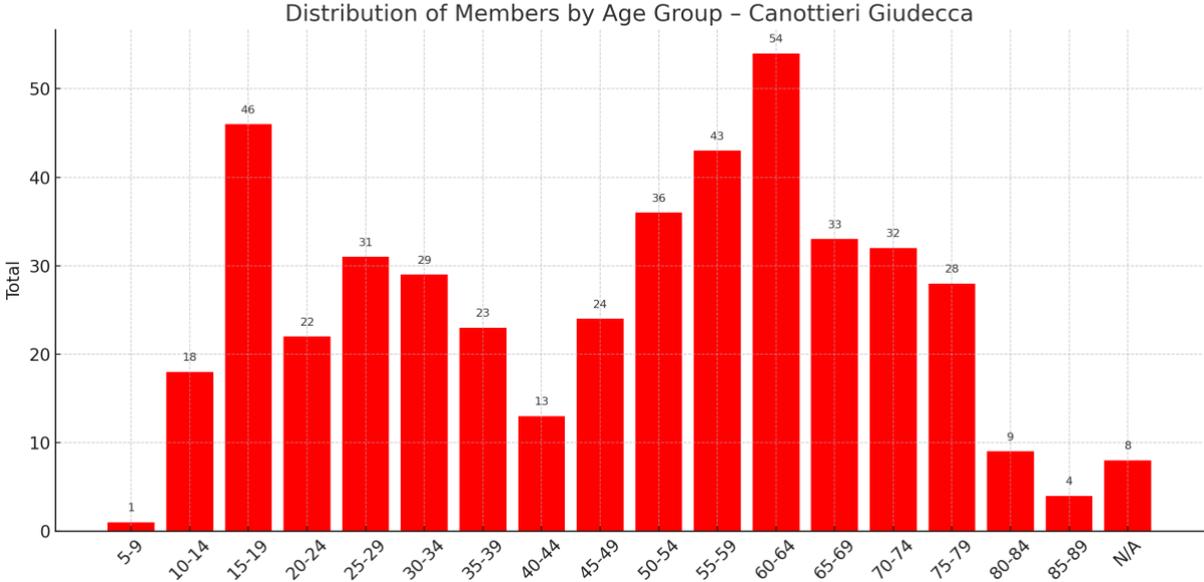


Figure 6. Distribution of members by age group. Data courtesy of Canottieri Giudecca, figure created by the author.

In contrast, the Voga Veneta Mestre shared that their location near San Giuliano Park struggles to attract young people, with less than 10% of their members being under 25, since their location by the lagoon lacks accessible public transport connections, limiting its attractiveness to youth. This trend may have negative implications for the future of competitive rowing, which depends on younger participants. Some associations, such as the Polisportiva Portosecco have introduced initiatives to attract younger generations, like summer kayak courses in which 80 to 90 kids participate each summer in the hopes they will get interested in the lagoon and later transition to Venetian rowing. This is made easier in towns like San Pietro in Volta, where younger families and seasonal residents are still common.

The same can be seen at the Remiere Murano that also still has a relatively young membership base due to a younger local population than in the historic centre. However, many associations expressed that aging leadership and instructors have reduced their capacity to organize outreach. While some sporadic collaborations with schools to teach rowing exist, the Remiera Murano for example noted that they can no longer organise such events due to a lack of instructors who are available and physically fit. The COVID-

19 pandemic also interrupted many of these intergenerational exchanges. For example, *Voga Veneta Lido* stopped all such projects after the first lockdown.

Gender Dynamics and Inclusion

One positive development in the Venetian rowing scene is the growing popularity of rowing among women. Many original associations were in the beginning exclusively reserved for men, especially the more historic ones like for example the *Canottieri Querini*. While their association statutes did not always explicitly exclude women, the early sport associations were predominantly male, and this remains the case in some associations today. The membership data by the *Canottieri Giudecca* for example presented a 2/3 male 1/3 female ratio in April 2025. However, change is still ongoing as Luisa Vianello (*Remiera Settemari*) recounted in her interview. When she began rowing in 1982, she encountered only men at the *sede* (clubhouse) of *Settemari* and the only women who occasionally rowed were the wives of members. More than 40 years later the picture has changed significantly. As Vittorio De Cesco, a teacher at *3 Archi* mentions he sees a lot of potential for growth among women in Venetian rowing and nowadays also many women groups operate within the associations – such as the women’s group “Un po di donne” that row down rivers and events like the *Regatta of the Woman*,” hosted by *Canottieri Giudecca* for International Women’s Day. A higher percentage of women seems to be noticeable in associations that are more open for new members like the *Canottieri Sartori* for example where they even make up a majority (60%). *Venice on Board* also reports a female majority. *Row Venice* has also played a key role in gender equality: its revenue has historically helped compensate for gender disparities in prize money for the *Regatta Storica* and other regattas -showing that advocacy for women in rowing has been part of the Venetian scene for years.

Openness to Foreigners and Short-Term Residents

Openness for foreigners and temporary residents like students varies widely. Some associations, particularly the more traditional and competitive ones, stated in interviews that they are interested only in members that are expected to stay in Venice, for example long-time residents and that teaching short term inhabitants, often staying only 1-3 years is not worth it. However, more inclusive associations like *3 Archi* and *Settemari* maintain a more welcoming attitude toward short-term residents and students. While they also hope for members to stay as long as possible, especially considering that most associations offer instruction free of charge by volunteers and the teaching is very time intensive, they are still willing to give it a chance. Although newer associations like *Venice on Board* and *Row Venice* are more expensive, one could argue that short-term residents can benefit from the activities of *Venice on Board* and *Row Venice* and learn how to row there, lowering the barriers to accessing more traditional associations afterwards.

Organizational and Financial Structures of Rowing and Sailing Associations

The interviews and research reveal a wide range of membership fees, ranging from €50 at Venice on Board up to €540 at Canottieri Francesco Querini. Nevertheless, most associations have similar membership fees, typically between €100 and €300 a year. An overview of the fees collected across different associations is shown in Figure 7. It is important to keep in mind, however, that (1) some of these associations have additional sources of income, and (2) some also charge fees for lessons.

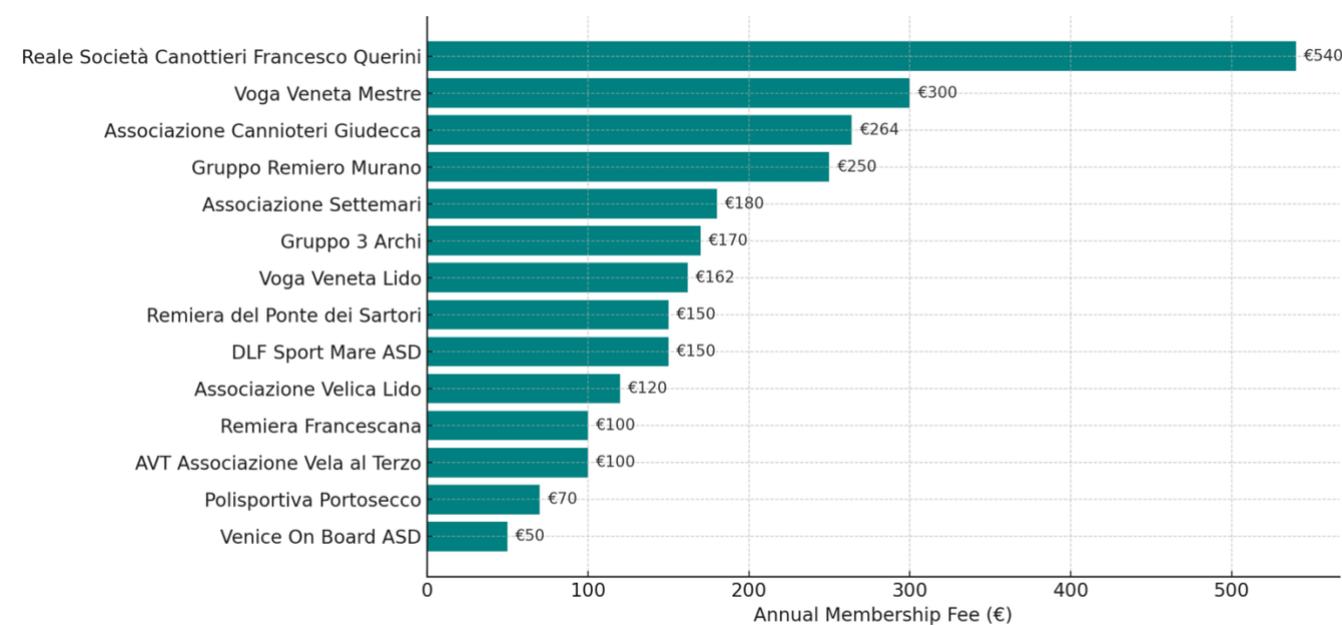


Figure 7. Annual membership fees at the association for adults, figure created by the author.

Although all associations share a commitment to preserving Venice's traditional maritime culture and are registered as non-profit A.S.D. entities, their financial strategies and operational structures demonstrate significant heterogeneity. Most associations rent their premises from the Municipality of Venice, though there are notable exceptions. The youngest association, Venice on Board, rents from a private owner, while one of the oldest, the Querini association, owns its premises. Another exception is DLF Sport Mare, which occupies a space provided by the National Railway as part of its afterwork (*dopo lavoro*) activities. Additionally, some associations must pay rent to the state (*Demanio*) for buildings it owns -such as Associazione Vela al Terzo- or for water space usage, as in the case of Voga Veneta Lido.

