

P4

MSc Architecture

City Of The Future

# VENICE

## BEYOND THE DREAM

**Redefining belonging: a comprehensive mapping of external agents' influence and architectural interventions to challenge Venice's housing problems**

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“Memory’s images, once they are fixed in words, are erased,” Polo said.

“Perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once, if I speak of it,

or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have already lost it,

little by little.”

*Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities (1972)*



# Abstract

This thesis explores the intricate relationship between residents and cities, with a focus on Venice as a case study. It investigates the impact of external agents on the city's evolution, highlighting challenges such as demographic decline, economic dependence on overtourism, all symptoms of an unlivable city. The study employs a hierarchical analysis to understand Venice's problems, emphasizing the urgency of preserving its residents, in terms of private, collective, and public living. Utilizing urban and architectural studies, the research proposes pragmatic solutions, advocating for a balance between curated experiences and authentic urban history. The Giudecca sestiere is taken into account, an island with the potential to challenge Venice's issues and become a resident-centred space, contributing to the broader discourse on urban preservation and livability. Here, Gino Valle's Social Housing Complex from 1984 is examined, establishing limitations and potential for architectural interventions.



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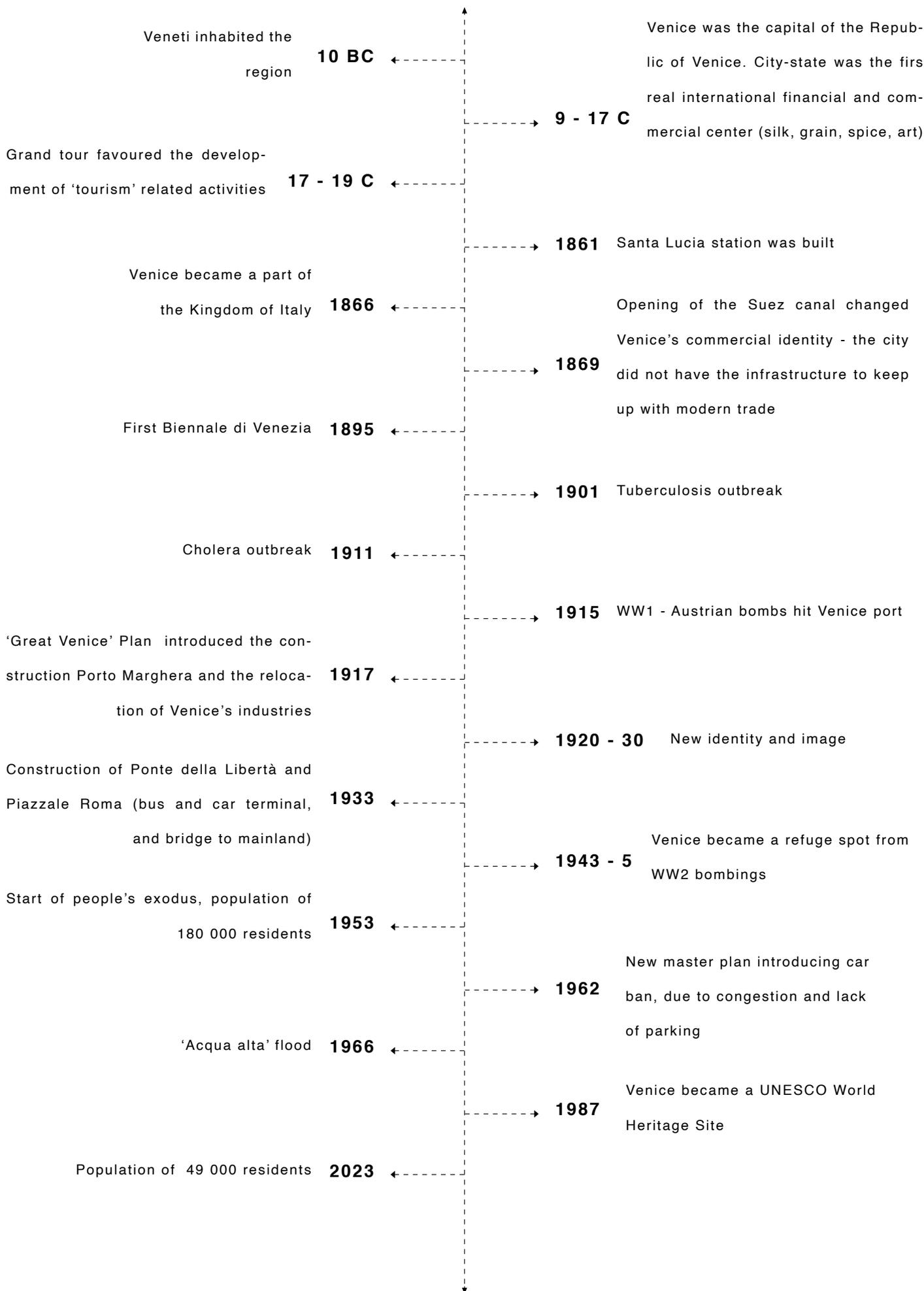
# Glossary

<b>External agents</b>	Stakeholders, with varying degrees of power and influence, that mutate the city operating at different scales. Their decisions shape the built environment, in the same way that the built environment shapes its users.
<b>Residents</b>	The people who permanently live in Venice and are directly affected by the urban and architectural dynamics of the city. Their needs, experiences, and well-being are central considerations in the exploration of urban challenges and the formulation of architectural solutions.
<b>Unlivable city</b>	A city characterized by conditions that make it challenging for residents to lead a comfortable and satisfying life. Factors contributing to it are defined by three factors: individual life, collective living, and economic sustainability.
<b>Overtourism</b>	When the number of tourists in a particular destination exceeds the capacity of that location, resulting in negative consequences for the local environment, infrastructure, and residents' quality of life.
<b>Museum city</b>	A city where the primary focus is on preserving historical and cultural heritage for tourism purposes, challenging the residents' need of maintaining a livable city.
<b>Sestieri</b>	Italian term for districts or neighbourhoods. Venice is divided into six sestieri: San Marco, Castello, Cannaregio, San Croce, San Polo, and Dorsoduro, of which Giudecca is an extension of.

<b>Giudecca</b>	One of Venice's sestieri, located to the South of the city center across the Canal Grande. Historically an industrial area, Giudecca has transformed into a residential center.
<b>Ater Venezia</b>	Public housing agency in Venice, Italy. The term "Ater" stands for "Azienda Territoriale per l'Edilizia Residenziale," which translates to "Territorial Company for Residential Construction". Ater Venezia is responsible for managing and overseeing public housing in the city, including the maintenance and allocation of residential properties.
<b>OCIO</b>	Acronym for Osservatorio Casa Isolani e Oltremare. Collective of residents and researchers focused on housing and residential issues in insular Venice, established in 2019.
<b>Venice Biennale</b>	International exhibition that takes place biennially in Venice. Established in 1895, it has expanded to include various art forms, including architecture.
<b>Nizioleti</b>	Narrow Venetian alleys or passageways
<b>Fondamenta</b>	Embankments along Venice's canals
<b>Salizade</b>	Wide streets or alleys with commercial activity
<b>Calli</b>	Streets or roads in Venice
<b>Sotoportègo</b>	Covered passageways beneath buildings

<b>Rami</b>	Smaller calli
<b>Campi</b>	Open public squares
<b>Campielli</b>	Small public squares or courtyards
<b>Corti</b>	Courtyards or enclosed collective and private spaces

# Venice timeline





# Introduction:

## Exploring the impact of external agents on urban livability: A case study of Venice

The dynamic relationship between residents and the city functions as a complex interaction, where both entities evolve together, shaping the cityscape and challenging established notions of belonging. This intricate bond prompts an exploration into the tangible realities that define a city's essence and its aspirational trajectory.

The perception of the success of the livability of urban landscapes often involves a sense of intentional design, where cities appear as meticulously crafted systems catering to individual needs. However, upon further reflection, one notices the fundamental nature of cities, prompting a distinction between permanent and transient features. This introspection sparked this thesis' interest in comprehending multi-layered urban systems, recognizing the forces that shape residents' daily routines and affect the way a city is lived.

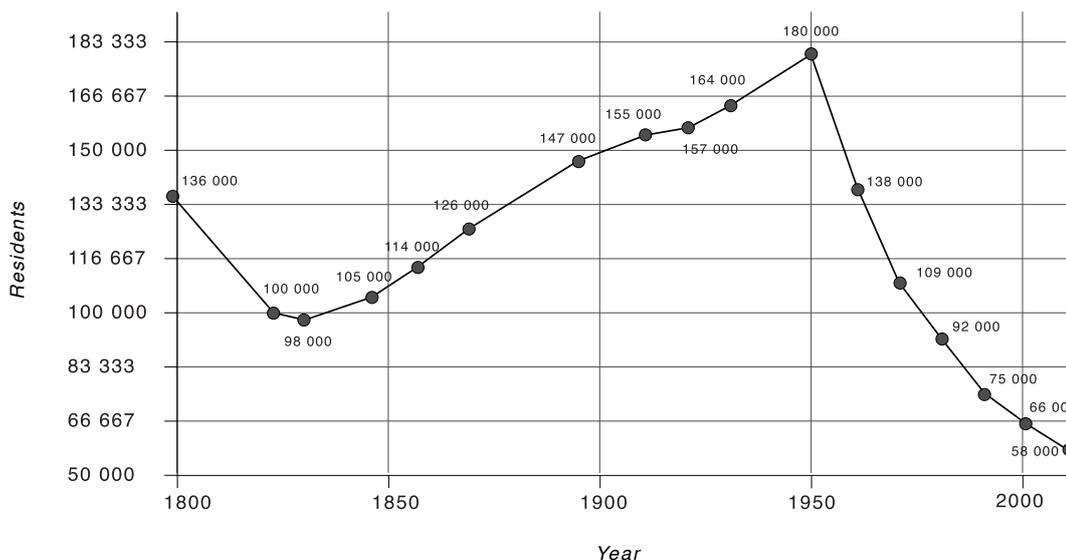
### **Historical Cities and External Agents**

As a way to investigate the relationship between city and residents through time, the case of historical cities is considered: embodying a delicate balance between appearing static in form and continuously changing in use, they serve as well-documented examples to learn from. Viewing a city as an ever-changing apparatus, this thesis establishes a fundamental position – a city does not change itself. Instead, external agents, with various degrees of power and influence, play pivotal roles in sculpting the urban landscape. These agents, operating on different scales, influence decisions that delineate the built environment, reciprocally shaping the city and its residents.

Historical retrospection rationalizes extreme scenarios, providing clarity and rationality from the ambiguity of the present. Therefore, this research aims to navigate the intricate issues faced by historical cities, to draw conclusions for the present.

Figure 1

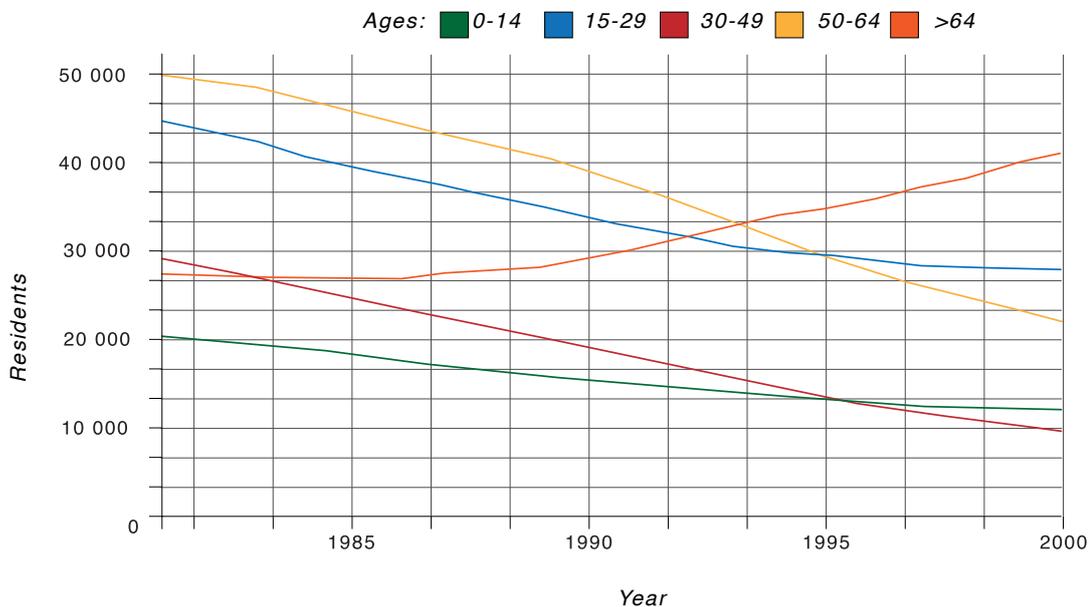
Residents in Venice's city centre throughout the years <sup>1</sup>



Venice reached peak population (180000 inhabitants) around 1950, after WW2. Afterwards, one can see a steep decline, which makes today's population under 50000 residents.