Venetian rowing associations showed a clear divergence in managing their revenue and operational cost approach. On one side of the spectrum is the Canottieri Querini, which is unique in that it owns the building it occupies. This leads them to have high fixed maintenance and upkeep costs. For them only twenty percent of costs are covered by membership fees for rowing activities, while the rest gets financed from the on-site gym they have as well as external support like sponsors and patrons. Overall, their high costs make them reliant on external and secondary activities.

At the other extreme there is the Polisportiva Portosecco that rents its space from the municipality and thus has lower fixed costs. It also has one of the lowest membership fees (70€ annual) in order to allow for maximum inclusivity. For them their biggest expense is boat maintenance since this work is outsourced to a third party. Consequently, because membership income is low, they must also rely on other income sources. To do so, they also have a sponsor as well as organize social events with the proceeds supporting the association's upkeep.

Venice on Board is the only association with a lower membership fee than Portosecco, employing a hybrid model wherein the annual membership fee is €50, supplemented by a nominal fee per lesson. This structure is necessary because the instructors work there full-time. One of the association instructors from Venice on Board explains that the association is only able to cover its costs because tourist activities indirectly “subsidize” member lessons. Usually, associations offer unlimited lessons as long as instructors are available. Venice on Board employs 4–5 full-time workers and lists salaries, boat materials, and insurance as its main expenses.

Traditionally, associations have relied on their member volunteers for boat maintenance. However, in recent decades, there has been a shift to associations hiring more often outside professionals, as the membership base is, on average, aging and becoming more transient. This has financial consequences, as hiring professionals makes running the association more expensive. One medium-sized club mentioned that of its €10,000–€15,000 annual budget, around €5,000 is spent on maintenance alone. Further, its president explained that the cost for painting a single boat ranges from €200–€300 if done by a volunteer but rises to €2,000–€3,000 if done by an external professional. In effect, using external labour can be ten times more expensive than relying on volunteers. Another widely used method of generating supplementary income is participation in public events such as the Regata Storica, Festa della Sensa, or the Corteo Acqueo del Carnevale, here associations get a set amount of money per boat that participates. Remiera Sartori, for example, takes part in all of these events and has also earned money by occasionally providing rowers as background actors

in films. However, as Ermanno Antonioli explains, “this money is not to cover general costs but to create an extra income to buy new boats.”

The associations at St. Alvise currently have an even more precarious legal situation. Since their 20-year lease with the municipality expired in 2023, although the space is still being used, they do not have an official contract, nor do they pay rent. While, this removes a major cost for the associations, it also leaves them in an ambiguous position with the city. One of the presidents of the associations of St. Alvise reports that rent once consumed two-thirds of their revenue -a cost now indirectly covered by the city. Current circumstances reveal ongoing contention regarding the application of the Bolkestein Directive, which mandates public tenders for the utilization of cultural spaces. One of the associations interviewed positioned by the park San Giuliano also reports that they do not have to pay rent to use the newly build facilities, but in this case, they also have a formal contract. While they do not currently pay rent or electricity, they still pay for water, cleaning services, and the crane -services that were once handled by members. Further, teachers now receive small contributions for their lessons. This all shows how many associations are developing in a direction where membership is more like a paid service than a social space where everyone actively contributes, for example, through volunteering. In summary, while boat maintenance constitutes the most significant expenditure reported by the associations, they also incur costs related to utilities, insurance, and professional services, such as accounting. Despite financial pressures, many strive to keep fees low to foster inclusivity and preserve the associations’ community-based spirit, rather than what one president says would be more like a “exclusive country club.”

Cultural, Educational and Social Contributions of Rowing and Sailing Associations

Cultural Contribution

A substantial number of Venetian associations, though not all, prioritize the transmission of cultural heritage within their operational framework. Rowing, in this context, is not merely a recreational activity, but a form of living heritage. This emphasis was frequently reiterated in interviews with both association presidents and members. Elena Borrelli, a member of 3 Archi, expressed that for her “Venetian rowing is more than just a sport – it is an art.” One of the instructors of Venice on Board similarly emphasized that his association promotes a type of Venetian rowing that “is not competitive, but an activity of transportation as in the old days, where one rows passively and as energy-efficiently as possible through the canals.” The act of rowing thus becomes a method of cultural preservation, rooted in embodied knowledge.

But cultural transmission occurs not only through practice: ideally, it also fosters a deeper, long-term understanding of the city's relationship with its waterways. As Massimo Brunzin from AVT puts it, "When you start rowing, you acquire a very high understanding of the city." The very act of navigating the canals and lagoon offers a distinct lens into Venice's geography, history, and rhythm. Another interviewee states that "the regattas have the value of maintaining tradition," underscoring how public events help reinforce communal memory and pride and why initiatives like DISNAR are so important. Many think that these associations are the last defenders of the tradition of Venetian rowing. Silvio Testa calls them "the central protectors of Venetian rowing." One example is Voga Veneta Mestre, which hosts one of the locations where the community event DISNAR takes place, presenting cultural gatherings around the regata storica not only as opportunities for shared meals but also as moments of cultural affirmation through rowing. As Marco Ghinami puts it, "The associations contribute so much to the safeguarding of the local culture - it can't just be the gondoliers that continue doing it."

The preservation of culture also extends into other types of media. The association Sartori for example has taken part in a National Geographic documentary about Venetian rowing, in order to attract attention beyond the pure scope of the lagoon.

Artisan tradition is also sustained by rowing associations, as explained by oars and *fórcole* maker Saverio Pastor. He mentions that rowing associations, alongside gondoliers and tourists, "have been relevant buyers for over 50 years," helping to economically sustain the craft of producing high-quality oars and *fórcole*, the traditional wooden oarlocks and oars of Venetian boats.

Institutional support plays a complex role in this cultural transmission. While often criticized, the research showed that the municipality has also invested in infrastructural spaces such as for example the previously mentioned San Giuliano complex, which, next to other rowing and sailing associations, also hosts the Voga Veneta Mestre. Saverio Pastor observes, "I don't feel like it's fair to say that the municipality does completely nothing". Further, he adds that according to him rowing should be recognized not just as sport, but as "a commercial, touristic, and cultural Venetian good." For him, Venetian rowing is nothing less than "the stem cell of Venetian culture," and he strongly advocates for the formal recognition of Venetian rowing as an element of UNESCO intangible cultural heritage. Finally, cultural transmission is also nurtured through less formal settings. The Settemari association's social space, for example, serves as a meeting point for writers, filmmakers, and artists -reinforcing the idea that these associations are more than just rowing clubs. They are living institutions through which Venice continues to tell its own story.

Educational Contribution

Another important aspect repeatedly mentioned by interview members was the importance of passing on the tradition and the know-how of Venetian sailing and rowing to younger generations. A large number of associations are, or at least at some points have been, engaged in structured training initiatives, many aimed at either adults or school-aged children.

One association stated that they used to offer free classes to upper-level schools for a while but stopped activities due to too many last-minute cancellations and another used to have schoolchildren visit until the COVID-19 pandemic started. *Voga Veneta Mestre* and *Canotieri Giudecca*, on the other hand, seem to have established more stable collaborations with schools, with the latter still organizing an annual “*Voga la scuola*” programme aimed at introducing schoolchildren to the fundamentals of Venetian rowing. Schools are an important point to motivate children for the sport especially since, as Massimo Brunzin mentions, “Venetian Rowing and Sailing usually do not always have a strong family tradition.”

Outside of formal partnerships with schools, there are also activities for adults. For example, the *Associazione Vela al Terzo* offers biannual courses for new members that combine theoretical lessons with practical instruction to learn sailing at a very affordable price. Many rowing associations, such as *3 Archi*, also provide free instruction from experienced members as well as social rowing outings, reinforcing both classical lessons and peer-based knowledge transfer. The most obvious, and for beginners often the first location to learn how to row and sail is *Venice on Board*. They have a strong focus on teaching and even offer specific gondola lessons. Other, non-interviewed associations like the *Gloria Rogliani ASD* are also repeatedly cited for their role in youth education, particularly for introducing children to Venetian rowing.

The president of the *Sartori* association highlights that besides formal lessons a lot of learning happens informally during group social rows. Here, newer members improve by watching and copying experienced rowers in a form of peer-to-peer learning. Other associations take education into more academic settings; for example, the *Settemari* association gives presentations about Venetian rowing at universities. This variety of teaching methods shows how central education is to an association's identity. It fulfils a dual role: preserving the rowing tradition itself while also promoting the wider cultural and environmental meaning of the lagoon.

Social role

While the discussed associations are often discussed for their cultural and environmental contributions, their role as a social space is equally significant. Rowing and Sailing associations in Venice are an important point of exchange in the city. They are also one of the few places where multigenerational and cross-cultural interactions occur. Ermanno Antonioli, president of Sartori, states that: “Although I’ve lived in Venice for many years, I’ve found no place like the rowing association to get to know Venetians.” And Elena Borrelli, a German carpenter that moved here for work knowing no one, told in the interview that some of the friendships formed within these groups “made it outside of the association,” becoming part of everyday life.