Figure 2

Demographic age shift in Venice's city centre, 1981 - 2000 <sup>2</sup>



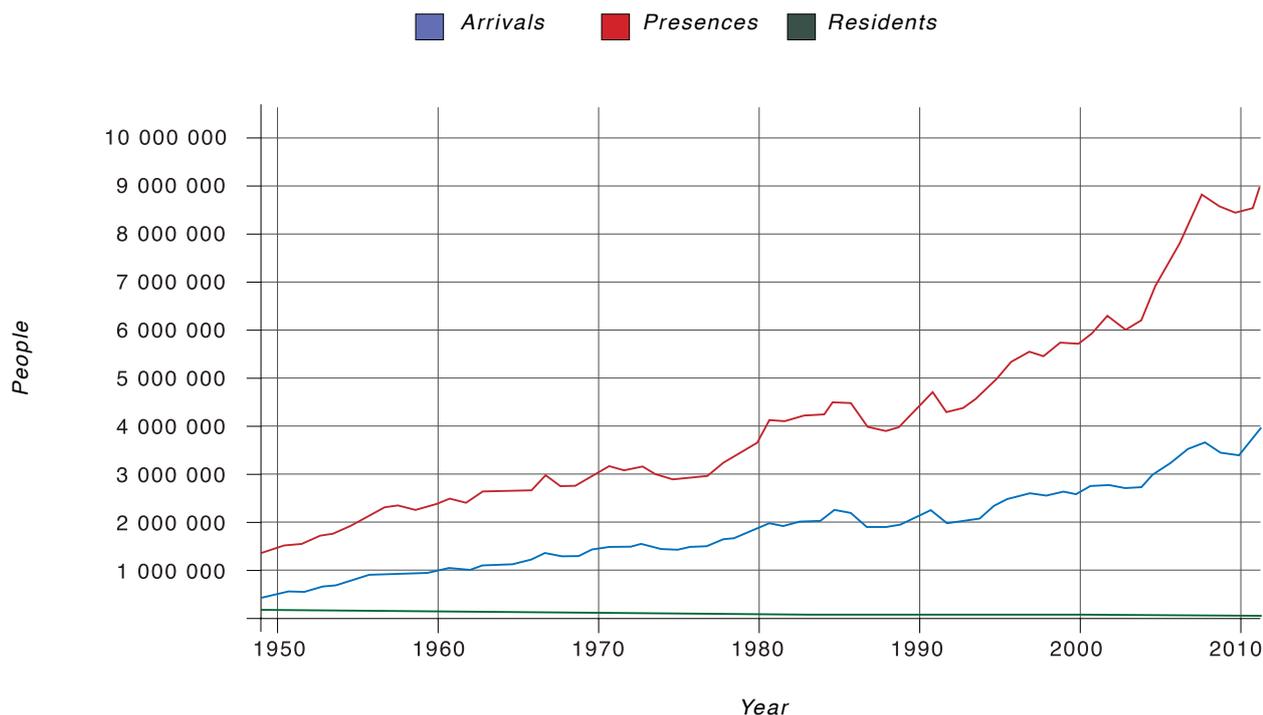
All age groups under 64 experienced a significant decline towards the end of the 20th century, especially between 15 and 49 years old. On the other hand, the age group of over 64 increased, marking Venice's ageing population

1. Source data: Favero, Giovanni. 2014. "Venezia Dopo Venezia: Economia E Demografia Urbana Nel Novecento." *Laboratoire Italien*, no. 15 (December): 79–89. <https://doi.org/10.4000/laboratoireitalien.830>

2. "Serie Storica Dei Quartieri." *Città di Venezia*, May 26, 2022. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220806163834/https://www.comune.venezia.it/it/content/serie-storica-dei-quartieri-anni-1982-2020>

Figure 3

Tourists' arrivals and presences, and residents in Venice from 1950 - 2011<sup>3</sup>



Tourists arrivals and presences distinguish the overnight stays and the day trippers in Venice. The local residents, marked in yellow, are virtually non-existent amongst the visitors.

The historical city of Venice will be the focal lens of this study. Described as a 'victim of its own success'<sup>4</sup>, Venice struggles with the dichotomy of global attraction juxtaposed against the challenges posed by its un-livability. The city's demographic decline since the post-World War II years (figure 1), coupled with a demographic shift towards an aging population (figure 2), and an economy solely relying on overtourism (figure 3), are all consequences of clear policies that can be challenged architecturally.

### Hierarchy of problems and disclaimer

To carry out a fair and balanced research, one needs to understand two things: the hierarchical order of Venice's problems, and the extent of this thesis' focus. The global relevance of Venice's architectural evolu-

3. *Dati Demografici - Popolazione.* "Città di Venezia, February 2, 2023. <https://www.comune.venezia.it/it/content/statistica-statistiche-popolazione-0>.

4. Bertocchi, Dario, and Francesco Visentin. 2019. "The Overwhelmed City": Physical and Social Over-Capacities of Global Tourism in Venice" *Sustainability* 11, no. 24: 6937. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11246937d>

tion and the continuous challenge of overtourism bears significance, as the global phenomenon of ‘museum cities’<sup>5</sup> prompts contemplation on the equilibrium between curated experiences and authentic urban history.

The 2023 threatened inclusion of Venice in UNESCO’s ‘World Heritage in Danger’ list<sup>6</sup> highlights the urgency of this research, contributing to the broader discourse on preservation and urban evolution.

However, overtourism, although a distinct challenge to Venetian life, emerges as a symptom of prevailing conditions. Figure 4 shows a schematic representation of the hierarchy of Venice’s problems: further analysis reveals underlying issues such as demographic decline marked by a drastic decline in population from 155,000 in 1911 to 58,000 in 2011, heritage loss, demographic shift, and an unlivable urban environment. The latter emphasizes the need for private and public spaces to blend seamlessly, creating a feeling of connection and community. At the epicentre of these issues lie external agents, serving as catalysts for widespread consequences.

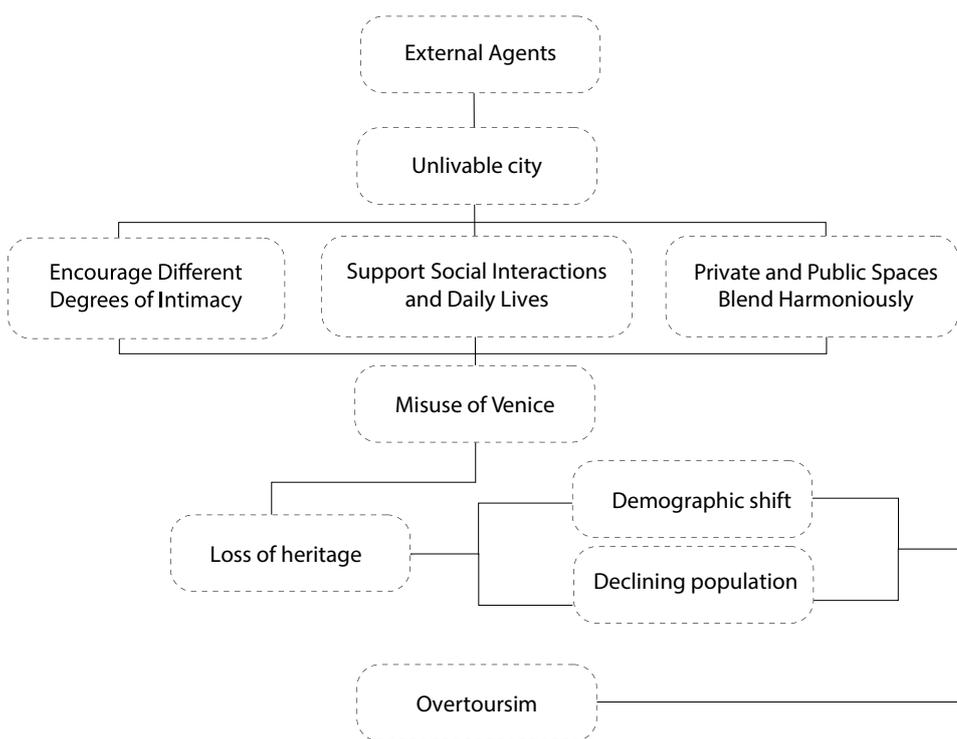


Figure 4

Schematic representation of the hierarchy of Venice’s problems shows the way Venice’s problems are interconnected. The diagram places the ‘external agents’ as the core problem, which then influence the unliavability of Venice, the misuse of the city, all leading to overtourism.

5. Hanley, Anne. “The Disneyfication of Venice Just Went a Step Further – with Entry Fees and QR Codes.” *The Telegraph*, July 8, 2022. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/italy/veneto/venice/disneyfication-venice-just-went-step-entry-fees-qr-codes/>.

6. Povoledo, Elisabetta. “Venice Keeps off List of Endangered World Sites.” *The New York Times*, September 14, 2023. <https://www.ny-times.com/2023/09/14/world/europe/venice-unesco-danger-list-tourism.html>.

The overarching problem resides in the impact of external agents on residential and public spaces in Venice, manifesting in an unsuccessful urban environment and a perpetual decline in population overshadowed by overtourism. Preservation endeavours often fall short, side lining the needs of residents and transforming the city into a tourist-centric destination rather than a permanent community.

Tourism is thus not a problem in itself, and this study does not suggest a touristic or economic reform in Venice, but it invites the reader to see tourism in the present form as limited. This drives a wedge between the city and the residents, leading to a city experience that is not genuine, but artificial and limited. Creating spaces for residents to exist privately and collectively, as well as supporting a varied economy is paramount for the future success and livability of cities.

### **Research aim**

This study aims to overlook romanticized narratives and analyse Venice objectively. The city's adaptive evolution after the WW2 years is investigated with a keen focus on intentional policies. The central scope revolves around understanding policies' intentions and proposing architectural solutions to mitigate the impact of external agents on Venice's urban fabric, with a specific focus on fostering a livable environment for residents.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research uses urban and architectural studies, and historical sociology as analytical tools, offering pragmatic solutions to abstract challenges. Emphasizing the disjunction between perceived reality and objective truth, the study builds on prior research, utilizing specific lenses to understand the dynamics of urban developments and societal transformations over temporal expanses. The key voices supporting this study are Dennis R. Judd and Susan S. Fainstein, who shed light on the '*museum city*' paradigm <sup>7</sup>, where turning cities into tourist attractions can lead to cultural erosion and disparities.

Additionally, the '*Delft method of typo-morphological project analysis*' <sup>8</sup>, developed by Bernard Leupen and

7. *Ibid*

8. Bekkering, H., Hoekstra, M. J., Rooij, R., Wagenaar, C., & Zeinstra, J. (2018). *The Delft Fundamentals: integration of disciplines, projects and analysis. Proceedings of the ICE - Urban Design and Planning*, 171(2), 87-96. <https://doi.org/10.1680/jurdp.18.00008>

colleagues, provides a versatile approach to assess Venice's living environment. Furthermore, architect Robert Good's research on vernacular architecture in Venice emphasizes the need to divert focus from housing prices to the misuse of residential spaces due to tourism, as '*a city's livability cannot be measured solely by economic factors*'<sup>9</sup>.

## Methodology

The research methodology follows a cyclical trajectory, involving meticulous proposal development, archival research, comprehensive literature review, on-site visitation, data collection, ethnographic site studies, and meticulous data analysis and synthesis. The approach is iterative, assimilating feedback to refine objectives and scope. This methodology ensures a diverse spectrum of information, incorporating social, cultural, economic, and environmental facets in the assessment of living environments.

Specifically, this thesis will offer an overview of Venice's context, with a focus on livability and historical land use and development. Afterward, the city will be analysed according to descending scale, in its urban form, neighbourhood scale, and finally considering a case study building. The neighbourhood chosen is Giudecca, located in the Southern perimeter of the city center, chosen for being amongst the most residential and livable left in Venice. In Giudecca, this thesis will then analyse one of Venice's most relevant social housing complex, constructed in 1986 by Italian architect Gino Valle. This order of analysis will allow this research to assess Venice on multiple scales, understanding the successes and failures of intentional design in promoting a livable city, and thus build a framework for future proposals.

In order to assess the livability of Venice, this thesis proposes a methodology in three principles: private, collective sphere, and public spheres. This means that Venice, at all scales, will be examined according to these three parameters, as they help assess the abstract concept of 'livability' in a clear way. This is because a space is only livable for residents when it fulfills their individual needs, such as a safe and healthy dwelling to live in, when it enables them to move from private life to collective life in a seamless way, having a gradual transition from the private to public spheres.

9. Good, Robert. "Tourist Commodification of Residential Vernacular Architecture in Venice: Livability and Conservation in an Historic District." *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 17, no. 1 (2005): 65–74. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41758305>.

# Chapter 1:

## An exploration of socio-economic shifts, war-induced transformations, and the persistent struggle for urban viability

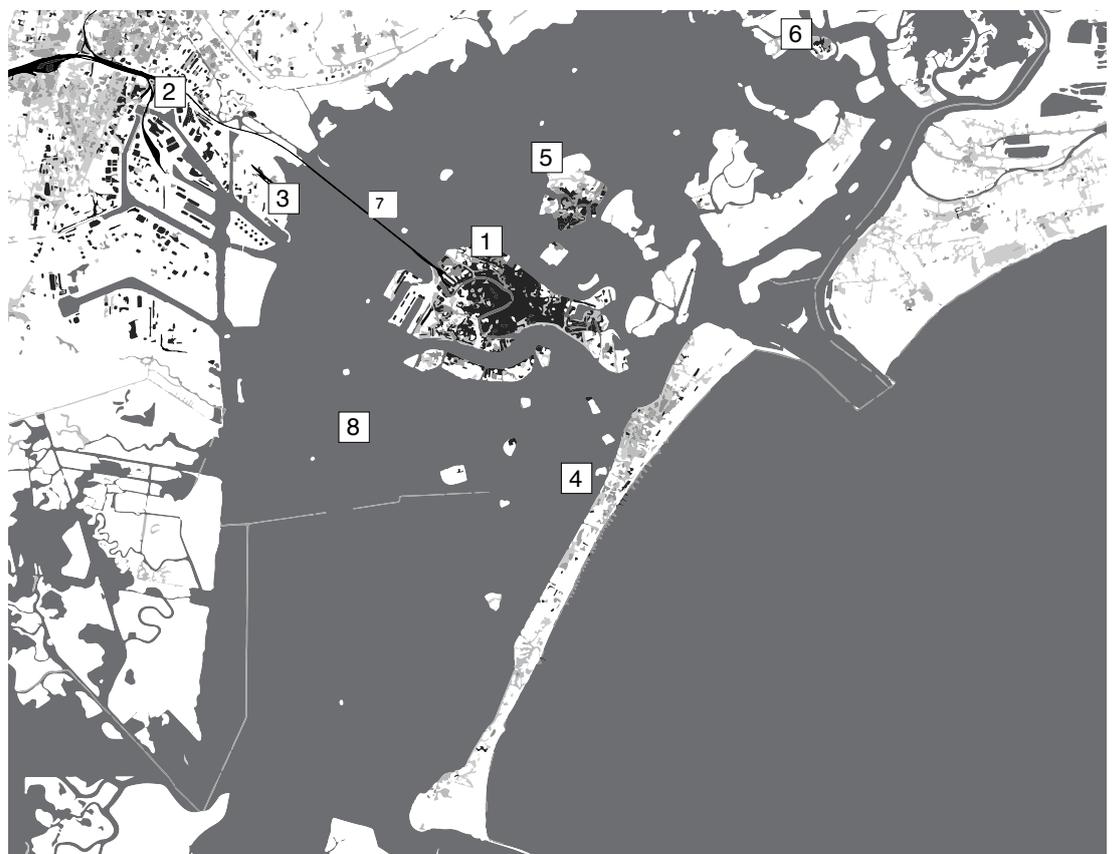
Venice, the capital of Veneto, is a city situated in North-East Italy, with a rich history that spans centuries. Historically, it emerged as a major financial and maritime power from the 5th to the 17th century, evolving into a crucial international financial center. However, the 20th century brought on significant challenges that changed Venice's status.