Perhaps the best example of social exchange is the previously mentioned event DISNAR, a community gathering held around the Regata Storica with support of the associations. Daniele Ricapito explains that DISNAR was created to “bring Venetians back to following the Regata Storica in the Grand Canal”. The Remiere and other city associations promote convivial evenings in the city squares, and present the regatta participants of yesterday, today and tomorrow. Daniele and the other DISNAR promoters believe it is essential that Venetians return to being protagonists of their Regata Storica. Besides this annual event, regular group lunches and gatherings further reinforce their social role. DLF Sportimare, for instance, frequently hosts communal meals. And Vittorio De Cesco, an instructor at 3 Archi, reflects that these activities are key to long-term engagement: “Just taking classes and rowing in pairs takes a lot of dedication and pure love for the sport. The social side is often what makes people stay.” Even without forming deep, close friendships, members experience “a feeling of community and belonging.” Some associations also emphasize their efforts to promote inclusion. Venice on Board collaborates with “Giro Busola” that teaches rowing to visually impaired and Grupo Remiero Murano has partnered with “Petit Rosso”, an organization that supports children with disabilities also to introduce them to Venetian rowing.

Ultimately, rowing and sailing associations in Venice are far more than sporting institutions. They serve as critical social anchors in a city where the pressures of mass tourism have eroded many community spaces.

Environmental Awareness and Lagoon Stewardship

Similar to cultural preservation, environmentalism is deeply embedded in the statutes and day-to-day philosophy of many rowing and sailing associations. The Associazione Vela al Terzo, for example, states in its statute that it is “committed to the protection and

preservation of the lagoon's delicate system." This environmental commitment is also evident in the lived experiences of members. One of the instructors Venice on Boards explains that "rowing gives an environmental awareness," as the close contact with the lagoon and direct engagement with its natural environment help cultivate a stronger ecological consciousness. Silvio Testa further emphasizes the vital role of Venetian rowing in fostering a sense of respect for the lagoon, particularly among newer and younger members. "Associations teach environmental awareness," he notes, highlighting how this commitment is actively passed on through everyday practice.

However, numerous challenges persist. One rowing association member pointed out the lack of regulation of motorboats and their emissions, saying "there is no Euro 1, 5 or 6 when you buy a motorboat engine". Lucio Conz, former president of the Canottieri Giudecca and strong advocate for lagoon protection, highlighted the stark contrast between Venice and the mainland, noting the absence of stricter emission standards for boats or initiatives similar to "car-free Sundays." He emphasized how the historic centre of Venice suffers under some of the worst air quality in Italy despite not having cars and heating systems that work exclusively with gas or electricity, calling for the need of targeted legislation aimed at regulating boat emissions and mitigating air pollution, specifically regarding fine particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10).

Various interviewees suggested that this regulatory gap is structural, attributed to the substantial lobbying influence of water taxis and lagoon transport operators, coupled with a local government that has historically prioritized economic interests over environmental sustainability. "There is a lack of awareness," one interviewee remarked, adding that "economic interests undermine any meaningful action"- a dangerous dynamic in a city where most residents in some form, are economically dependent on tourism. This sentiment was repeatedly mentioned by multiple interviewees, who expressed frustration over what they perceived as political inaction and weak enforcement. Criticism was repeatedly directed by many at the current mayor, seen by many as an obstacle to environmental reform, although most also stated that the political inaction also has been present for longer.

Additionally, some associations experience environmental issues more than other. *Voga Veneta Mestre* faces for example a problem with sediment accumulation. Their president reported a yearly increase of around two centimetres, largely due to a lack of the maintenance in Mestre's canals. While this does not significantly affect light, flat-bottomed Venetian rowing boats, it has made navigation for deeper-draft sailboats increasingly difficult, forcing them into narrow, shared channels with motorboats -thus increasing their exposure to *moto ondoso* (wave motion), an issue discussed in wide detail in the next chapter.

Moto ondosso and Future Challenge and Perspectives for Associations

All in all, the most pressing issue for the Venetian association presidents was moto ondosso (wave motion). This problem makes it difficult -or even impossible- to navigate the lagoon with rowing boats and smaller motorboats, and it also dramatically damages the foundations of buildings along the canals. According to several interviewees, in particularly affected areas, the lifespan of these foundations can be reduced from 100 years to just 10. Lucio Conz warns that modern attempts to address the issue -such as cementing over the foundations - may backfire in the long run, since Venetian buildings require a degree of elasticity. As he puts it, in this case “the cure is worse than the disease.”

Further, a unanimous consensus exists that the worst wave offenders are water taxis and Alilaguna boats, followed by ACTV services and private motorboats. Vaporettos are not inherently problematic; rather, it is the speed at which they currently operate that causes the most damage. The effects of this have been visible for decades and continue to worsen. Row Venice, for instance, avoids certain lagoon areas due to hazardous wave conditions - especially in the St. Alvis Canal. In the past three years alone, two serious accidents have resulted in rowers being hospitalized for extended periods. Some associations are more fortunate: groups like Voga Veneta Lido, located away from the historic center, report fewer problems. However, this is rather the exception than the rule. Most associations report significant issues, particularly on weekends, when motorboat traffic surges as private boat owners take to the water. For example, both the Francescana and Gruppo Remiero Murano report severe issues during peak times.

To combat this issue, a commission against moto ondosso was established in 1988. Yet today, the problem persists- largely due to the unchecked growth in both the number of boats and their operating hours, as Silvio Testa recounts. This is worsened by the lack of systematic data collection, which makes any tracking difficult to assess the extent of the lagoon’s ongoing degradation. Proposed solutions include applying greater pressure on the city government through the UNESCO and promoting the use of flatter-hulled boats, which generate fewer waves. In addition, the Gruppo Insieme Contro il Moto Ondoso is taking shape: an umbrella organization comprising 98 members, 41 associations, and a 9-member working group- underscoring the urgency for political action. Luisa Vianello, the president of the Settemari association, believes that Gruppo Insieme is important because it represents the islanders. She proposes a direct, long-term adaptation: acquiring larger and more stable boats.

Critics of Venice's current situation insist that viable solutions already exist in other similar cities. One interviewee highlighted Amsterdam, which has been much more successful in implementing electric boats. The same interviewee noted that a strong culture of environmental awareness in Amsterdam helped prevent similar problems from becoming as severe as they are in Venice. One innovative proposal named by a Gruppo Insieme member suggests regulating boat traffic not by speed alone, but by the intensity of the waves each vessel produces. Using GPS technology, boats could be monitored in real-time, and speed limits could be dynamically assigned based on wave impact -an approach that would favour flatter-hulled, low-wake boats and also improve safety in low-visibility conditions. Central to these proposals is the call for a dedicated research group focused on the moto ondoso phenomenon, which many see as both a capitalist and political issue. Pierpaolo Vianello, president of Polisportiva Portosecco, emphasizes the need for a cultural shift, noting: "Moto ondoso is a culture of driving, and we need to change it."

Journalist Silvio Testa emphasizes the importance of direct engagement with the lagoon. He tells how, during the protests against the oil tanker channel in Marghera in the 1960s, fishermen and hunters from Pellestrina led the resistance because they were still in daily contact with the lagoon. "We need to get Venetians into the lagoon in order for them to care about it," Silvio stresses. This spirit, among other factors, helped give birth to the Vogalonga. Testa also laments the declining maritime culture among both Venetians and visitors. He stresses that the fight against moto ondoso is not about selfishly wanting smoother rowing experiences. Rather, rowers are the first to witness the damage caused by unregulated traffic, such as crumbling foundations and the disappearance of salt marshes (barene). As he explains, "We fight this battle because we have the privilege, through our activity, of being aware of what this unregulated traffic causes. The real challenge is education."

Future Challenge and Perspectives

Besides the immediate concerns of moto ondoso, the interviews reveal a range of deeper structural challenges that threaten the long-term viability of Venetian rowing and the lagoon's cultural heritage. The most important among these being political dysfunction, demographic decline, and the societal marginalization of traditional practices. Many mentioned the reoccurring theme of political inaction and short-sightedness that have plagued urban governance for decades. One association president even goes as far as to state that "the political failure has not only been in the last seven years, but of the last hundred." Still, several voices across associations voiced the belief that momentum for meaningful change will only be possible with a new municipal leadership.

Further, Massimo Brunzin highlights that “people have been protesting for 50 years and they will continue doing so as long as policies continue to prioritize mass tourism over local needs”. Saverio Pastor echo this sentiment, emphasizing that without prioritizing sustainable mobility and lagoon protection, there can be no viable future for Venice. “If one does not prioritize water and sustainable mobility,” Pastor warns, “there is no positive future for Venice.” The dominance of tourism as a structuring force in Venice’s economy continues to polarize opinion. While some see potential in promoting active, respectful forms of tourism saying that “I prefer a tourist that rows Venetian than one who takes taxis”, others caution against relying so much on “experience tourism” as a solution. They argue that offering rowing as a one-time activity trivializes its depth and tradition, much like “offering someone to play the violin once as a try-out course.” They warn that such approaches, however well-meaning, risk turning a living culture into a consumable product.

Another central challenge is generational change. Across the board, association leaders reported a marked decline in youth participation. One interviewee describes depopulation and generational disconnect as “the greatest danger to Voga Veneta”, a view shared by many association presidents, some speaking of a “catastrophic demographic fall.” They add that while many children try rowing, they often drift toward other sports that are easier to teach in large groups and require less specialized instruction. The absence of young, motivated teachers further exacerbates this problem. In terms of physical infrastructure and practice, many foresee adaptations becoming necessary. One suggestion to save rowing consists of implementing more robust, stable boats to cope with worsening wave conditions.

Despite the general pessimistic outlook from many, pockets of hope persist. Vittorio from, 3 Archi, while acknowledging political dysfunction, believes that as long as there is active civic engagement and visibility -through social media, documentaries, and other outreach -there is still room for a renaissance. “Venetian rowing needs to reinvent itself,” he says. Similarly, Luisa Vianello emphasizes that “giving up is not an option.” Nevertheless, the scale of the challenge is vast. As one interviewee puts it anonymously, “The biggest problem of Venice are the Venetians” -a sobering reminder that the future of the lagoon depends not only on external regulation or tourist behaviour, but also on the will of local communities to advocate, adapt, and reimagine their place within the city. Without confronting the systemic issues of governance, economic dependency on tourism, and demographic decline, even the most committed efforts by rowing associations may struggle to stay afloat.

Interview Findings Related to Tourism Operators

As mentioned in the methodological section, interviewing tourism operators proved to be a more complicated task. Out of 27 operators contacted, only four agreed to participate. Unsurprisingly, all of the interviewed operators represented businesses with a relatively sustainable and sensible approach to the lagoon, which most likely is not a coincidence. Tourism operators that are more sensitive to cultural and environmental issues and “have less to hide” are also more likely to be willing to discuss their activities and challenges. Thus, these findings should be interpreted with caution as they most likely only represent a small segment of the market.

Economic and Operational Dimensions of Tourism Operators

All of the successfully interviewed operators run relatively small-scale yet economically sustainable businesses. Their business models range widely, from traditional private tours to non-profit experiences and modern, large-scale operations.

A traditional model is represented by Il Bragozzo, a small, two-person operation offering customized tours on a traditional motorboat around Venice and Murano. The price is variable but averages around €95 per person for 100 minutes. The boat on average holds around 6 people at once and the business is economically sustainable rather than highly profitable, and the owner notes that it requires a major commitment. They find most of their customers via online platforms like GetYourGuide, hotel referrals, or word-of-mouth and operate seasonally from April to October.

On the non-profit side Venice on Board is an example of how associations can incorporate touristic activities into their operations. They offer 90-minute Venetian rowing lessons that also include an explanation of the association's history and mission. Most of their customers come through word of mouth or travel agencies and they are also seasonal (April to October).

Although also a non-profit, Row Venice is an association that is made up of 20-25 female rowers that offer touristic Venetian rowing lessons as a side income. They offer a variation of rowing experiences ranging from standard lessons to lessons with an integrated cicchetti tasting and a lesson on the Grand Canal. Their standard lesson starts at €100 for 1-2 people and their capacity is naturally limited by the 4 boats they own. This small scale reflects their core philosophy of staying small and treating the tourism activities as a side income. Consequently, the associations do not advertise and get most of their tourists organically from TripAdvisor, Lonely Planet, Facebook, and TikTok.

Venezia Catamaran, founded in 2021 by Andreas Albrecht, provides a more structured and larger volume form of experience tourism. The business holds one of Venice's 107 Gran Turismo licenses and employs eight permanent staff members. The catamaran tour along the lagoon offers 90-minute tours at a price range of €40 to €80 depending on the time of the day and with a capacity of up to 84 passengers offers space for much more guests simultaneously. More than half of the bookings come through online platforms like GetYourGuide, Viator, and TripAdvisor, with the rest coming from people passing by the boat. Currently the operation serves 15,000 visitors per year, and is already breaking even, which is remarkable as it only started in 2021. The owner sees potential to grow the business but warns that there are bureaucratic hurdles to setting up such a large operation, which in turn makes it a challenge for competitors to enter the market or copy the model. Regarding environmental strategies, the owner reported a strong focus on low-impact operations. The boat moves slowly and uses modern, efficient engines thus making it very fuel-efficient. Furthermore, and of key importance for this research, the catamaran's hull design means it creates almost no moto ondo.

Target Group of Tourism Boat Activities

Due to the specific subset of the operators interviewed cater to a specific type of visitor. Tourism for individuals that seek a slower more personalized experience and often search for a cultural and hands-on engagement. The make-up of those tourists varies.

The boat tour operator Il Bragozzo, for example, reported that approximately two-thirds of its clientele are Anglo-Saxon tourists, primarily from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, while the remaining third is mainly composed of visitors from other European countries. Here most, guests fall within the 40–60 age range or older.

Similarly, Venice on Board targets what one interviewed instructor describes as “experience tourism.” Their guests are not simply seeking a recreational outing but are actively interested in engaging with Venetian traditions. In addition to rowing lessons, the association offers visitors an introduction to its space and ongoing activities.

Row Venice's customer base is almost completely international. Instructor Elena Almansi noted that the majority of their customers were from France, Germany, the UK, the US and Australia, and that Italian clients made up less than 1% of the total. This suggests that their target demographic is international clients who are curious and interested in a physical activity that delivers authenticity and adds to the conservation of a traditional practice.

Lastly, Venezia Cat offers a slightly different service profile. Most clients are couples aged 30 to 50 or older and their guests do the tours primarily to escape the stress of discovering the city. Their clientele consists primarily of couples, families, and groups celebrating special occasions -including company events and weddings -as the boat can be chartered on request.

Across all operators, a shared characteristic emerges: they attract visitors who stand in contrast to the stereotypical mass-tourist seeking a brief photo opportunity. Instead, these services appeal to a minority of tourists who show genuine interest in the lagoon as an ecological, historical, and cultural space.

Future Perspectives for Tourism Operators

The future perspectives for the interviewed tourism operators are marked by cautious optimism and simultaneous deeper concerns about broader developments. The owner of Il Bragozzo for example said that they are also very aware of the problem of moto ondoso and that for example although they drive a boat with a traditional flat hull, producing minimal wave motion (moto ondoso), most operators do not and drive much faster. He states that although there are still growth opportunities in this niche tourism focusing on tradition and sustainability, this market will eventually also saturate and that it is just a tiny fraction of the gigantic sector that Venice is. Efforts to organize between smaller operators are also on their way like for example the Consortio di Porto Commerciale Venezia, a collective effort to coordinate and support small touristic boat providers. A similar view is shared by Elena Almansi from Row Venice that generally supports all water-based activities that do not contribute to wave motion. However, she notes that “one needs to do it in a way that makes sense.” She considers kayaks businesses an environmentally friendly option in the open lagoon but warns of their dangers in narrow city canals. One of the instructors of Venice on Board offers a more critical view. He questions why no rowing boat taxis exist, noting that speed is not essential in the smaller canals. Further, he believes that the type of tourists Venice currently attracts -those seeking quick, superficial experiences -limits the potential for growth in more educational or culturally meaningful tourism. He notes that even during peak season, Venice on Board’s touristic activities are not fully booked. Additionally, he also expresses concern over the increasing dangers of water-based activities due to growing numbers and poorly managed groups, especially with kayak tours. Safety, alongside quality and sustainability, is becoming harder to maintain. Tour guide Luisella Romeo, while less pessimistic, shares similar concerns. She argues that Venice is doing “exactly the opposite” of promoting slow, thoughtful tourism. Activities like learning Venetian rowing help form a deeper understanding of the lagoon are far from the norm.

The interviewed operators all agreed that Venice's current tourism model cannot last, as it is unsustainable. They also noted that little room exists for alternative types of tourism, since slower and more cultural activities do not align with the city's current tourism strategy.

Economic dimensions and comparison

The Rowing Associations

The following analysis provides a financial review of rowing associations and tourism operators. It is important to stress that the figures presented are estimates. This is because the analysis relies on self-reported data and the sensitive nature of this information limited the insights, particularly in conversations with tourism operators.

The gross turnover for each association was estimated using this formula:

$$\text{Turnover} = \text{Association Fee} * \text{Number of Members} * (1 - \text{Discount rate})$$

where the discount rate was considered across three levels: 0, 0.25, and 0.5. T

The methodology for calculating the associations' general turnover, as detailed in Table 4, involves the following key assumptions:

- All members are assumed to hold full annual memberships.
- A discount rate is frequently applied to account for various membership fee reductions (e.g., for children, young adults, seniors, and families) making a type of discounting necessary.
- To reflect the uncertainty arising from member demographics and the assumptions made, turnover is presented across a range of scenarios: a low estimate (based on 50% of members paying the full fee), a median estimate (based on 75% of members paying), and a high estimate (based on 100% of members paying). The discount rates were chosen based on accounts from the interviews.
- To focus on a more representative average for rowing associations, outlier associations (Querini and Polisportiva) were excluded. Furthermore, non-rowing associations (Associazione Velica Lido and Associazione Vela al Terzo) and those with distinctly different financing models (Venice on Board) were also excluded to ensure a more uniform and consistent dataset for averaging.

Association Name	Membership Fee (€)	Number of members	Gross Turnover in € - 0.5 Discount	Gross Turnover in € - 0.75 Discount	Gross Turnover in € - 1.0 Discount
Remiera del Ponte dei Sartori	150	65	4.875	7.312	9.750
Gruppo Remiero Murano	250	90	11.250	16.875	22.500
Remiera Francescana	100	100	5.000	7.500	10.000
Voga Veneta Lido	162	127	10.288	15.432	20.577
Associazione Settemari	180	135	12.150	18.225	24.300
Gruppo 3 Archi	170	150	12.750	19.125	25.500
DLF Sport Mare ASD	150	150	11.250	16.875	22.500
Voga Veneta Mestre	300	275	41.250	61.875	82.500
Associazione Cannioteri Giudecca	264	440	58.080	87.120	116.160
Total		1932	169.693	254.540	339.387

Table 4. Estimated Membership fee Turnover per Association per year. Table created by the author.