The municipality comprises two distinct zones, as seen in figure 5: '*terraferma*', referring to the mainland, geographically a part of the peninsula of Italy; and the '*estuario*', representing the islands in the lagoon, home of the city center researched in this paper. These two regions are vastly different from an economic and demographic point of view, as a result of various land use policies <sup>10</sup>.

Figure 5

Venice's municipality  
and lagoon

1. Venice
2. Mestre
3. Lido
4. Murano
5. Burano
7. Ponte della Libertà
8. Venetian lagoon



10. DeVine, Jr, John . n.d. *Review of The Boundaries of Venice Digitally Mapping Historical Venetian Borders and Their Modern Day Implications*. WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE. Accessed September 17, 2023. [file:///Users/flaviascafella/Downloads/VE16\\_BOUNDS\\_Report.pdf](file:///Users/flaviascafella/Downloads/VE16_BOUNDS_Report.pdf).

The turn of the century witnessed political and economic changes, impacting Venice's architecture and land use. In the late 19th century the city struggled with conflicting interests as commercial and industrial development clashed with the growing tourism sector.

A great urban transformation already took place in 1846, with the construction of the bridge *Ponte della Libertà* in 1931 and the Santa Lucia train station building in 1861, connecting Venice to the mainland, resulting in a transition in the city's economic base, and marking the beginning of the city's reliance on the rest of Italy. The main reason for the shift was the city's distinctive urban structure as an island, which posed challenges for modernization. This led to sanitation and housing issues, exacerbated by the influx of newcomers, causing rent hikes, especially in peripheral areas <sup>11</sup>.

As it may be observed from figure 6, Venice's tangled network of canals, narrow winding streets, and historic architecture made it difficult to implement modern infrastructure and accommodate the needs of contemporary industries. The narrow streets and limited space hindered the adoption of larger, more efficient industrial facilities, and the water-based transportation system posed logistical challenges for modern transportation networks. Balancing the preservation of Venice's historical character with the demands of modernization



Figure 6

*Venice's network of canals, narrow streets, and dense urban fabric. This led to difficulty in implementing modern infrastructure, which hindered industrial development.*

11. Puga, Diego, and Daniel Treffer. 2014. "International Trade and Institutional Change: Medieval Venice's Response to Globalization\*." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129 (2): 753–821. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qju006>

became a complex task, leading to tensions between maintaining the city's heritage and adapting to contemporary needs.

Frictions took place as critiques about Venice's degradation, worsened by the 1911 cholera outbreak that highlighted health problems tied to housing and food, emphasized the need for urban improvement. The main exponents of this were the members of the Italian Futurist movement, who were countered by the efforts of the municipality to protect the city's image.

Additionally, during world war I, the city was hit by multiple areal bombardments: by 1918, more than 1000 bombs had been dropped on the city <sup>12</sup>. The city was thus at a crossroad, and the need for action significantly changed its role to determine its survival.



Figure 7

*Archival photograph depicting the city's struggle against aerial bombardment during World War I.*

Stemming from these conditions, in 1917 the 'Great Venice' industrial plan was introduced by politician and businessman Giuseppe Volpi, and industrialist Vittorio Cini <sup>13</sup>. The plan aimed to transform Marghera, a mainland port area West of Venice, into an industrial hub, while maintaining the historic center a residential and commercial area.

12. "SKD: A City at War." n.d. [www.skd.museum](http://www.skd.museum). Accessed April 10, 2024. <https://www.skd.museum/en/exhibitions/archiv/a-city-at-war/>.

13. *Unesco. Venice Restored. Unesco, 1978.15*

However, this represented a problem for the residents of Venice, as it led to a notable rise in unemployment within the historic core, as people no longer worked in the city center, and were reluctant to move to Marghera.

The implementation of the industrial plan prompted a change in the city's economic dynamics, with traditional sectors like tourism facing challenges. This economic transformation necessitated welfare interventions in the 1930s, as authorities sought to address the growing unemployment and socioeconomic repercussions caused by the changing industrial landscape. The city, with too many impoverished inhabitants, sought '*urban reclamation*'<sup>14</sup>. Between the wars, the futuristic vision of Venice dissolved, and the focus shifted towards preserving its peculiarities.

Therefore, in World War II Venice altered tactics, embracing its status as an artistic epicentre to protect the city and its residents. During the biennium spanning 1943 to 1945, Venice not only accommodated the personnel relocated from Rome following the transfer of Repubblica ministries, but also served as a sanctuary for evacuees seeking refuge from aerial bombardments. Post-war overcrowding ensued, exemplified by how in 1946, Venice accommodated twenty-seven thousand 'non-residents', with the population in the city center reaching two-hundred thousand<sup>14</sup>. In these times, efforts to relocate residents to the mainland proved insufficient.

However, in 1953, a substantial '*exodus*' from Venice to the mainland began, counting 175 thousand residents in the city center, signifying a prolonged demographic shift<sup>15</sup>. The main issues were health problems, housing inefficiency, and parking challenges. Mestre and Marghera's origins, as industrial hubs linked to Venice, became crucial. Agents such as UNESCO initiated preservation efforts to safeguard Venice's cultural heritage and residents, but the city faced complexities balancing tourism, preservation, and economic viability.

Even after the war, minimal efforts were directed towards diversifying Venice into a multifaceted city. The

14. Scarpa, Antonella. 2014. "Archivio Del Ricordo Memorie Giuliano-Dalmate a Venezia - L'esodo Degli Istriani, Fiumani E Dalmati. ." [https://www.comune.venezia.it/sites/comune.venezia.it/files/cultura/documenti/schede-cultura/VeDo\\_08.pdf](https://www.comune.venezia.it/sites/comune.venezia.it/files/cultura/documenti/schede-cultura/VeDo_08.pdf).

15. Pietragnoli, Leopoldo, and Maurizio Reberschak. 2002. "Dalla Ricostruzione al Problema Di Venezia - Treccani." Treccani. 2002. [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/dalla-ricostruzione-al-problema-di-venezia\\_\(Storia-di-Venezia\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/dalla-ricostruzione-al-problema-di-venezia_(Storia-di-Venezia)/).

grandeur of the past persisted, with the city struggling to evolve beyond its historical role. The narrative of Venice's transformation reflects the enduring tension between preserving its heritage, catering to tourists, and fostering a livable environment for its residents, a theme that resonates in the city's challenges today.

## Chapter 2

### Venice's urban fabric: navigating geographical and contemporary realities

#### Territorial framework

This chapter delves into the various urban and architectural dimensions of Venice's municipality and city center, navigating the complex balance between tradition and the demands of contemporary dynamics.

Venice is composed of a distinctive urban layout shaped by its unique geographical setting. Situated in the middle of a lagoon, approximately four kilometers from the mainland and two kilometers from the sea, the city's form unfolds along the dual bends of a primary canal, where a dense network of 158 secondary canals separates one hundred eighteen islands. The urban organization has evolved over centuries, as seen in figure 6. This was influenced by both deliberate human interventions and unforeseen natural events, resulting in a spatial arrangement dictated by the surrounding environment <sup>16</sup>.

Figure 8

*Evolution of urban development in Venice*



Despite changes in political and economic circumstances, the city's territorial dimensions have remained relatively stable, with the core functions of politics, administration, commerce, and religion concentrated in the central area between San Marco and Rialto <sup>17</sup>.

16. Chiara Finizza. 2022. "Interpretazioni Figurative per Leggere E Rappresentare Le Forme Urbane Di Venezia." *DIALOGHI / DIALOGUES • Visioni E Visualità / Visions and Visuality*, September. <https://doi.org/10.3280/oa-832-c80>.

17. Lazzari, Giovanni. 1977. *L'Enciclopedia Treccani. Vol. V - Venezia. Treccani.*

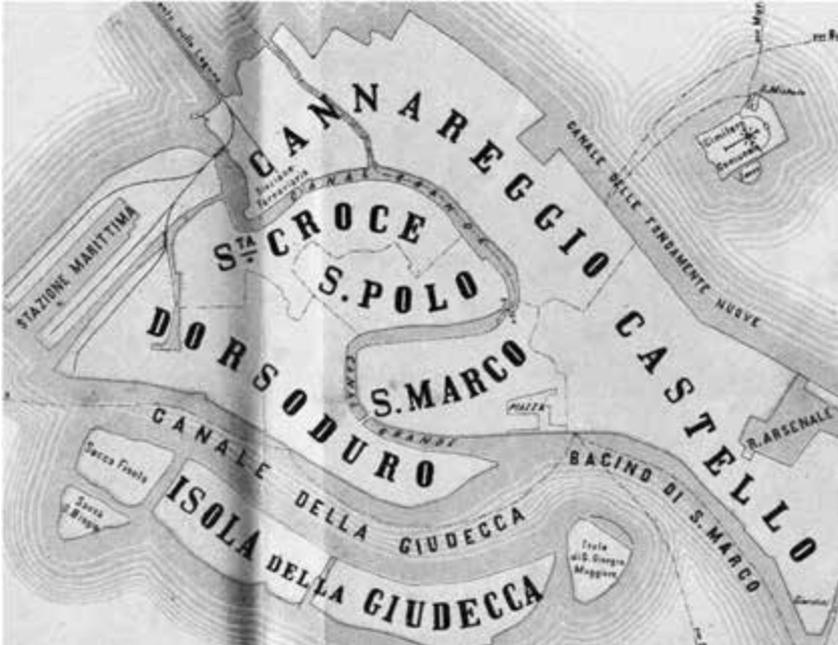


Figure 9

Venice's sestieri

- Cannaregio
- Castello
- Dorsoduro
- Giudecca
- San Giorgio Maggiore
- San Marco
- San Polo
- Santa Croce

The historic city is organized in six historical 'sestieri', or neighbourhoods, seen in figure 7: San Marco, Castello, Cannaregio, Santa Croce, San Polo, Dorsoduro, and the neighbourhood of Giudecca, affiliated as an extension of Dorsoduro. The establishment of the sestieri is a typical Italian urban structure, dating back to 1320, where it played a vital role in overseeing public security and contributed to shaping the architectural identity of each sestiere. This is still relevant today, as each district has specific functions in terms of tourism, collective living, and residential life <sup>18</sup>.

The municipality of Venice is composed of a mixed composition of territories. It encompasses a total area of approximately 46 thousand hectares, where the municipality delineates 18 thousand hectares of land, juxtaposed with an extensive water area of nearly 28 thousand hectares. Venice's historic center spans 757 hectares, composed of the surfaces of the waters areas (canals), and the emerged lands, which amount to approximately 720 hectares.

As of the 2021 census, this intricate territorial fabric accommodates a resident population of 250 thousand: they are predominantly concentrated in the Mestre area, counting 87 thousand residents, while 49 700 reside in Venice's city center. However, the latter is additionally populated by an influx of approximately 30 million tourists a year <sup>19</sup>.

18. Lazzari, Giovanni. 1977. *L'Enciclopedia Treccani*. V - Venezia. Treccani.

19. Venice municipality. 1996. "COMUNE ASSESSORATO ALL'URBANISTICA PIANO per REGOLATORE LA CITTA' GENERALE ANTICA." <https://www.comune.venezia.it/>. 1996. [https://www.comune.venezia.it/sites/comune.venezia.it/files/page/files/elaborati\\_di\\_analisi.pdf](https://www.comune.venezia.it/sites/comune.venezia.it/files/page/files/elaborati_di_analisi.pdf).

## Economic landscape

Venice's economy is characterized by a workforce of 355 thousand individuals, with a diverse distribution across the three sectors. The agricultural sector contributes a relatively modest 2.7%, while the industrial sector employs 26.7% of the workforce, indicative of Venice's industrial base. These are predominantly focused in the mainland areas of Mestre and Marghera. In contrast, the services sector finds its base predominantly in the city center, emerging as the primary driver, encompassing 70.6% of employment <sup>20</sup>.

Within services, trade, hotels, and restaurants constitute 24.3%, while other activities and services contribute significantly with 46.3%, highlighting the diverse range of services shaping the city's economic landscape. However, despite the economic vibrancy, 2022 witnessed a concerning surge in unemployment, reaching 41 thousand individuals in the municipality of Venice, a noteworthy escalation from the 34 thousand recorded in 2021. This economic shift prompts a closer examination of Venice's adaptive strategies and resilience in the face of evolving labour market dynamics <sup>21</sup>.

American critic and political activist Mary McCarthy (1912 - 1989) examines tourism in Venice shedding light on the city's complex relationship with commercialization and enchantment. The city has functioned as a dual entity, serving as both '*a museum and an amusement park*' <sup>22</sup>, sustained by tourists since the 18th century. McCarthy highlights the evolution of Venetian crafts into sideshows, transforming glass-blowing, bead-stringing, and lace-making into souvenirs. She dismisses the dichotomy between the tourist and authentic Venice, asserting that the "*tourist experience encapsulates the true essence of the city*".

This perspective prompts a nuanced reflection on Venice's economy, and its reliance on tourism. McCarthy's Venice is a '*dream incarnate*', guarded by symbolism and history, invites objective consideration of how urban dynamics align with the city's cultural identity, reflected by the high unemployment numbers and main reliance on the third sector. The paradox of a commercial society creating a city of fantasy raises questions about Venice's sustainability as a livable city, and what spaces are needed to support it in the future.

20. Redazione. 2019. "Commercio E Servizi, in Veneto Il 63% Degli Occupati Lavora Nel Terziario." *VenetoEconomia*. July 17, 2019. <https://www.venetoeconomia.it/2019/07/confcommercio-dati-veneto/>.

21. PENDOLINI, EUGENIO. 2023. "Inps, Boom Indennità Di Disoccupazione Nel Veneziano: 'Contratti Stagionali a Livelli Pre Covid.'" *La Nuova*, November 16, 2023. [https://nuovavenezia.gelocal.it/venezia/cronaca/2023/11/16/news/inps\\_venezia\\_boom\\_disoccupazione-13864463/#:~:text=Nel%202022%20ci%20sono%20state,tasso%20di%20occupazione%20in%20calo.](https://nuovavenezia.gelocal.it/venezia/cronaca/2023/11/16/news/inps_venezia_boom_disoccupazione-13864463/#:~:text=Nel%202022%20ci%20sono%20state,tasso%20di%20occupazione%20in%20calo.)

22. Fainstein, Susan S., and Dennis R. Judd. *The Tourist City*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

## Chapter 3

# Housing shortage and misuse of dwellings in Venice: Challenges of tourism and public policy

### Housing shortage

The convoluted economic framework of Venice, where nearly two-thirds of available tourist lodgings in Venice stem from non-hotel establishments like tourist rentals, hostels, and bed and breakfasts, represents a threat to the livability of the city.