Taking a further step, Table 5 attempts to extrapolate this average economic contribution to the broader population of active rowers in Venice. With estimations of active members floating between 3,772 and 6,000 rowers, based on the last reliable source from 2001 and more recent estimates, we derive a projected range of economic turnover from purely paid expenses. This ranges from €331.000 to €526.000 for the stronger discount to €662.000 to €1.054.000 on the assumption everyone is paying full membership.

Average per head turnover	Turnover in € - 0.5 Discount	Turnover in € - 0.75 Discount	Turnover in € - 1.0 Discount
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Total	169.693	254.540	339.387
Per person	87	131	175
Estimate 3772	331.306	496.959	662.612
Estimate 6000	526.998	790.497	1.053.996

Table 5. Estimated Total and Per-Capita Membership Turnover. Table created by the author.

Since most participants stated that, apart from a few emergency funds, their annual finances generally broke even, the actual significant assets are estimated to be held in equipment. This suggests that the value of the boats represents a substantial portion of the associations' economic standing. Boat prices vary considerably between types, age, and condition. Therefore, estimating their value requires strong assumptions and should be interpreted with significant caution given the severe limitations of actual, precise numbers. One association President noted purchasing recently a new gondola for €28.000, and generally, the cost of new boats seems range between €10.000 and €30.000. To account for the incomplete knowledge of all boats present in the associations' shipyards, a conservative range of €5.000 to €10.000 per boat was selected for Table 3. Furthermore, to avoid contamination by low-cost boats like kayaks, any association reporting over 35 boats was excluded from this specific valuation, as it hinted at the inclusion of Kayaks. This analysis also indicated that the average included association owns approximately 20 boats.

Nevertheless, the true economic value of rowing associations is likely significantly higher than suggested by simple membership fee turnover calculations. As highlighted in the findings, many associations report alternative sources of income, such as participation in social events sponsored by the municipality. One of the largest interviewed associations stated that this makes up as much as 1/3 of its total annual turnover. Furthermore, our initial calculations do not account for other valuable assets like oars and *fórcole*, nor, crucially, the substantial amounts of voluntary work contributed by members. While this labour is uncompensated monetarily, it represents significant cost savings for the associations annually. For instance, the findings indicate that while the materials to paint a boat cost only around €200–€300, professional painting can cost ten times that amount. One interviewee estimated the labour time for painting a boat to be approximately 150 hours. Assuming a modest labour cost, this translates to a saving of around €2,700 per boat per year for associations with members who volunteer their painting skills, especially considering that frequently used boats ideally require painting annually. Therefore, when comparing the monetary turnover and value of associations to tourism operators in the following section, it is essential to consider the largely monetarily unaccounted value added by these associations, even before factoring in their recreational and cultural significance.

Association Name	Number of Boats	Estimated Boat Stock Value (€5.000 per boat)	Estimated Boat Stock Value (€10.000 per boat)
Remiera del Ponte dei Sartori	15	75.000	150.000
Gruppo Remiero Murano	20	100.000	200.000
Remiera Francescana	30	150.000	300.000
Voga Veneta Lido	21	105.000	210.000
Polisportiva Portosecco	10	50.000	100.000
Associazione Settemari	30	150.000	300.000
Gruppo 3 Archi	20	100.000	200.000
DLF Sport Mare ASD	19	95.000	190.000
Venice On Board ASD	10	50.000	100.000
Total	175	925.000	1.750.000

Table 6. Estimated Boat Stock Value of Selected Associations. Table created by the author.

Tourism Operators: A Preliminary Economic Analysis

Estimating the financial aspects of tourism operators presents a more direct analytical path compared to non-profits, given the public availability of pricing. However, this research encountered limitations in securing direct engagement with operators.

Similarly, the following analysis is a pure attempt at interpreting the scarce collected data in the limited interviews, necessitating cautious interpretation.

Based on a detailed interview, Venezia Catamaran experiences around 15.000 visitors yearly. If one calculates the average ticket price (assuming an even distribution across all of their daily, different priced tours and ignoring any chartering of the boat), an estimated annual gross revenue of €850,000 can be projected. However, costs like vessel maintenance, taxes, docking fees, staff, the commission of booking platforms (20-30%) must be accounted for. These expenditures, combined with the seasonal nature of the business, are decisive when determining the company's actual net profit.

Il Bragozzo: Analysis of online booking platforms (TripAdvisor) suggested approximately one tour per day. Assuming a 60% booking rate during their operational season (April to September, 183 days) and an average booking of six individuals at a total tour cost of €570, the estimated annual gross revenue is just over €62.000 for the two-person operation, averaging around €31.000 per person. These figures are based on assumptions about booking rates and average group size derived from limited available data.

Rowing Associations with Touristic Activities: A direct economic comparison for rowing associations offering touristic activities was not conducted due to the integrated nature of their operations as non-profit entities and the difficulty in isolating financial data specific to their tourism-related services. The limited availability of comprehensive financial data for tourism operators beyond publicly listed prices also presents a challenge for robust comparative analysis, highlighting an area for potential future research.

Discussion

Comparative Overview

In order to summarize and compare the key findings through the interviews, Table 7 presents the most important interview data sorted by interview section A for the associations and B for the water-based tourism operator services. Further following the methodology presented by Gioia et al. (2013), the table organises these concepts into second-order themes and more general aggregate dimensions, offering a structured lens through which distinct and similar qualities can become more visible, thus facilitating the interpretation of findings.

First-order concepts	Second-order themes	Aggregate dimensions
A. Rowing and Sailing Associations		
1. Operate as non-profit Associazioni Sportive Dilettantistiche (ASDs) with a primary focus on sportsmanship, community, and cultural preservation.	A1. Socio-Cultural Purpose & Community Engagement. (Focus: Preserving heritage, fostering social cohesion, providing accessible local recreation)	I. Community-Centric, Heritage-Focused, Resilience-Oriented Model
2. Act as central preservers of living cultural heritage, including Voga alla Veneta and Vela al Terzo.		
3. Promotes transmission of traditional boat-making skills and rowing and sailing knowledge across generations, supporting artisan traditions.		
4. Serve as social hubs, facilitate intergenerational exchange and promote a sense of community and belonging.		
5. Provide accessible and affordable recreational and sporting activities for residents.		
6. Offer educational programs for youth (e.g., school collaborations like "Voga la scuola") and adults (e.g., beginner courses).		
7. Governance is typically democratic with unpaid volunteer work for board members and instruction (though paid instructors are emerging in some).	A2. Operational & Financial Framework. (Focus: Non-profit, volunteer-driven, diverse funding, cost management)	
8. Primary funding through membership fees; supplementary income from sponsorships, public event participation (e.g., Regata Storica), and occasionally renting spaces.		
9. Significant reliance on volunteer labour for boat maintenance and operations, though this model is increasingly strained and shifting towards external services.		
10. Main expenses include boat maintenance (highest cost), rent (often to municipality, though some precarious situations exist), utilities, and insurance.		
11. Statutes and daily philosophy often explicitly include a commitment to protecting the lagoon's delicate ecosystem.		
12. Cultivate environmental awareness and ecological consciousness among members through continuous engagement with the lagoon.	A3. Environmental Stewardship & Advocacy. (Focus: Awareness building, direct observation, civic	
14. Members act as frontline observers of environmental degradation, particularly moto ondoso, pollution, and sediment accumulation.		

15. Active participation in civic mobilization and advocacy groups (e.g., Pax in Aqua, Gruppo Insieme Contro il Moto Ondoso) to combat moto ondosos and call for regulation.	action against degradation)	
16. Moto ondosos (wave motion) from motorized traffic (especially water taxis, Alilaguna) is the most pressing environmental and operational threat, impacting safety and damaging infrastructure.	A4. Navigating Challenges & Transformations. (Focus: Adapting to environmental pressures, demographic shifts, political context, and financial sustainability)	
17. Facing demographic challenges: aging membership, declining youth participation, and the broader depopulation of Venice's historic center.		
18. Experiencing financial pressures due to rising operational costs (e.g., outsourced maintenance) and a diminishing volunteer base.		
19. Confronting perceived political inaction, weak enforcement of regulations concerning lagoon health and boat traffic, and lobbying influence of transport operators.		
20. Varying adaptation strategies include acquiring larger/more stable boats, avoiding high-traffic areas/times, and continuous advocacy.		
B. Water Based Tourism Services		
21. Operate as for-profit businesses with income generation as a primary objective.	B1. Economic & Market Dynamics. (Focus: Profit-driven, catering to tourist demand, variable scale and niche)	II. Commercial, Experience-Driven, Market-Responsive Model
22. Offer water-based experiences often on a one-time basis, typically at higher price points than association activities.		
23. Target audience is predominantly international tourists; interviewed niche operators cater to those seeking slower, authentic, or hands-on cultural engagement.		
24. Bookings frequently made via online travel agencies, hotel referrals, or direct online presence/walk-ins.	B2. Operational Characteristics. (Focus: Varied business structures, seasonality, reliance on paid staff and marketing platforms)	
25. Business structures range from small two-person operations (e.g., Il Bragozzo) to more structured companies with permanent staff (e.g., Venezia Catamaran).		
26. Operations are often seasonal, typically running from April to October.		
27. Reliance on paid employees and professional services; significant operational costs can include vessel maintenance, docking fees, taxes, and commissions to booking platforms.		
28. Limited engagement with a broad spectrum of operators; interviewed operators represented more sustainable/niche segments (e.g., traditional boats, catamarans, rowing lessons).	B3. Environmental & Cultural Impact. (Focus: Variable impacts, from detrimental mass tourism effects to more responsible niche offerings)	
29. Broader tourism sector (including many non-interviewed motorized boat services like water taxis) is a major contributor to moto ondosos, pollution, and erosion.		
30. Mass tourism contributes to the "Disneyfication" and commodification of Venice and its culture, with some tourist activities being superficial.		
31. Interviewed niche operators demonstrate efforts towards environmental sustainability (e.g., low-impact traditional hulls, modern efficient engines, minimal wave production, waste treatment).		
32. Some niche operators (e.g., Row Venice, Venice on Board) offer activities that directly engage with and promote local traditions like Venetian rowing, sometimes subsidizing association activities.		