Following the surge in tourist rentals in 2017 and 2018, the number of available bed spaces almost equals the resident population (56 764 bed spaces versus 56 734 residents), as seen in figure 7. This equilibrium signifies a housing shortage, increasing affordability challenges and potentially leading to gentrification and displacement <sup>23</sup>. The situation negatively impacts the quality of life, as increased tourism - related activities alter the neighbourhood dynamics and contribute to economic displacement, making Venice unlivable. Moreover, the cultural and social fabric of the community may suffer, and the strain on infrastructure highlights the need for effective urban planning.

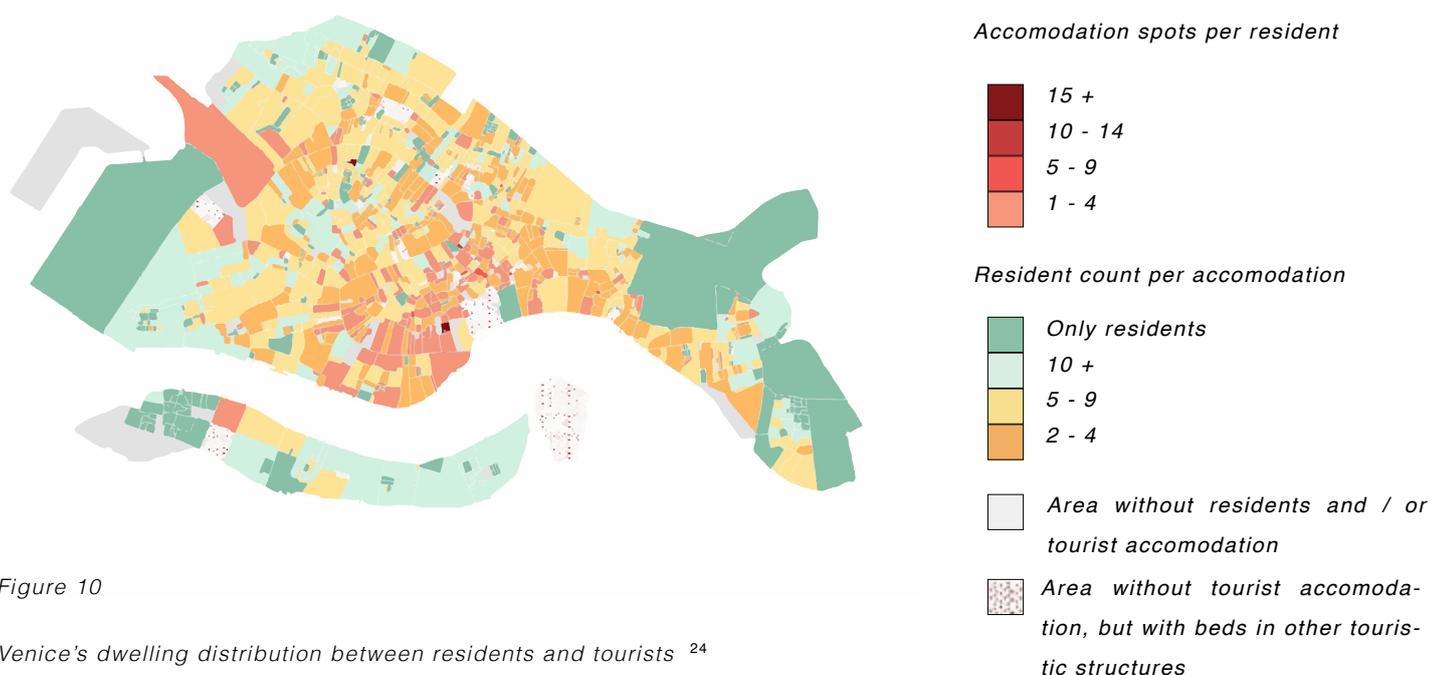


Figure 10

Venice's dwelling distribution between residents and tourists <sup>24</sup>

23. Good, Robert. "Tourist Commodification of Residential Vernacular Architecture in Venice: Livability and Conservation in an Historic District." *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 17, no. 1 (2005): 65–74. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/417583>

24. Salerno, Giacomo-Maria, and Antonio Paolo Russo. 2020. "Venice as a Short-Term City. Between Global Trends and Local Lock-Ins." *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, December, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1860068>.

This over-reliance on non-hotel structures, particularly private accommodations catering to tourists, has a profound impact on the architectural and urban landscape of the city center of Venice. The proliferation of tourist rentals and the conversion of residential buildings into hotel-like structures exacerbate the shortage of livable dwellings for residents.

### **Misuse of dwellings**

Moreover, the absence of effective regulation further aggravates the situation, as the issue of Venice's dwellings extends further than the problems caused by tourism. The issue of abandoned public housing in the historic city, particularly from 2011 to 2018, reflects a pervasive neglect of social housing challenges.

Ater Venezia, a public housing agency in Venice responsible for managing and overseeing public housing in the city, manages a portfolio of five thousand dwellings in Venice, including 791 (nearly 16%) uninhabitable ones requiring maintenance. Despite planning interventions for the recovery and maintenance of 296 historic city dwellings, only less than 10% were successfully completed, emphasizing the severity of the problem <sup>25</sup>.

Ater Venezia's financial constraints, emphasised by inconsistent regional funding, hindered progress, leaving a substantial portion of planned interventions unresolved. Initiatives such as property sales and rent revisions failed to generate anticipated revenue, with only 106 properties sold between 2015 and 2018. The critical underfunding and deferred maintenance of public housing underscore the broader issues related to social housing neglect and highlight the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to alleviate the housing crisis in Venice. <sup>26</sup>

On Saturday, 18 November 2023, a significant protest unfolded in Venice, originating from Campo San Giacomo, near the Rialto Bridge, and progressing towards the municipality. It was organised by the assembly "ASC Venezia" under the rallying cry '*Qui Viviamo, Qui Restiamo!*' (*Here we live, Here we stay!*).

25. Report. 2023. "OCIO I Cerca." Ocio-Venezia.it. November 12, 2023. <https://ocio-venezia.it/search?q=case+sfitte>.

26. "OCIO I Ater Venezia: L'abbandono Dell'edilizia Residenziale Pubblica Nella Città Storica, 2011–2018." 2020. Ocio-Venezia.it. February 4, 2020. <https://ocio-venezia.it/report/ater-venezia-l-abbandono-dell-edilizia-residenziale-pubblica-nella-citta-storica-2011-2018>.

# MANIFESTAZIONE CITTADINA PER LA CASA "QUI VIVIAMO QUI RESTIAMO"

SABATO 18 NOV. ORE 16:00 CAMPO SAN GIACOMETTO (ERBARIA) RIALTO

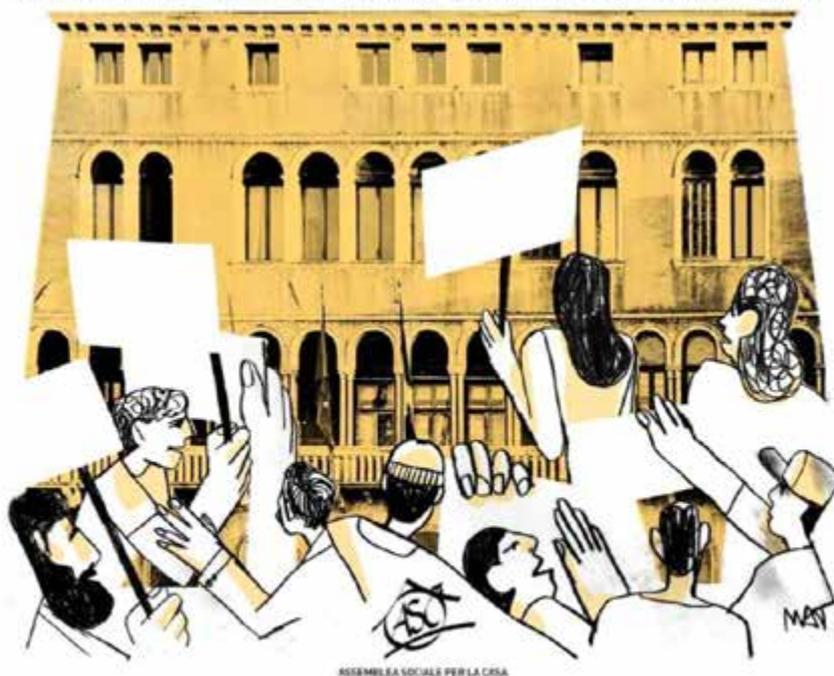


Figure 11 <sup>27</sup>

Flyer for the resident protest of 18 / 11 / 2023

The back of the flyer states:

- "Between 2017 and 2023, vacant properties owned by the municipality increased from 796 to 1024
- Only 140 houses will be assigned thanks to the latest ERP call
- Meanwhile, tourist rentals continue to rise, rentals are sky-rocketing, and more and more people are left without homes.
- And Brugnaro?" (the mayor of Venice since 2015) "he says Venice is depopulating because the residents are dying!
- We can no longer watch the transformation of our city into a Disneyland for tourists; we want city policies that prioritize housing and residents.

Their demands are:

- Restoration and immediate assignment of the 2000 empty and abandoned public houses
- Stop airbnb! We want regulation of tourist rentals
- Regulated rents for students, workers, and residents
- No to entry fees



Figure 12

*Residents at the Rialto Bridge on 18 / 11 / 2023 protesting the housing policies*

The demonstration voiced the concerns of residents facing the housing crisis, sharing the most recent statistics: over 2 200 unassigned public housing units, a 17.4% average rent increase from 2022 to 2023, and Venice securing the second-highest rank for residential rent in Italy. <sup>28</sup>

27. "Facebook." 2023. *Www.facebook.com*. November 8, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=332472466204790&set=pb.100083261178569.-2207520000&type=3>.

28. "Qui Viviamo Qui Restiamo Manifestazione Cittadina per La Casa." 2023. *Insolito Tran Tran*. November 2023. <https://www.insolitotrantran.it/event/qui-viviamo-qui-restiamo-manifestazione-cittadina-per-la-casa/>.

The protest sought to challenge the housing policies and market dynamics that have led to the closure of public houses while accommodating an excess of 49 000 tourist beds in contrast to 49 304 for residents, as of November 2023. With a net loss of 6,000 residents in seven years, the demonstration called for an end to the depopulation of the city, advocating for genuine and concrete residential policies <sup>29</sup>. The assembly emphasized the need to prioritize citizens over tourists, redirecting public investments towards housing, schools, hospitals, secure employment, and essential urban services. The event converged diverse Venetian groups and committees, led by ‘*Assemblea Pubblica per la Casa*’, all unified in their demand for substantive changes in housing policies.

Furthermore, the municipality’s recent allocation of substantial funds to the ‘*Bosco dello Sport*’ project in Tessera (shown in figure 14) raises significant concerns. This multifunctional space, designed for sports, social activities, music, and education, has faced public dissent <sup>30</sup>. The residents demanded explanations for allocating ‘*€ 300 million*’ <sup>31</sup> to the project, instead of using the funds, as they were originally allocated, on housing maintenance. This allocation further highlights the divergence in priorities between addressing the housing crisis and financing a project predominantly aimed at tourism profit <sup>32</sup>.

As stakeholders like tenant unions and students mobilize against these inadequate measures, the situation in Venice reflects broader challenges in regulating housing, and highlights the need for architectural interventions to balance the impact of tourism on residents, architectural integrity, and housing availability.

29. Morion Laboratorio Occupato. 2023. “Instagram.” *Www.instagram.com*. October 10, 2023. [https://www.instagram.com/cso\\_morion/p/CyN-tiKYrVXF/](https://www.instagram.com/cso_morion/p/CyN-tiKYrVXF/).

30. Città metropolitana di Venezia. n.d. “IL BOSCO DELLO SPORT Un Nuovo Epicentro Territoriale Di Sport, Socialità, Vita, Inclusione E Sostenibilità.” [https://live.comune.venezia.it/sites/live.comune.venezia.it/files/articoli/allegati/Bosco\\_dello\\_Sport\\_presentazione\\_0.pdf](https://live.comune.venezia.it/sites/live.comune.venezia.it/files/articoli/allegati/Bosco_dello_Sport_presentazione_0.pdf).

31. Colombo, Luca , and Marco Pacifico. 2023. “‘Qui Viviamo, Qui Restiamo’: A Venezia Protesta per Il Diritto Alla Casa.” *Www.rainews.it*. November 18, 2023. <https://www.rainews.it/tgr/veneto/video/2023/11/venezia-protesta-per-il-diritto-alla-casa--a4d2247c-c2f1-4ee2-a570-4c41b8c375ad.html>.

32. DUCOLI, MARIA. 2023. “Bosco Dello Sport: A Venezia La Rabbia Della Gente E La Richiesta Di Dimissioni.” *La Nuova Venezia*. April 27, 2023. [https://nuovavenezia.gelocal.it/venezia/cronaca/2023/04/27/news/venezia\\_bosco\\_sport\\_proteste\\_dimissioni-12776428/](https://nuovavenezia.gelocal.it/venezia/cronaca/2023/04/27/news/venezia_bosco_sport_proteste_dimissioni-12776428/).

33. *Ibid*



Figure 13

Above: Bosco Dello Sport proposal render <sup>33</sup>

Below: Location of the project in Tesserà

# Chapter 4

## Decoding Venice's urban evolution: architectural interventions and social dynamics

Having established the underlying problems behind Venice's housing crisis, one needs to understand the factual architectural interventions that the municipality has built in the post- WW2 period. This will allow this thesis to have an objective point of view on what the developments have been like in the past century, understanding the prevalence and patterns of building types, and the intentions behind them.

Looking at figure 14, one can see the extent of built projects in the province of Venice between the years 1945 and 2000, specifically looking at the timeframe when residents started leaving the city center. The developments in the mainland areas aligns with the industrial growth of the post-war years, and the industrial re-development of the ports.

Additionally, looking at the timeline of built projects after 1945, shown in figure 15, it is clear that the primary goal for construction was commercial and business - related structures, which boomed between 1950 and 1970. Initially, some efforts went into dwellings and public structures as well, but a similar pattern of diluted construction can be seen again after the 1970s. This stagnation highlights a need for public and residential areas in Venice, in order to achieve a livable city.

Furthermore, analysing the municipality of Venice alone, the dataset shows 46 built projects in the years 1945-2000, showcasing a varied architectural portfolio <sup>34</sup>. These are distributed into, 15 cultural and promotional, 12 public and civic structures, 8 dwellings, 5 commercial and business, 4 recreational, 2 production and industry, and 2 religious buildings.

34. "Scheda Regione Veneto - Censimento Delle Architetture Italiane Dal 1945 Ad Oggi." n.d. [Censimentoarchitetturecontemporanee.cultura.gov.it](https://censimentoarchitetturecontemporanee.cultura.gov.it). Accessed November 21, 2023. <https://censimentoarchitetturecontemporanee.cultura.gov.it/scheda-regione?regione=Veneto>

Figure 14

*Distribution of built projects between 1945 - 2000 in Venice's province*



Figure 15

Timeline of built projects in Venice's city center 1945-2000

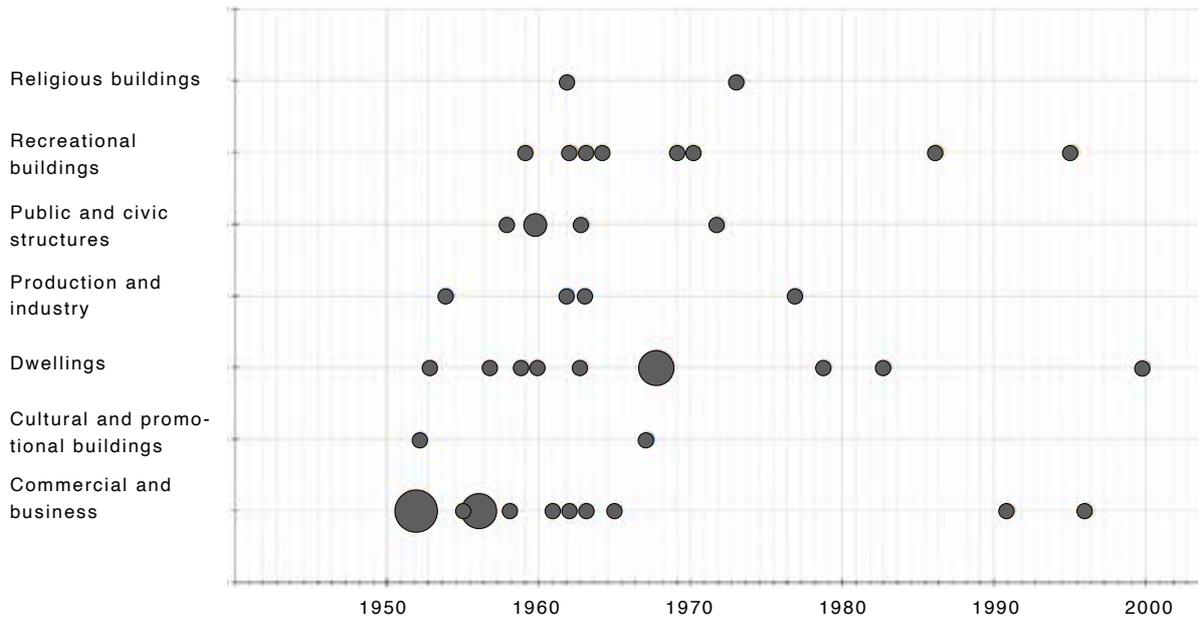
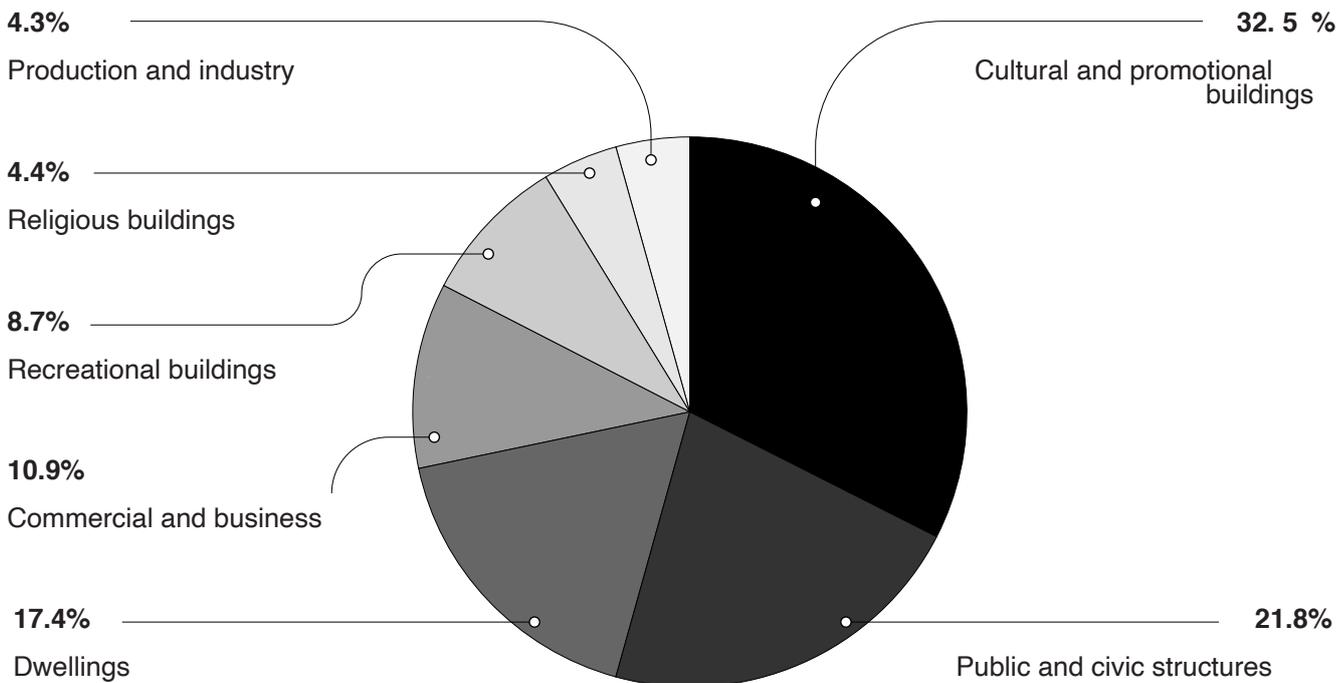


Figure 16

Building types in Venice's built projects in 1945-2000



The city center stands as the nucleus of Venice's architectural prowess, hosting 34 buildings that span various functions. Within it, one finds 12 cultural and promotional, 10 public and civic, 5 commercial and business, 3 dwellings, and 2 recreational buildings. The rest of the built projects are situated in the areas of Lido, Fusina, the island of Burano, and the areas of Mestre and Marghera.

Looking at the sestieri of Venice, the built projects can help understand the goal of construction during these years, and where funds and efforts went according to function.

Figure 17

*Built projects in Venice's city center 1945-2000*



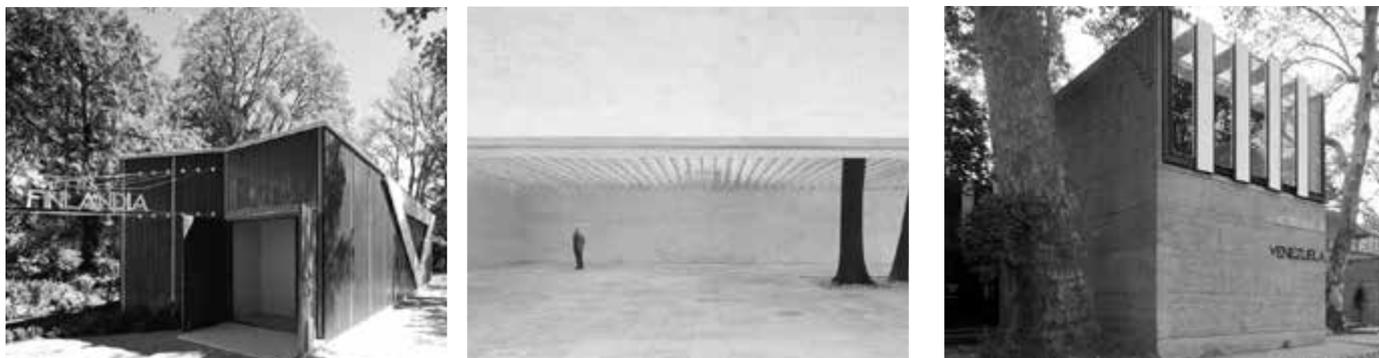
Most projects are concentrated in the Castello area, due to the Venice Biennale pavillions which revolutioned the area. In the center, notable commercial and business edifices were built, such as the Olivetti Store deisgned by Carlo Scarpa. Furthermore, the only social housing complex built in this period was the IACP Case Popolari in Giudecca by Gino Valle.

# Chapter 5

## Urban developments and socioeconomic dynamics in Venice's sestieri (1945-2000)

The following chapter delves into some of the main urban developments of Venice's various sestieri from 1945 to 2000, shedding light on their distinctive characteristics and evolving identities during this period.

Castello emerges as a focal point with a variety of architectural endeavours, predominantly attributed to the Architecture Biennale pavilions, which changed the perception of Venice as it is today. Additionally, Dorsoduro presents a diverse array of buildings, ranging from residential, commercial, and public structures. Residential projects especially can be seen as particularly relevant, catering mainly to higher class individuals.



*Figure 18*

*Examples of Biennale pavillions built in Castello (Finnish, Nordic, and Venezuelan)*

The renowned tourist hub of San Marco reflects its cultural essence through a blend of mixed functions, serving as a widely successful public space, despite currently catering mainly to tourists.



Figure 19

*Built projects in San Marco and Dorsoduro: Olivetti store (1957-1958 - Carlo Scarpa), Balboni house (1964-1969 - Carlo Scarpa Single-family home), Casa alle Zattere (1953-1962 Multi-family dwellings Ignazio Gardella)*

Finally, the least built projects can be found in Giudecca and Santa Croce. The latter still sees a focus on public and commercial projects, aligning with its position at ‘entrance’ of Venice, being close to the train station and the bridge. In Giudecca one finds only a single public housing project, emblematic of the broader trend of low-income residents relocating to the mainland post-1945. Analysing the distribution of built projects reveals insights into the socioeconomic dynamics and spatial organization of Venice’s sestieri during the latter half of the 20th century.

Giudecca hosts the only public housing dwelling built in the city center in this timeframe, while the other two public residential constructions are found in Mestre and Murano. Furthermore, Giudecca, which hosts more than 10% of the city centre’s population, is the sestiere with the least annual income in Venice (around € 19 000 per year, compared to the richer ones of S. Croce, S. Polo, and S. Marco with an average of € 29 500<sup>35</sup>).

35. *Fondazione Gianni Pellicani. 2023. “Redditi, Venezia è La Più Povera Tra I Capoluoghi a Nordest E Le Città d’Arte: Stipendi (Quasi) Fermi.” Corriere Della Sera. December 29, 2023. [https://corrieredelveneto.corriere.it/notizie/veneziamestre/cronaca/23\\_dicembre\\_29/redditi-veneziae-la-piu-povera-tra-i-capoluoghi-a-nordest-e-le-citta-d-arte-stipendi-quasi-fermi-ff3e0d17-a28e-4d92-988b-f66a94ee7xlk.shtml](https://corrieredelveneto.corriere.it/notizie/veneziamestre/cronaca/23_dicembre_29/redditi-veneziae-la-piu-povera-tra-i-capoluoghi-a-nordest-e-le-citta-d-arte-stipendi-quasi-fermi-ff3e0d17-a28e-4d92-988b-f66a94ee7xlk.shtml).*

One can therefore see that there is a need for an urban revival which provides residents in Giudecca with the necessary built environment structures to thrive.



Figure 20

*IACP Case Popolari in Giudecca, built by Gino Valle in 1984, as a social housing project*

In terms of public space for residents, Santa Croce, Castello, and Giudecca currently host the fewest spaces for tourists, as seen in figure 10.

This is partially due to their peripheral location, but district function also plays a role: Santa Croce, located adjacent to Venice's port, is the smallest of Venice's Sestieri, currently serving as the gateway for those arriving from the mainland<sup>36</sup>. Stretching from Piazzale Roma to the Rialto Market area, it is a focal point for amenities, such as the car and bus terminal, making it convenient for reaching public transportation and other parts of the city<sup>37</sup>. However, no dwellings were built in this district in the second half of the 20th century, meaning that even though houses are not catered towards tourists, they are not for residents either, as it is a predominantly commercial and public area, rather than a residential one.

36. "Il Sestiere Di Santa Croce." 2017. *Evenice - Il Portale Degli Eventi a Venezia*. April 25, 2017. <https://evenice.it/venezia/monumenti-chiese/sestiere-santa-croce>.

37. Squillante, Matteo. 2023. "Vivere a Venezia: Costo, Quartieri, pro E Contro — Idealista/News." *Www.idealista.it*. July 19, 2023. <https://www.idealista.it/news/immobiliare/residenziale/2023/07/18/174627-vivere-a-venezias-costo-quartieri-pro-e-contro#Dove+vivere+a+Venezia>.

## Castello, Sant'Elena, and the relationship between the Venice Biennale and the residents of Venice

Similarly, the Castello sestiere saw a significant development of cultural and promotional buildings during the second half of the 20th century, mainly due to the Venice Biennale pavilions. The Venice Biennale, established with the inaugural International Exhibition of Fine and Applied Arts in 1895, achieved autonomous status in 1930<sup>38</sup>. The Biennale expanded its scope from 1895 to 1999 to include manifestations in art, music, cinema, theater, architecture, and dance<sup>39</sup>. The Central Pavilion is located in the Giardini, while the architecture exhibition utilizes the Corderie dell'Arsenale as an exhibition space. The Giardini specifically are located partially in a private area of Sant'Elena, a modern residential island, as seen in figure 21.

The relationship between the residents and the Biennale is complex: the Biennale, expanding into the Giardini Pubblici, once accessible to the public, has progressively isolated these spaces from the city. Despite intentions to reopen the Gardens throughout the year, they remain exclusive to paying visitors, closed during non-exhibition periods.

To highlight this phenomenon, for the 18th Venice Architecture Biennale, the architectural collective *AKT* and Viennese architect Hermann Czech orchestrated a temporary transformation of the Austrian Pavilion, addressing the critical issue of the lack of collective spaces for residents in Venice, as seen in figure 21<sup>40</sup>. Located Northeast, near the perimeter wall separating the Biennale Gardens from the city, the pavilion engaged with the surrounding community. Under the theme '*Participation / Beteiligung*', the symmetrical pavilion was divided into two halves, symbolizing a dialogue between the Biennale and the city. While the Western half remained accessible from the Biennale, the Eastern half, including a courtyard, was intended to be freely accessible from the city, serving as a meeting place for residents.