33. Current mass tourism model and focus on speed/convenience often limits the growth and mainstream appeal of slower, more culturally respectful tourism alternatives.	B4. Future Perspectives & Systemic Issues. (Focus: Cautious optimism in niches, concerns about sustainability of mass model, regulatory environment)	
34. Bureaucratic challenges, high operational costs, and market competition are factors for operators; potential for growth in responsible tourism exists but is constrained.		
35. Safety and quality concerns arise with increasing numbers and sometimes poorly managed groups in certain water-based tourist activities (e.g., some kayak tours in crowded canals).		

Table 7. Interview Findings: A Comparative Overview Using a Gioia Methodology Framework. Table created by the author.

Interpretation of Findings

This chapter synthesizes insights from the literature review and interview findings to address the central research question: how traditional non-profit sport associations in the Venetian Lagoon navigate socio-economic and environmental challenges. The discussion will go beyond a descriptive summary and discuss the key findings and their significance to the research question and in their wider implications also beyond Venice. To allow for better understanding, the chapter is structured thematically, following generally the second-order themes presented in Table 7. It will begin from their socio-cultural and environmental roles, before analysing their operational and economic challenges. After that it will explore the coexistence with tourism as well as the systemic vulnerabilities it faces. The interpretation of findings concludes by connecting this to future perspectives and policy recommendations.

The Association as Social Infrastructure

This study's findings repeatedly showed Venetian rowing and sailing associations as crucial havens of cultural preservation and social cohesion, representing far more than just recreational clubs. The interviews highlighted them as preservers of a living heritage, actively safeguarding cultural knowledge of rowing and sailing, that might otherwise no longer be passed on beyond the practice of gondoliers. The safeguarding of knowledge extends beyond objects, also encompassing the conservation of intangible cultural heritage and to an extent, the feeling of Venetian identity. This is also reflected in the continuous economic support of artisan traditions, where associations still represent significant purchasers of artisan crafts, especially regarding *fórcole*, oars and traditional boats. In a city often treated as a static museum, this function clearly can be seen as an act of cultural resilience, where a community actively maintains its identity against pressures of mass tourism and the depopulation of its historic centre.

This cultural role is sustained through communal bonds, for example the DISNAR event, which reaffirm cultural identity through community-led meals hosted by these associations. This social significance aligns strongly with Luana Castelli's thesis findings, which highlights the associations' role in fostering "civic capital" within Venice (Castelli, 2024). Going one step further, it can be extended to encompass Robert Putnam's theory of social capital, where networks, norms and trust empower citizens to act together more effectively regarding pursuing shared objectives (Putnam, 2000). Rowing and sailing associations create this social capital. This ranges from the formation of deep friendships to a more general sentiment of community and stand as a strong counterweight to an anonymized, constantly changing city geared towards tourism. Crucially they serve as meeting points that foster "bridging" social capital where intergenerational and cross-cultural interactions occur. The presence of educational and inclusive projects demonstrates their immense social importance.

Embodied Knowledge and Environmental Stewardship

Regarding environmental aspects, rowing and sailing associations demonstrate a strong environmental engagement that does not stem from an abstract concept but a lived, physical relationship with the lagoon. The interviews repeatedly frame rowing and sailing as incubators for "environmental lagoon awareness." This phenomenon reflects what cultural ecologist David Abram explains as "participation of the senses" where sensory experiences deepen ecological consciousness (Abram, 1996). For the Venetian rower this is a regular reality. The feel of the oar in the water, the reading of the currents, and the sight of changing water height levels constitute direct sensory engagement. This "embodied knowledge" distinguishes a rower's understanding of the lagoon vastly from a non-rower, transforming members into uniquely positioned environmental stewards who act as frontline observers of degradation.

Thus, through continuous engagement, association members become frontline observers of environmental degradation. The most acute and universally cited threat is moto ondosso (wave motion), generated by motorized traffic. Rowers are the first to experience the direct impact of the waves, which can range from making navigating difficult to creating hazardous conditions where it's too unsafe to practise. Furthermore, members witness the severe long-term damage on the foundations of the historic buildings themselves. The consensus from the interview points to water taxis and the private Alilaguna transit boats as the primary sources of moto ondosso.

These first-hand observations have repeatedly catalysed a shift from awareness to action. Civic activism has led to the creation of the past (*Pax in Aqua*) and present (*Gruppo Insieme*) advocacy groups that advocate for stronger lagoon protection regarding wave motion,

Gruppo Insieme representing 41 associations. This activism operates within “a contested lagoon”, where rowers interests for sustainability clash with the short-term economic interests of powerful groups. The findings highlight a perception of political inaction, attributed to strong lobbying by transport operators who are seen to prioritize short-term economic growth over the long-term sustainable lagoon health.

The struggle against moto ondosso can be classified as a common-pool resource. The lagoon is a shared space, where fast commercial motorized traffic imposes several negative externalities on traditional, non-motorized users and small motorboat users. The associations thus, do not only fight for less waves but also advocate for a more equitable and sustainable management of Venice’s most vital public space.

Navigating Economic Pressures and Shifting Volunteerism

The last two sections have established the huge socio-cultural and environmental value that Venice’s rowing and sailing associations have. This is contrasted by the sustainability paradox they experience as they try to fulfil a community first role that prioritizes social inclusivity and affordability and simultaneously face increasing economic and operational pressures of existing in Venice. Regarding their economics, the associations demonstrate significant heterogeneity in their financing methods. Normally their main source of income derives from annual membership fees, which as seen in figure 7, are deliberately kept low to foster broad participation. This modest revenue base, however, must cover constantly rising costs, the highest of which is boat maintenance. This tension is a regular sustainability challenge faced by many small, non-profit organizations that rely on a community-based financial model and volunteering.

The increase in maintenance is mainly due to the shift of volunteer labour towards engaging external services. This trend is due to fewer members possessing the skills and time for doing maintenance and will likely put further financial pressure on the associations budget and thus in turn on its membership costs and social inclusivity, as members might not be able to afford to take part anymore. A similar development is already in place where rowing and sailing lessons are not given free of charge but require a small participation fee, presumably due to fewer teachers being available. This trend is a direct consequence of a changed membership base which is either aging or more temporal, diminishing the pool of available and experienced volunteers. The economic impact of this shift is significant. One interviewee highlighted that the cost of painting a single boat costs ten times the material cost amount, representing savings of thousands of euros per boat for associations when they still possess skilled volunteers that can do the manual labour. The vanishing of this volunteer base causes a massive, unaccounted financial loss putting further strain on already modest budgets.

It is important to note that this erosion of a volunteer base is not happening in a vacuum but is a direct reflection of the broader developments social and economic pressures faced in Venice and to large parts in all of Italy. Rising living costs in a city that heavily depends on tourism causes many individuals to have less disposable time and resources for unpaid community activities. Association President Pierpaolo Vianello explains it in the most straightforward way, “In the past people generally used to have time for a hobby after work, but due to the economic development in recent decades this is now the time people spend working a second job to sustain themselves and their family, leaving no time for Venetian rowing”. Thus, the decline of volunteerism is not a matter of changing interests but a symptom of a city where economic survival increasingly surpasses the capacity of its inhabitants for civic and community engagement.

Associations Coexistence with Tourism

The previous section sets up a strong contrast between the community-centric character of non-profit rowing and sailing associations and the logic of Venice’s dominant tourism industry. Associations are shown to foster cultural continuity and environmental stewardship. At the same time the broader tourism sector is often perceived as prioritizing profit, contributing to systemic issues like *moto ondoso* and the “Disneyfication” of Venice. This sets up a fundamental conflict between two competing value systems operating within the same lagoon: one focused on sustainable community life and the other on high-volume of commercial activity.

However, the research also identified a small but significant exception to this strict dual view: niche tourism operators offering a more respectful, participatory model. Tourism businesses such as *Il Bragozzo* and *Venezia Catamaran* or touristic associations activities like *Row Venice* and *Venice on Board* align with principles of sustainable or alternative tourism, which emphasize authentic experiences that include a minimal environmental impact and cultural engagement. Their clientele stands in sharp contrast to the stereotypical venetian mass-tourist, instead offering touristic activities that promote an alternative, “slow tourism”. Despite their positive model, the findings make it clear that these efforts remain marginal, with these types of operators making up a very limited share of the total market.