38. "Biennale Di Venezia - Treccani." n.d. Treccani. Accessed January 12, 2024. <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/biennale-di-venezia/>.

39. "L'Istituzione." 2017. *La Biennale Di Venezia*. April 24, 2017. <https://www.labiennale.org/it/listituzione>.

40. "Partecipazione / Beteiligung — 18. Mostra Internazionale Di Architettura." 2023. *Partecipazione / Beteiligung*. 2023. <https://labiennale2023.at/it/>.

The project aimed to reverse the Biennale's historical expansionist trend, fostering dialogue and inclusivity with the surrounding community. However, despite a year of preliminary discussions and negotiations, the Biennale and relevant authorities did not approve the pavilion's opening to the residents, highlighting the challenges of implementing such transformative spatial practices. The Austrian Pavilion thus transcended its role as an exhibition venue, becoming a representation of the divide and relationship between the city and the Biennale itself <sup>41</sup>.

Figure 21

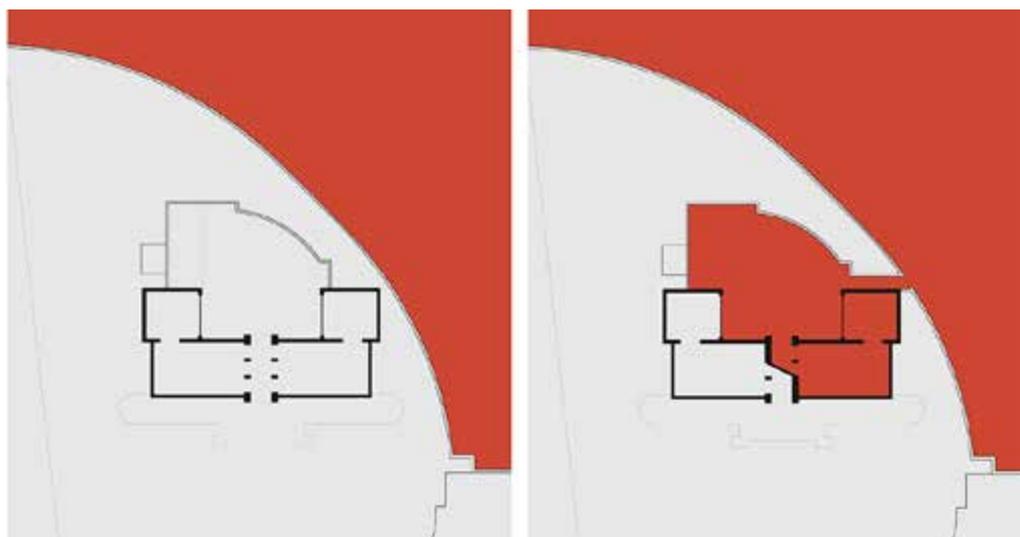
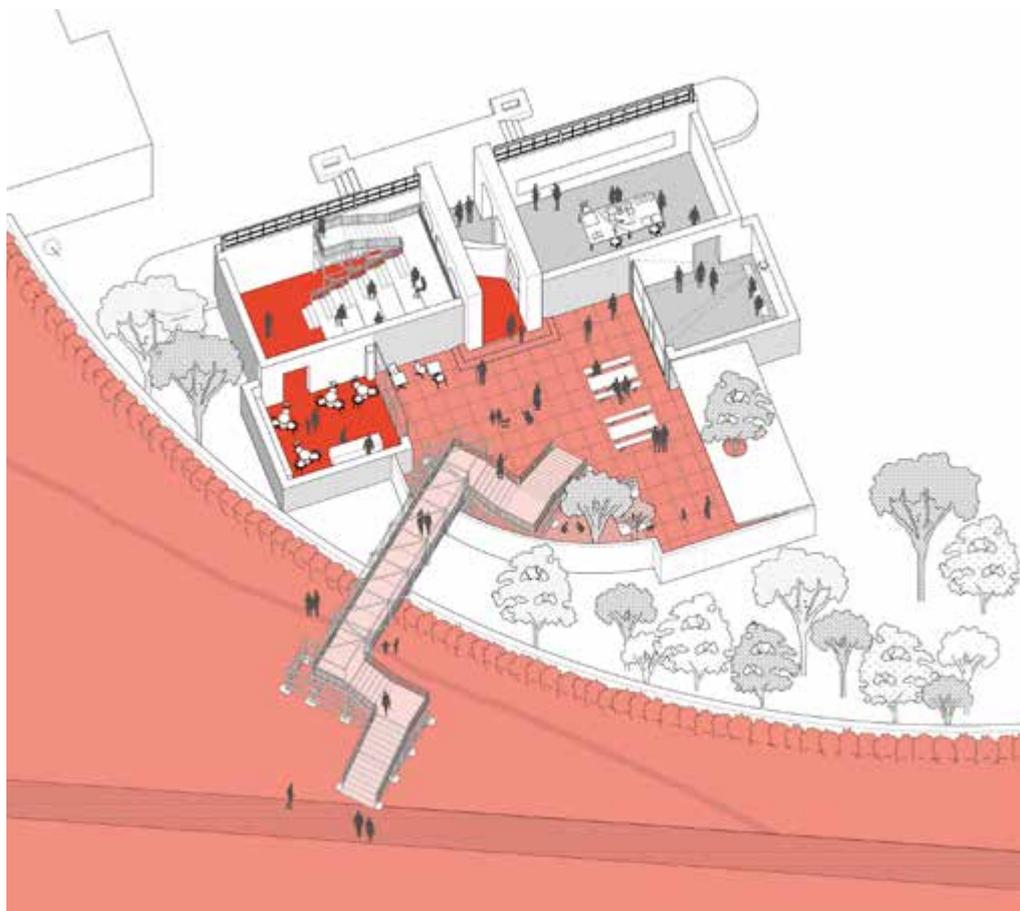
Map of the Giardini and Sant'Elena, showing the location of the Austrian pavillion on the residential island of S. Elena, in the area which is overlapped by the Biennale's gardens



41. *Ibid*

Figure 21

Proposed plan for the multifunctional Austrian pavilion, to be used by residents as collective space during closing times of the Biennale <sup>42</sup>



42. Burgos, Matthew . 2023. "What Role Can the Biennale Play in the City of Venice? The Austrian Pavilion Curators Weigh In." *Designboom | Architecture & Design Magazine*. May 11, 2023. <https://www.designboom.com/architecture/role-biennale-city-venice-austrian-pavilion-curators-interview-05-11-2023/>.

## Chapter 6

### Giudecca: tracing the evolving landscape from historic haven to industrial hub and contemporary resurgence

Born as a suburb of the city center, Giudecca is the largest among the 116 islands forming Venice. It is composed of ten islands separated by nine canals.

It is separated from the historic center by the Giudecca Canal, situated North. In the East, it is separated from the Island of San Giorgio by the Canal della Grazia. To the South, the Canals delle Scoazze, Fasiol, and Nuovo act as dividers from the opposite islands (delle Grazie, di S. Clemente, di Sacca Sessola). Heading southwest, the Fusina Canal creates a distance between Giudecca and Porto Marghera. From 1171 onward, Giudecca has been a part of the Dorsoduro sestiere; it was only during the 19th-century French and Austrian rule that Giudecca was regarded as a distinct area separate from Venice.

The population comprehends around 4 thousand residents <sup>43</sup>, after reaching peaks of 6 thousand in the 1500s and 13 thousand in the early 1900s. The island, nicknamed ‘spinalonga’ for its long and narrow shape, was one of the first parts of Venice to be inhabited, thanks to the consistent presence of rich vegetation, lacking in the main city center.

Figure 21

Overview of Giudecca

1. Giudecca canal
2. Venetian lagoon
3. Giudecca
4. Sacca Fisola
5. San Giorgio Maggiore
6. Historic city center
7. Vaporetto lines



43. "Città Di Venezia | Comune Di Venezia - Portale Dei Servizi | Mappa Della Popolazione Residente al Giorno Precedente." n.d. [Portale.comune.venezia.it. https://portale.comune.venezia.it/millefoglie/statistiche/home.](https://portale.comune.venezia.it/millefoglie/statistiche/home)

### Giudecca: prosperity, decline, and societal transformations in 15th-18th century

The island's prosperity traces back to Doge Orso I Partecipazio, who allocated land to influential Venetian families for constructing their residences. Subsequently, many other noble families were drawn to Giudecca due to its abundant vegetation, and it became a haven for artists seeking inspiration and tranquillity during short stays <sup>44</sup>.

For similar reasons, in the mid-1300s, religious orders established churches and convents on Giudecca. For example, a Benedictine convent and church dedicated to the Holy Cross was built in the 1500s, and Palladio designed an Oratory and shelter for orphan girls in the 15th century <sup>45</sup>. From this, one notices the original character and identity of the island, notably a highly livable one, where private and public aspects of life intertwined.

During this period various realities coexisted in Giudecca: the working and farming class, involved in various artisanal activities that were expanding on the island due to its favourable position, the affluent and joyous life of the nobility, and the stricter life within the monasteries.

In fact, historical documents from this period confirm a thriving intellectual life. In 1484, Ermolao Barbaro initiated an Academy of philosophy and botany at his residence, the Barbaro Palace, attracting the brightest minds of Venice. The palace later passed to the Nani family, where historian Giambattista Nani established the Academy of the Filareti in 1661-63, aimed at educating youth in fine arts, philosophy, and theology <sup>46</sup>.

However, Giudecca was characterized by arts and entertainment only until the seventeenth century. According to historians, one of the main reasons dates back to 1702, where the procurator of San Marco, Agostino Antonio Nani, drowned while returning to his residence in Giudecca <sup>47</sup>. This discouraged many Venetian families from living on the island, causing them to change the location of their homes in favour of the other side of the canal.

44. Francis Cotterell Hodgson. 1901. *The Early History of Venice*. London : G. Allen.

45. Okey, Thomas. 2015. *Venice and Its Story*. CreateSpace.

46. Pompeo Gherardo Molmenti. 1907. *Venice, Its Individual Growth from the Earliest Beginnings to the Fall of the Republic*.

47. Jonglez, Thomas, Paola Zoffoli, and Irene Galifi. 2010. *Venezia Insolita E Segreta*. Jonglez.



*Figure 22*

*Exterior and interior of the Barbaro Palace, frequented by the noble class in Giudecca in the 15th century*

Consequently, the population decreased, as did shops and consumption. Furthermore, the loss of the colonial empire, one of the main sources of Venice's wealth, led the city towards a decline that was amplified by the arrival of the plague in the 1600s, causing significant depopulation of both the historical center and the islands, including Giudecca. In the 1700s, with Napoleon's occupation, many religious orders were suppressed, and consequently, many churches and convents, if not demolished, were transformed into barracks and warehouses <sup>48</sup>, leading to an impoverishment of the artistic and cultural impulses deriving from ecclesiastical patronage.

### **The industrial evolution of Giudecca (1800s): from factories and workforce residences to economic transformation and urban restructuring**

The 1800s marked the start of Giudecca's industrialization, leading all the human and material forces to be directed solely towards the construction and production of factories and industrial centres. Consequently, every cultural aspect was neglected since Giudecca was in an extremely favourable position for trade and product shipment.

48. *Ibid*

The industrial side of Giudecca developed during the Napoleonic rule (1806-1814), where furnaces for lime and bricks multiplied, altering its landscape and playing a central role in both industrial production and architectural evolution <sup>49</sup>. These furnaces emerged with a distinct architectural identity, disrupting the traditional concealment within other buildings and disregarding imposed artistic and monumental values.

The growing industrial development led to a complete transformation of the nearby residential areas into worker-populated zones, as workers preferred living close to the workplace.

The value of property underwent a significant decline, resulting in the devaluation of real estate <sup>50</sup>. Degraded and unsanitary housing was easily rented at low prices, contributing to increased epidemics and diseases.

In the early stages of industrial development, there was no strict planning for the location of factories, resulting in a random distribution: some were accommodated in existing structures like convents and palaces, while others were built in open areas. In contrast, shops strategically followed a specific pattern along the Giudecca Canal due to maritime interest .

During the early 19th century, efforts were made to hide the industrial nature of Giudecca by placing factories in more internal areas to preserve its facade image.



*Figure 23*  
*Factory chimney and shipyard found*  
*in Western Giudecca*

49. Dal Cin, Valentina . 2019. *Il Mondo Nuovo L'élite Veneta Fra Rivoluzione E Restaurazione (1797-1815)*. Edizioni Ca' Foscari .

50. Favero, Giovanni. 2014. "Venezia Dopo Venezia: Economia E Demografia Urbana Nel Novecento." *Laboratoire Italien*, no. 15 (December): 79–89. <https://doi.org/10.4000/laboratoireitalien.830>

However, as the century progressed, the industrial landscape underwent a major transformation due to the opening of a new port between 1891 and 1896. This revitalized Venice economically, making it the second maritime power in Italy <sup>51</sup>. Giudecca, with its strategic location, became an attractive area for new buildings and shipyards, drawing investments from foreign banks and national companies.

These changes led to a profound transformation of Giudecca's urban structure. Numerous small factories vanished, replaced by larger industrial complexes with significant structures and higher production capacities. Many old buildings, churches, and convents were demolished to facilitate more uniform land use and grant dominance to new entrepreneurs.

Giudecca was the chosen location for many establishments that emerged in those years. This led to the '*complete alteration*' of the historical image of the island. Here, the German Herion initiated the production of yarns and textile products in the former church of Saints Cosma and Damiano (now a space known as the Incubator, hosting recently formed high-tech businesses) <sup>52</sup>. His compatriot Junghans established factories for precision instruments such as watches, timers, and, during the war, even fuses for hand grenades <sup>53</sup>. The space of the former Junghans factories has been converted into a residential area with a university residence and a theater.

At the western end of the island, the Swiss Stucky had the imposing neo-Gothic mill erected in his name. The grand building in Nordic style operated until 1955. It was designed by German architect Ernst Wullekopf, and its style has '*elements entirely foreign to the ordinary urban architectural culture*' <sup>53</sup>. Today, it has become a luxury hotel complex <sup>54</sup>.

51. Romano, Dennis, 'Italian Venice, 1866–1920', *Venice: The Remarkable History of the Lagoon City* (New York, 2024; online edn, Oxford Academic, 22 Feb. 2024),

52. Loquis. 2018. "Fabbrica Herion, Venice Podcast." Loquis. February 22, 2018. <https://www.loquis.com/en/loquis/570814/Fabbrica+Herion>.

53. Ennio Concina. *Storia Dell'architettura Di Venezia*. Mondadori Electa, 1995.316

54. *Ibid*

### Giudecca's renaissance: from industrial decline to artistic rebirth in the late 20th century

However, Giudecca is no longer an industrial hub; it has abandoned its role as a working-class suburb to become a residential neighbourhood. Despite the significant changes, the spirit of the island has retained some of its historical essence, presenting a sense of indefiniteness and incompleteness as if the process that began many years ago has never truly halted.

In 1964, the 'Pro-Giudecca Committee' was formed by collaborative efforts of citizens aiming to rejuvenate the island from an artistic-cultural standpoint<sup>55</sup>. Their focus extended to renovating residences, improving water conditions, and ensuring the safety of foundations and bridges. This volunteer-driven initiative involved island residents working together to support various beneficial activities, aided by the intervention of entities, particularly the newly established Neighbourhood Council.

The Committee not only addressed signs of decay caused by neglect but also initiated cultural and educational events, including conferences, concerts, film screenings, and the promotion of cultural contests, photography, drawing, and painting. In 1965, the citizens' representation officially requested the mayor to establish a craft center, proposing the use of the former Convent of Saints Cosma and Damiano as its headquarters.

The extensive restoration and conversion lasted nearly five years, resulting in twelve artisan workshops, four large halls of approximately 400 square meters each with corresponding office spaces, and services. Additionally, the large 15th-century cloister and a garden spanning about 4 thousand square meters have been reclaimed for communal use.

This initiative aligns with Giudecca's evolving identity: the workshops host various artistic crafts, while other spaces accommodate theatrical production and research facilities. The motivation behind this project was to revitalize many artisanal activities, especially those linked to Venice's ancient traditions, such as furniture making, lacquering, decorating, sculpting, blacksmithing, and pearl craftsmanship<sup>56</sup>.

55. *Ibid*

56. DM247889. 2017. "SS. Cosma E Damiano." *Comune Di Venezia*. April 20, 2017. <https://www.comune.venezia.it/it/content/ss-cosma-e-damiano>.

Therefore, the history of Giudecca reflects a series of contrasting phases. At its peak, it was a leisure destination for wealthy Venetians in the city's glorious historical era. However, it experienced a decline as an industrial periphery, resulting in a significant population decrease and the loss of its identity. Today, the remaining residents struggle with the challenge of restoring the island to its former vitality, both in terms of services and a cohesive identity.

# Chapter 7

## Exploring Venice's urban landscape: The case of Giudecca and the evolution of urban language

In the exploration of Venice's urban landscape, Giudecca emerges as a significant focal point, offering a nuanced understanding of the adaptation of urbanism among residents and tourists alike. To understand this dynamic further, this chapter offers a comprehensive analysis of Venice's urban language, and the effects of that on the users, both tourists and residents.

By examining the infrastructure that gave way to the rise of factories, the proliferation of worker-populated zones, and the collateral decline of traditional residential functions, this section shines a light on the complex web of forces that have shaped Giudecca's built environment and social structure.

Furthermore, the contemporary dichotomy between the experiences of residents and tourists in modern-day Giudecca will be considered, especially in how simplification and rationalization of urban language can lead to different experiences of a space.

While tourists are often drawn to the island's picturesque canals and historic landmarks, residents deal with the challenges of daily life, including routing, public space, and communal activities.

In essence, the analysis of Venice's urban language as seen in Giudecca, offers insights into the enduring historical legacy and the contemporary dynamics shaping its urban landscape. By juxtaposing divergent experiences, one gains a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between planned intentions and actual use, that defines the essence of Venetian urbanism, especially in identifying the transitional points between private and public.

## Tracing the historical legacy and contemporary adaptation of Venice's urban language through nizioletti and toponyms

Venice's urban language has developed through history in function of space, keeping the same names for centuries, and now being adapted to the city's modern needs. Venice's network is characterized by a diverse array of access routes, each serving a distinct purpose in the city's transportation and urban hierarchy. These spaces are marked by '*nizioletti*', white rectangular signs made of lime plaster, found on the walls of streets in Venice. In the time of the Republic, the official language for all legal and administrative documents was Venetian: having kept the original signs, modern-day nizioletti are also in Venetian, symbolizing the character of the city.

These toponyms often repeat, and each has a precise meaning, reflecting the historical and cultural significance of the locations they denote. This first section will describe two main branches of this language, streets and squares <sup>57</sup>.

*Figure 22*

*Example of nizioleto*

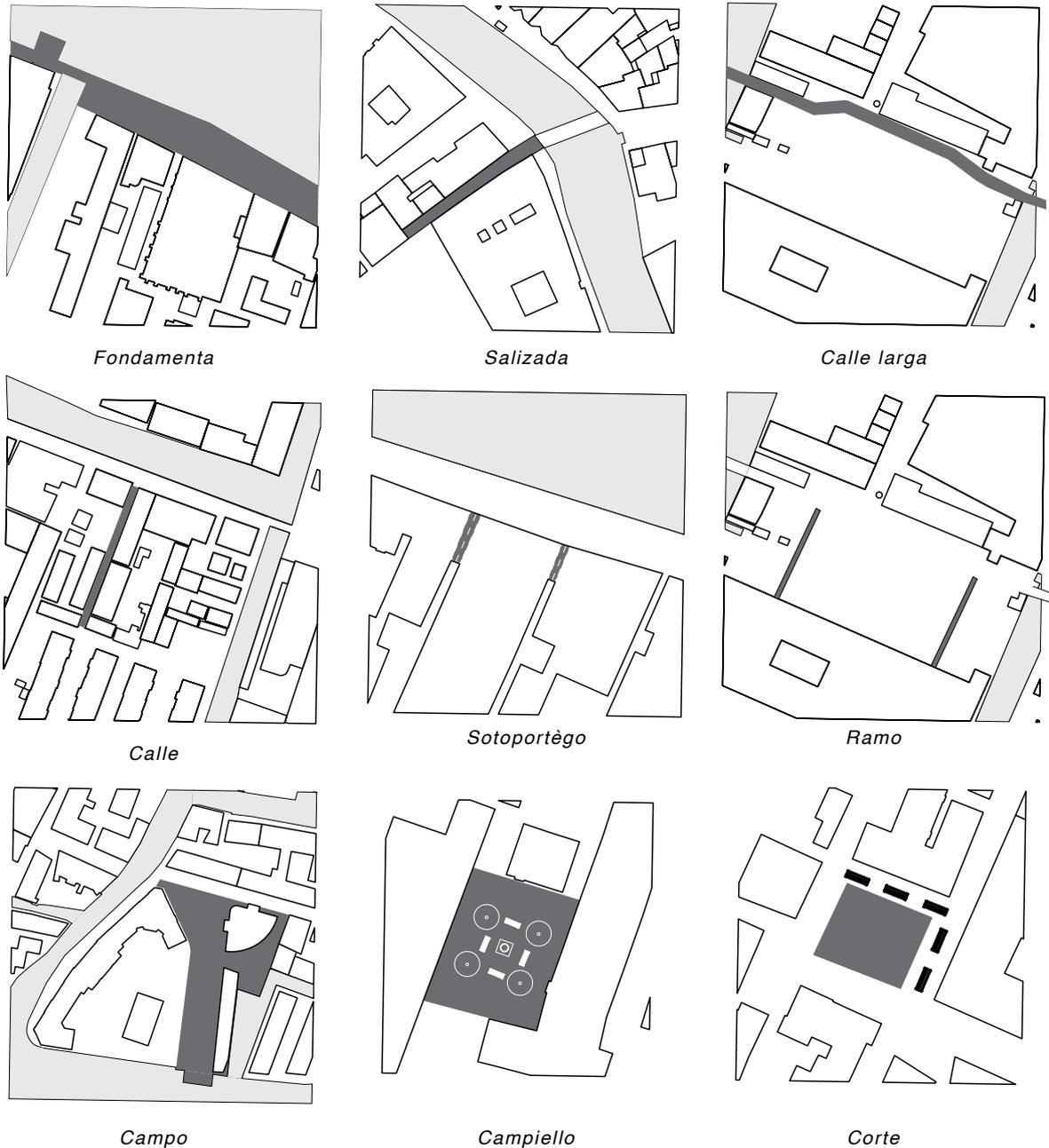


57. "Campi, Campielli E Corti, Ma Una Sola Piazza." 2021. Comune Di Venezia - . January 26, 2021. <https://live.comune.venezia.it/it/2021/01/campi-campielli-e-corti-ma-una-sola-piazza>.

## Unveiling the Varied Layers of Venetian Street scape and Urban Fabric

Figure 23

Toponyms of Venetian streets and squares



One must take into account that in the past the real streets of Venice, a city on water, were not considered those accessible on foot, but rather by boat. Therefore, the 'real' street of Venice is the Grand Canal, which cuts the city in a serpentine shape.

Thus, the streets that follow these canals are of specific importance. Called 'fondamenta', these waterfront promenades are integral components of Venice's urban fabric. They are some of the most populated streets, offering views of the city, vantage points for trading, and connecting the islands with the water.

Those streets that can be explored on foot within the urban fabric of the islands are instead called '*calli*', stemming from the Latin *callis*, meaning 'path' or branches (to indicate the secondary calli that exit from the main one). The calli represent the narrowest of Venetian streets, with the narrowest being 65 centimetres wide. These passageways are intimate and intentional, as they wind their way through the city, connecting various neighbourhoods. These vary in size, as they can be short (*callette*), or wide (*calli larghe*).

The wide streets juxtapose the intimacy of the narrower ones, offering broader access points. These spacious streets often serve as primary arteries through the city, facilitating the flow of commerce and transportation, and accommodating the diverse needs of residents and visitors navigating Venice's streets.

The intricate network of streets can be very direct and unexpected in Venice, offering routes that appear hidden, dark, and unbecoming, but eventually lead to wider, open spaces. What Venetians call '*sotoportèghi*', are covered passageways, providing sheltered walkways through the city's buildings, connecting alleys, courtyards, and waterfronts.

Longer streets are called '*rughe*', referring to streets that were once places of commerce and trade. These historic streets were lined with shops, markets, and workshops, serving as hubs of economic activity during the height of the Venetian Republic. While many of these long streets have evolved over time, their historical significance remains palpable in the architectural details and layout of Venice's urban landscape.

When these streets acquired significance, they became '*salizade*', or paved streets, characterized by their cobblestone paving and strategic location within the city. The use of paving, now a given quality, helped the residents orientate themselves into the city, and served as key public spaces <sup>58</sup>.

As these terms get into further degrees of intimacy, one finds '*rami*', which are small alleyways and dead-end streets branching off from main thoroughfares, providing access to hidden courtyards, residential buildings, and waterfronts. These secondary streets contribute to the intricate network of Venetian urbanism, offering

58. Panizzuti, Piera. 2013. "Campi, Campielli E Corti a Venezia I Venezia Nascosta." *Venezia.myblog.it*. April 3, 2013. <https://venezia.myblog.it/2013/04/06/campi-campielli-e-corti-a-venezia/>.

alternative routes for pedestrians navigating the city, and simultaneously adding to the privacy of the dwellings, as one moves away from public life. While less prominent than major ways, these play a vital role in shaping the pedestrian experience and preserving the intimate character of Venice's urban landscape <sup>59</sup>.

### Exploring the varied typologies of public squares in Venice

Similarly, public squares in Venice are categorized in hierarchies from public to private, guiding the urban language of the city and its use. A space of varying size surrounded by buildings is called '*campo*', '*campielo*' or '*corte*'. In Venice, there are 102 *campi* and 134 *campielli*, which are the equivalent of squares and little squares (the only real square in Venice is Piazza San Marco) <sup>60</sup>.

1. '*Campo*', or square, represents the primary public space in Venice, serving as a gathering place for numerous daily activities: markets, religious ceremonies, tournaments, and rallies, with churches, convents, or prestigious palaces overlooked. These open squares were also very busy due to the Venetians who drew water from the wells, generally located in the center of the *campi*, that collected and filtered rainwater. The latter lost their function in 1884 when they were closed for the arrival of the aqueduct.

2. '*Campielo*' is a smaller square nestled within the fabric of Venice's urban landscape, offering intimate communal spaces for relaxation and contemplation. These secluded corners provide rest from the hustle of city life, inviting residents to pause, while highlighting their surroundings.

3. '*Corte*' represents a hidden square tucked away within Venice's streets. These private spaces serve as extensions of residential buildings, providing residents with secluded outdoor areas for leisure and recreation. *Corti* are often adorned with lush greenery, ornate fountains, and architectural details, creating serene retreats within the urban fabric of Venice. These are generally large spaces with a single passage for entry and exit.

59. vadoMatorno. 2022. "La Toponomastica Veneziana: Le Vie Di Venezia." September 30, 2022. <https://www.vadomatorno.it/blog/la-toponomastica-veneziana-vie-venezia/>.

60. Admin. 2022. "Orientarsi Nella Toponomastica Di Venezia Tra Sestieri, Calli, Sottoporteghi, Salizate, Campi, Campielli E Corti -." *Appasseggioblog*. June 26, 2022. <https://www.appasseggioblog.it/orientarsi-nella-toponomastica-di-veneziah-tra-sestieri-calli-sottoporteghi-salizate-campi-campielli-e-corti/>.

## Navigating the interplay of urbanism, tourism, and cultural identity

The essence of modern-day urbanism in Venice is characterized by a multi-layered relationship between the city's historical hierarchies, the simplification of urbanism through language, and the impact of overtourism. Since its inception, Venice has been structured around hierarchical arrangements that dictate degrees of intimacy and accessibility within the urban landscape, prioritizing the private life of residents, and maintaining a distance between those who came to visit, and those who lived in Venice. However, the widespread search around the 'dream' of the city and the subsequent influx of overtourism have eroded the notion of what is "hidden" or tucked away, undermining the importance of the city's traditional hierarchies and spatial dynamics. The ancient structure made up of islands connected by bridges proved to be perfect for sightseeing: here the aesthetic appeal is widespread everywhere <sup>61</sup>. The spaces vary continuously, providing always new and suggestive views. Tourists travel the routes faster and faster as proposed and allowed by the municipality, becoming a flow of a tide that pours at specific times in the city <sup>62</sup>.

The importance of this study lies in a critical rereading of Venice, especially in dissecting its morphology and understanding the meaning behind urbanist policies. If Venice is a city for *tour*-ists, who need to 'tour' the city, then what they need is easy, accessible routing. Venice, that was born for trading as a port city, used its streets as economic nodes, prioritizing efficiency rather than livability. When taking account of significant urbanist renewals, such as Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann's Paris renewal in 1853, seen in figure 24, one can see that urbanism is a key factor in determining the perception of a city <sup>63</sup>. By introducing large avenues in place of local working-class communities, the city's role changed. Similarly, if Venice considers its calli as links between economic centralities, then there is no space for Venetians as they are today. What the modernists envisioned as the city of the future, focusing on hygiene, green spaces, and urban rationalizations, does not go without controversy. The future of the livable city takes on aspects from both visions, that of the historical past, and that of the theoretically hyper-efficient city.