Further, when discussing the intersection of traditional practices and tourism a careful examination of cultural commodification is needed. This is the process of turning cultural practices into marketable products, which in the long run can carry the danger of stripping them of their authentic meaning. According to theorists like Greenwood (1977), assigning a monetary value to a cultural activity is a dangerous endeavour because it can erode its

intrinsic worth in the long-term. This tension was evident in the conflicting views of the interviewees, when discussing the potential of *voga alla veneta* for tourism. On the one hand, some saw this as a positive alternative, with one stating “I prefer a tourist that rows Venetian than one who takes a taxi”, especially in light of rowing currently only operating touristically at a small scale. On the other hand, some interviewees expressed the limitations of offering rowing lessons as a one-time "experience", arguing that it trivializes a skill that takes much longer to master. This highlights the central challenge: navigating the fine line between tourism as a form of sustainable support and tourism as a commodifier and diluter of the very culture it aims to protect.

Systemic Vulnerabilities and Future Paths

As for the overarching challenges facing the associations, the research highlights various interconnected, complex issues. These difficulties encompass the environmental threat of *moto ondosso*, a continuous demographic decline, financial and operational issues, and a perception by many of political inaction from municipal authorities. Despite this, it is crucial to recognize the persistent resilience and strong commitment of these associations to their core values. The interviews revealed a deep dedication to the preservation of Venetian rowing among members, as well as a strong commitment to civic engagement and advocacy, which together define their primary path forward.

Internally, one of the most pressing vulnerabilities is the city’s demographic decline. The findings show a clear membership aging across most associations with only a minority having active programmes to attract younger generations. The same was noted regarding achieving gender balance, with only a few associations reporting an increase in female membership. Still, this vulnerability is actively addressed by some, offering initiatives like beginner courses. This shows that while the demographic challenges are systemic, grassroots efforts are counteracting these developments and provide a crucial inspiration for how resilience and future growth can exist. Externally, the environmental pressure of *moto ondosso* is and will most likely continue being the strongest issue. Here, associations are actively adapting out of necessity. Besides their civic advocacy trying to weaken the problem by the root, they are forced to adapt their daily operations to the reality of the contested lagoon. This might mean to not row at hours where the traffic is the strongest or rowing out in larger, more stable boats. These adaptative strategies, while necessary for short-term survival, already forecast the extent of which these traditional practices will need to adapt to survive.

Ultimately, the future of the rowing and sailing associations is deeply linked to the broader well-being of the Venetian population. Struggles like demographic decline, economic pressure and the degradation of the lagoon environment are a microcosm of the challenges

the city as a whole experience. Thus, the associations resilience is not only about preserving traditional practices but also about maintaining the vitality of Venetian civil society. Here, the most significant development is the continuous commitment to advocacy, actively attempting to shape the current developments for the better instead of simply just enduring them. Despite the immense pressures, the finding that many associations have maintained operational stability for the last two to four decades is an encouraging signal of the strength and endurance of these community-based models hold.

Policy Implications for a Sustainable Future

The preceding analysis, showing the associations' resilience despite their systemic issues, should not be taken for granted. In order to ensure a long-term operational existence and empower them to grow, a series of targeted policy interventions are necessary. Here, a necessary prerequisite for the implementation of any new policies and regulations is the creation of sufficient public and political awareness around the issues identified in this research. The following recommendations are derived from the findings.

For one an urgent need for effective regulation and enforcement against moto ondosos is desperately needed. This includes the enforcement of existing speed limits but also the active realization of effective policies to directly tackle factors responsible for moto ondosos like incentives for boats to have flatter, low-impact hulls. Furthermore, policies must address the current lack of systemic data by investing in reliable, independent environmental monitoring. This programme would collect consistent data regarding wave motion and traffic density, as data is essential for evidence-based policymaking and tracking of future developments.

Secondly, there is a need for direct policies to support the operational and financial stability of the associations. This would for example include resolving the currently non-existent lease agreement at the St. Alvise shipyard with the associations residing there. Additionally, the municipality could re-establish grants for the restoration and active use of traditional boats or subsidize youth programs by integrating visits to Venetian rowing into school curricula. Such initiatives would provide more security for operational continuity and directly support the association's vital social and cultural role.

And lastly, and most complex, policy needs to address the broader tourism model. This is necessary to counter the current "Disneyfication" of Venice. This includes incentivizing sustainable tourism alternatives and promoting slower sustainable tourism models. The scalability of already practiced tourism operators remains unclear, but in its core the city would benefit from any more balanced and resident-friendly model in the future.

Limitations of the research

Although the exploratory qualitative research illuminated various dimensions of the research question, several limitations and methodological boundaries became evident during the study. One of the main constraints of this thesis is the limited representativeness of the study sample for larger groups regarding tourism operators. Although the initial compilation of relevant associations and tourism operators is extensive, it is not exhaustive. And, more significantly, the engagement with tourism operators proved challenging with only 4 out of 27 contacted, in the end being interviewed. This undoubtedly restricted the breadth of perspectives gathered and thus a comprehensive comparative analysis between rowing and sailing associations and a full spectrum of tourism operators was very limited. Furthermore, as the research mostly relied on self-reported data from interviewees, the findings must be interpreted cautiously regarding potential bias. This is especially relevant for the accuracy of quantitative estimates, such as economic turnover, where many statements are estimates. Additionally, the interviewer's still developing Italian proficiency might also have led to occasional nuances in communication being missed.

The research must be understood as a preliminary exploration of a severely under-researched topic and not as a source of definite, statistically generalizable conclusions. Further limitations like deliberately choosing to only research the Municipality of Venice leaves a lot of potential of expanding research just in the Lagoon. Of especial interest might be Lido di Jesolo and Chioggia where distinct socio-economic and environmental dynamics may prevail. These geographically excluded areas offer promising directions for future investigation.

Finally, the economic assessment faced inherent complexities. A truly comprehensive comparison of the economic dimensions of associations versus tourism operators would necessitate an attempt to quantify the significant socio-cultural value embedded in the associations' activities -a challenging endeavour beyond the purview of this thesis. The monetary figures presented, therefore, are suspected to underrepresent the true overall importance and multifaceted contributions of Venetian rowing and sailing associations to the city's social fabric and cultural heritage.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that Venetian rowing and sailing associations are of immense importance to the Venetian Lagoon and its inhabitants, presenting them as living institutions deeply intertwined with the city's resilience and social fabric. Analysing how they navigate emerging issues of a globalized tourism in the city, makes it clear that their role extends far beyond recreation to include active cultural preservation, environmental stewardship and community-building taking place.

Despite the increasing developments of depopulation and social fragmentations, the analysis showed that associations function as a crucial social infrastructure, providing a protected space for the creation of social capital, fostering community cohesion.

Here, the practise of Venetian rowing and Venetian sailing represents an embodied knowledge, cultivating a unique environmental awareness that can fuel civic activism against issues like *moto ondoso*. This positions members as frontline carriers of environmental lagoon stewardship. Nevertheless, the associations are caught in a precarious sustainability paradox, where their operational model is strained by current pressures. On one side there is their low-cost, community-first approach and on the other the development of rising costs and a declining base of members that also volunteer within the associations. This is further exacerbated by a slow opening to the tourism sector, where associations must navigate the fine line between sustainable engagement and the risk of cultural commodification. Clear policy implications are presented, detailed in the discussion chapter, which emphasize effective environmental regulation, the need for direct support of the associations and a fundamental rethinking of Venice's current tourism and city model. Further research is needed to quantify the economic value, especially regarding volunteer labour and non-monetary benefits as well as explore the potential of Venetian rowing as part of sustainable and resident-friendly tourism models.

Fundamentally, the link between associations and the Venetian population means that their development is dependent on each other, and changes in rowing and sailing associations reflect struggles that often affect the whole historic centre. As long as no relevant political change allows for reforms, associations will continue to resist, not only as a sport institution but also as a reflection of the spirit and identity of Venice.

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Appendices

The Overview List

Rowing and sailing Associations selection	and foundation year	adult annual inscription fee	Number of Members	Number of Boats	sport offered
Associazione Canioteri Giudecca	1981	264	440	80	voga veneta, canottaggio, vip, vela al terzo, palestra
Reale Società Canottieri Francesco Querini	1901	540	300	130	voga veneta, canottaggio, canoa, palestra
Voga Veneta Mestre	1974	310	27	40	voga veneta
Gruppo 3 Archi	1975	170	150	20	voga veneta
Remiera Franciscana	1980	165	100	30	voga veneta
DLF Sport Mare ASD	1979	150	150	19	voga veneta
Remiera del Ponte dei Sartori	1977	150	65	15	voga veneta
Associazione Velica Lido	1981	120	200	150	vela
Gruppo Remiero Murano	1977	250	90	20	voga veneta
Voga Veneta Lido	1981	162	127	21	voga veneta
Associazione Settemari	1977	180	135	30	voga veneta, palestra

AVT Associazione Vela al Terzo	1988	100	120	100	vela al terzo
Venice On Board ASD	2014	50	260	10	voga veneta, vela al terzo
Polisportiva Portosecco	1982	70	130	10	voga Veneta, kayak
Rowing Diadora ASD	1882	240			voga veneta, canottaggio, canoa
Reale Società Canottieri Bucintoro	1960	280			voga veneta, canottaggio, canoa, vela al terzo
Serenissima	1977	180			voga veneta
Remiera Canottieri Cannaregio	1976	180			voga veneta, canoa, kajak, vip, palestra
A.S.D. Cannottieri Mestre	1976	320		40	voga veneta, canottaggio, canoa, vela al terzo, palestra
Circolo Velico Casanova	1981	60			voga veneta, vela al terzo, vela
Remiera Vogaepara Burano	1977				voga veneta
Remiera Nomboli	1977				voga veneta
ASD Gruppo Sportivo Artigiani	1978				voga veneta
Remiera San Marco	1976		200		voga veneta
Remiera Casteo	1997				voga veneta

ASD Remiera Pellestrina	1979			120	voga veneta
ASD Gloria Rogliani					voga veneta, kayak, vela al terzo, dragonboat
ASD S. Erasmo					voga veneta, calcio
G.S. Voga Riviera del Brenta					voga veneta

company name	category	website
Venezia Catamaran	boat Experience	https://www.venezia-cat.it/
Il Bragozzo	boat Tour	https://www.ilbragozzo.it/
Row Venice	rowing, vela al terzo, gondola	https://rowvenice.org/
Venice On Board	rowing	http://www.veniceonboard.it/
Jolly Roger	boat experience	http://www.jollyroger.it/it/beaches.htm
Go Boat	boat rental	https://goboat.it/en/maps
AQA VENICE	boat rental	http://www.aqavenice.com/
Classic Boats Venice	boat rental	http://www.classicboatsvenice.com/
Brussa Is Boat	boat rental	https://www.brussaisboat.it/
Campello Marine Rent - Venezia Marghera	boat rental	https://rent.campellomarine.it/venezia/
Venice tour by boat	boat rental	https://venicetourbyboat.com/

VivoVenetia	boat tour	https://www.vivovenetia.it/la-navigazione-a-venezia/
Biasin Boat Rent	boat tour	http://www.veniceboatrent.com/
Lagoonario	boat tour	http://lagoonario.com/cms/contact/
Venetian Rowing	boat tour	https://www.venetianrowing.com/
Venice Boat Experience	boat tour	http://destination-venice.com/
Venezia in Vela	boat tour	https://www.veneziainvela.com/it/
Treasures of Venice: local boat tour by Maksim Sabura	boat tour	https://boatinvenice.com/
Terra e Acqua	boat tour	http://www.veneziainbarca.it/
Vidal Venice Tours	boat tour	http://www.vvtours.it/
Laguna Eco Tours	boat tour	http://www.lagunaecoadventures.com/English/Home.html
Kayak discovery tour in the lagoon of Venice	kayak	https://www.detourist.it/
Venice Kayak	kayak & canoe	https://www.venicekayak.com/contact-us/
Cao Rio Tours	kayak	https://caorio.com/
Real Venetian Boat	kayak	https://www.realvenetiankayak.com/
Venice By Water	kayak & canoe	https://www.venicebywater.com/
Sup In Venice	stand up paddle	https://www.supinvenice.com/

occupation	origin	relationship to the thesis
researcher	US	3 Archi member
carpenter	Germany	3 Archi member

remèri & DISNAR organisers	Venice	cultural experts
researcher	Venice	researcher in similar field
Tourist guide	Venice	perspective of a tourist guide
researcher	Italian	researcher in similar field
teacher	Venice	speaker of Gruppo Insieme & ASD Vela al Terzo member and instructor

	Contacted but not interviewed
	Interviewed

The Three Questionnaires

Questionnaire for Associations

I. Association Profile:

1. What is the full name of the association?
2. In which year was it founded?
3. How many members does the association have roughly?
4. What kind of water-based activities are offered?
5. How many boats does the association hold?

II. Membership and participation:

1. What are the primary demographics that make up your association (age, origin, families)?
2. Could you describe the organizational structure of the association?
3. What is the standard annual membership fee for adult members?
4. How long do members stay within the association?
5. Roughly, what percentage of your members are non-Venetian and/or non-Italian?

Here a quick reminder that all sensible information shared is handled confidentially and unless explicitly asked only published anonymized.

III. Economic and Organisational Aspects

1. Please describe the association's management structure and operational procedures.
2. How does the association fund itself? Is there external funding beyond membership fees?
3. What are the main costs of maintaining the association?
4. To what extent does the association collaborate with others?
5. Does the association engage in or have any connections with tourism activities or services?
6. What are the central challenges that the association faces in sustaining its operations? (For example, boat traffic, population decline).
7. What recreational and social aspects does the association provides to its members? (e.g. skill development, social cohesion, recreational activities)
8. How would you characterize the association's growth development in the last few years?

IV. Social and community impact:

1. What is the role of the association on the local community, are there any wider societal impacts?
2. What social values does the association hold and promote within its members and community?
3. How would you define the significance of community within the association's activities?
4. What other social or economic benefits do these recreational activities provide that you think are important?
5. How would you define the balance between the association's sport and social functions?

V. Local community and sustainability:

1. What kind of benefits does the association provide to the local community?
2. Does the association have measures in place to minimize its environmental impact in the lagoon?
3. How do you think that sport associations can contribute to preserve the lagoons environment?
4. How do you think that the associations activities contribute to the preservation of local culture and traditional heritage?

5. How have the activities of the remiere changed in recent years?
6. How do you think activities within the lagoon will change in the future?

VI. Optional Feedback:

1. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?

Questionnaire for Tourism Operators

I. Business profile:

1. What is the full name of the business?
2. In which year was it founded?
3. How many employees does the business have roughly?
4. What kind of activities does the company offer where the main activity takes place in the Venetian Lagoon? Please explain in detail the various activities.
5. How many boats does the company hold?

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II. Customer profile and services:

1. Can you describe the primary target audience? What is the ratio of Italians and foreigners?
2. Regarding the age range is there any notable trends in age demographics?
3. What is the hourly rate per person for your activities? A rough number is absolutely enough.
4. What is the average expenditure per customer?
5. What is the average size of the group for your activities?
6. What aspect of the activity do customers value the most?
7. How do customers find you? What's the main channel of advertisement?
8. Do visitors return or do the activity repeatably?
9. What are the operating months? Which is the most important season? Are there any periods of closure?

III. Economic impact and business performance:

1. Can you describe how the business has performed in economic term in recent years and what changes have been experienced?
2. How is business performance measured?
3. Could you provide information on the following information: the total number of visitors, and the number of tours conducted annually?
4. How would you characterize the business profitability and what factors influenced it?
5. How much of your operational capacity gets reached? Is there opportunity and space for a business expansion?
6. Are there anything other thoughts you'd like to share about how these activities benefit the community or local economy in your opinion?

IV. Operational challenges and market dynamics:

1. Could you explain how your business is structured?
2. What are the biggest challenges you are confronted with when working in the tourism sector?
3. Can you tell me a little bit about the amount of competition in your line of business and how the company can be classified within it?
4. Does your business collaborate with other service providers in Venice? Are you part of a larger network?
5. How would you say the activities in the lagoon have changed within the last few years?
6. Are you able to make any future predictions of where business is heading to?

V. Local community and sustainability:

1. Please describe the businesses position within the local Venetian community.
2. Are there measures in place to minimize the environmental impact within the Venetian Lagoon?
3. In your opinion, what is the extent of responsibility of tourism operators in ensuring the preservation of the Venetian Lagoon's environment?
4. To what extent do you believe your business's activities contribute to the preservation of local Venetian culture and customs?

VI. Optional Feedback:

1. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?

Questionnaire for Additional Interviews

I. Interviewee Profile (not part of the interview questions):

1. What is your name and occupation?
2. What is your relation to the research of Associations, Tourism and the Venetian Lagoon?
3. Where are you from? And how long have you been in Venice?

II. Key Insights on Lagoon Dynamics: perspectives on tourism, environmental challenges, social impacts

1. How long have you been active in (your field of expertise)?
2. What water-based activities are you related to?
3. How long have you been associated to this?

III. Socioeconomic Aspects, Local Community, and Sustainability:

1. How do you relate to the conservation of the Venetian lagoon and its traditions?

For Rowing members:

1. Why did you start rowing? What do you like about this sporting activity? Does it connect you to the city?
2. Do you feel that rowing is one of the few remaining affordable sports for Venetians?
3. Do you feel like there is an importance to keep these site-specific traditions alive?
4. Have you recommended rowing to others? What does rowing mean to you in the context of Venice?
5. Does the association play a social role in your life beyond recreational sport? Have you made for example friendships at the association that go beyond doing sports together?
6. What importance do you think the "remiere" (rowing clubs) have in Venetian society?
7. Would you consider the "remiere" a social refuge from overtourism?
8. What are the main limitations or challenges facing the association? (e.g., boat traffic, population decline)

9. If applicable, how has rowing activity in the lagoon changed over the last years?

Confidentiality Document

"I, _____ hereby grant permission to Stephan Kruse, a student at Ca Foscari University, to record this interview for the sole purpose of research related to the Master Thesis: Mapping the Lagoon.

I understand that:

The recording will be used for transcription and analysis purposes only.

The recording will not be published or shared publicly.

I have the right to withdraw my consent at any time.

The recording will be securely stored and deleted upon completion of the research.

[Signature]

[Date]