61. Parmeggiani, Paolo. 2016. "Guardare Venezia: La Città Come Dispositivo Visuale." *California Italian Studies* 6 (1). <https://doi.org/10.5070/c361028408>.

62. Velo, Luca. 2020. "Analisi Urbanistica Di Venezia I Guide, Progetti E Ricerche Di Urbanistica I Docsity." *Www.docsity.com*. 2020. <https://www.docsity.com/it/analisi-urbanistica-di-venezias/5655058/>.

63. Adukia, Vedika. 2023. "Paris: Before and after Haussmann." *RTF | Rethinking the Future*. April 13, 2023. [https://www.re-thinkingthefuture.com/architectural-community/a9848-paris-before-and-after-haussmann/#google\\_vignette](https://www.re-thinkingthefuture.com/architectural-community/a9848-paris-before-and-after-haussmann/#google_vignette).

The city, like a house, is not a machine, it is about people. And what Venice can do is look at the initial urbanism strategies, and capitalize on their potential, by taking them a step further.

Urbanism, which seeks to rationalize and organize urban spaces, is juxtaposed with the curiosity of tourists who often seek out iconic landmarks and picturesque views, disregarding the city's underlying structure. This tension between urbanism and tourism exacerbates the commodification of Venice, leading to the simplification and exploitation of the city's cultural and architectural heritage. Moreover, the lack of functionality in these shared spaces further highlights the disconnect between tourists' perceptions and residents' lived experiences of the city. As a result, Venice struggles with the challenges of preserving its identity and cultural heritage amidst the pressures of overtourism and the commodification of its image <sup>64</sup>.

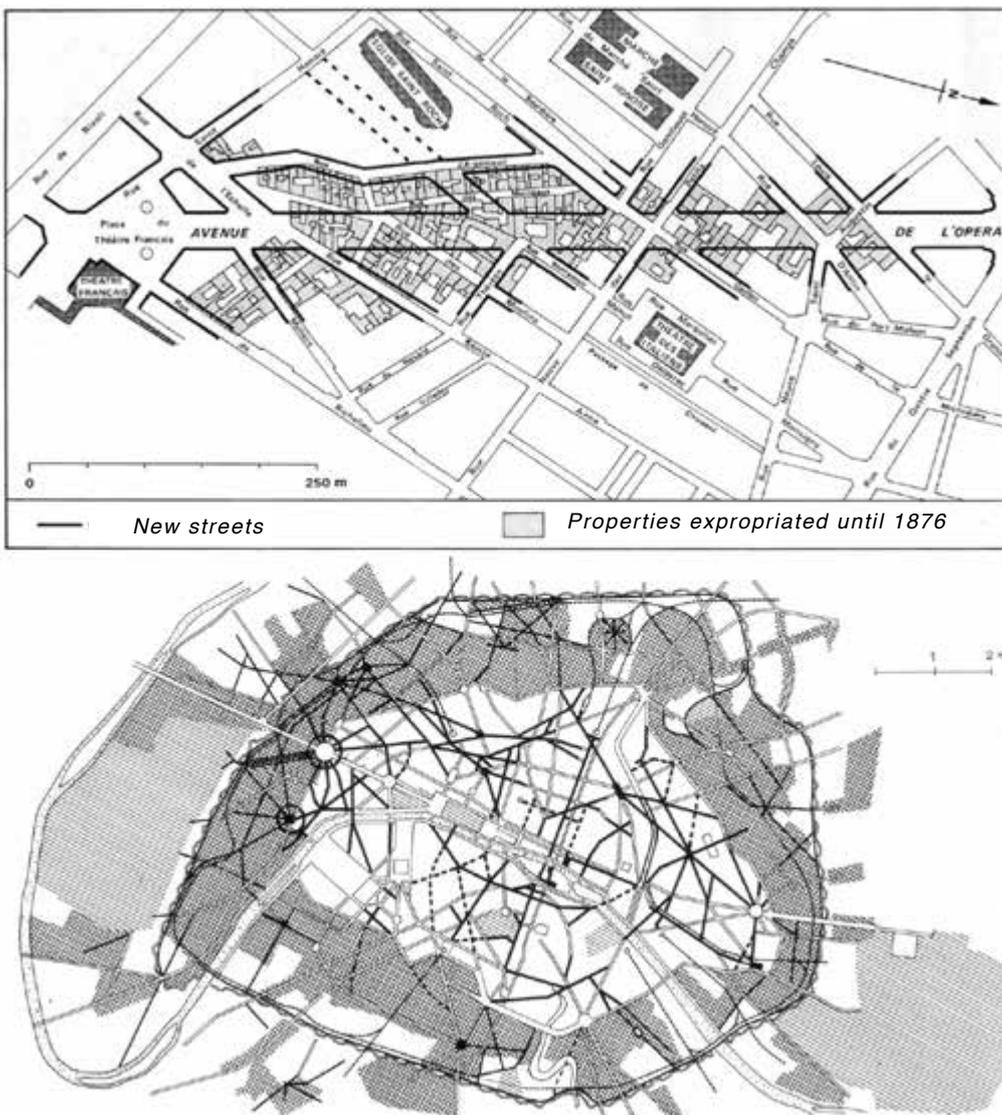


Figure 24

*Haussmann's plans for Paris. Above is an example of demolition of the original street to favour large boulevards.*

*Below is a map of the city with the new road axes in black, the new neighborhoods checked and the planned urban greenery in lines.*

65

64. *Ibid*

65. 2015. "La Nostra Amatissima Parigi E Le Sue Trasformazioni (Haussmaniane) Scellerate." *La Sottile Linea D'ombra*. May 22, 2015. <https://lasottilelineadombra.com/2015/05/22/la-nostra-amatissima-parigi-e-le-sue-trasformazioni-scellerate/>.

## Chapter 8

### Mitigating overtourism and enhancing livability: strategies for controlling tourist flows and prioritizing resident amenities in Venice

The tension exerted by the commodification of Venice, resulting in the oversimplification and exploitation of its rich cultural and architectural heritage, can be dealt with in different ways. Specifically, the functional shortcomings of shared spaces highlight the growing disparity between tourists' perceptions and residents' lived experiences of the city. In this context, the prioritization of amenities, particularly services, takes on significance as a means of preserving the quality of life for residents amidst the pressures of overtourism and the commercialization of Venice's image.

Therefore, it is important to understand tourist flows in a space, while also keeping in mind residents necessities and their location. Essentially, by understanding these two factors and using urbanism as a tool to displace and balance them within a city to ensure equal use and accessibility, architects can help alleviate the stress on residents, leading to a more livable city <sup>66</sup>. This has been done using different strategies in various cities, such as the '*Tourism in balance*' policy in Amsterdam. This was implemented by the city authorities in June 2021. This policy aimed to address the challenges posed by overtourism and preserve the city's quality of life for residents. It set restrictions on tourist stays and day visits in the city, seeking to establish a better equilibrium between the needs of residents and the demands of tourism.

Amsterdam's urban tourism policy focused on restricting tourist stays, banning new tourist shops and holiday rentals, and limiting the establishment of new hotels. The city aims to deter disruptive behaviour among tourists through campaigns like "*Stay Away*" and to enhance cultural experiences for visitors seeking authentic experiences. It is thus important to understand what tourism is, where people tour a location to explore its authentic and real experiences, stemming from the residents, or whether they seek momentary escapism, wanting to be surrounded by dream-like structures, without any context. Therefore, these efforts aim to strike a balance between accommodating tourists and preserving the city's unique identity and livability for residents <sup>67</sup>.

66. Tiphine, Lucas. 2023. "Infrastructure to Meet the Challenges of Over-Tourism." Leonard, Foresight and Innovation by VINCI. July 12, 2023. <https://leonard.vinci.com/en/infrastructure-to-meet-the-challenges-of-over-tourism/>.

67. "ITB - Travel Industry News - Amsterdam Sets up an Urban Tourism Policy Based on Quality in 2023." 2023. Travel Industry News. February 20, 2023. <https://news.itb.com/topics/amsterdam-tourism/>.

Figure 25

Poster for the 'City in Balance' goals and aims for the city of Amsterdam <sup>68</sup>



By examining the 'goals and measures' in the 'City in balance' plan in figure 25, one sees that Venice stands at a vantage point from some points of view, for example, it is already a 'low traffic zone', as Venice is a pedestrian city for the most part, and it includes 'coaches and lorries', although water taxis and vaporettos transport a significant amount of tourists daily.

Furthermore, Venice is already implementing some of these measures, such as 'Better financial balance', including 'fairer charge for using the city as a place to visit and recreation'. The controversial inclusion of the € 5 daily entrance ticket <sup>69</sup>, has however spurred friction between the municipality and the residents. The latter have in fact stated that the city 'is not a museum' and these tactics only enhance the perception of the city as a destination, as observed during the protests in November 2023.

68. Amsterdam. n.d. "Home." Amsterdam.nl. Accessed 2024. <https://www.amsterdam.nl>.

69. Sozio, Pina. 2024. "Dove Si Compra E Come Funziona Il Biglietto per Entrare a Venezia." Gambero Rosso. January 16, 2024. <https://www.gamberorosso.it/notizie/biglietto-venezia/>.

Therefore, what can urbanism do to help mitigate this conflict? The Amsterdam plan suggests '*reducing crowds in public spaces*', '*creating a more diverse range of facilities*', and '*making leisure facilities sustainable*'. To assess the current state of Giudecca under these parameters, this thesis maps land and building use, to then track the routes of tourists, and different kinds of residents in the sestiere. By looking at the results, one can see that the building occupation in Giudecca is 76.1% housing and 4.9% Airbnb's and hotels. From this, the remaining 19% of the buildings are devoted to services. By analysing this further, one sees that the main service is shipyards, occupying 33.2% of buildings, approximately being located along the Southern coast of the Islands. Restaurants occupy 17.9%, being that they cater to residents and tourists alike, and similarly 12.6% of the buildings are art galleries and cultural centres. This typology of service will be analysed further to understand its success in helping the livability of the sestiere, and its residents.

On the other hand, fewer buildings are dedicated to offices (3.6%), and local stores (7.6%). There are 7 supermarkets located mainly in the heart of the island on Northern front, with one in Sacca Fisola, the Western end.

By looking at the movement maps in figure 30, one can see how different the routes are for a tourist in Giudecca, compared to that of the residents, broken down into families, starters, children, and elderly. Specifically, the location of leisure compared to non-leisure activities is very telling to the character of the island, being that leisure is mainly located North and non-leisure South, contrary to what one would expect based on natural sunlight. Of course, the Northern coast allows views of the Venice city center, but it does leave locations with more advantageous conditions to be used for less-populated and generally indoor activities.

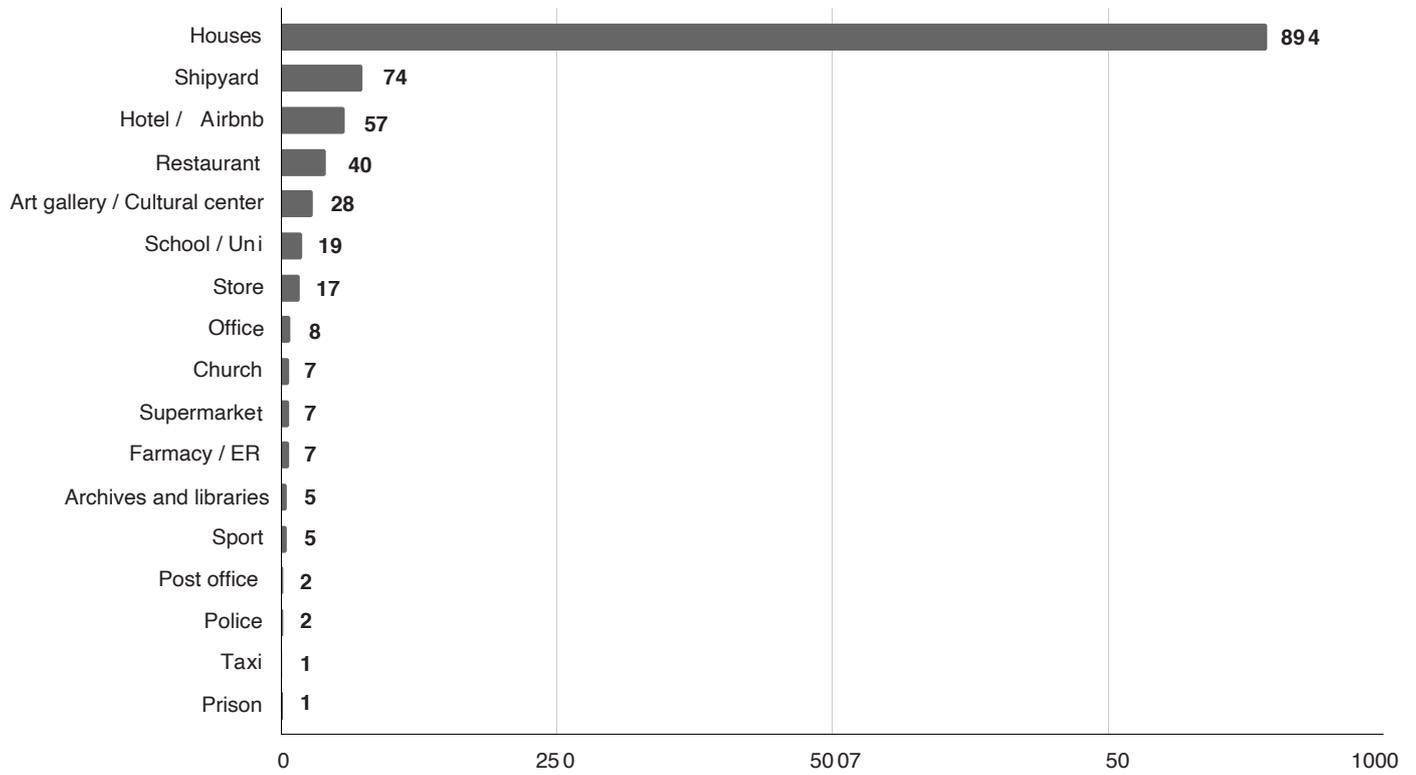


Figure 26

Numerical distribution of building types in Giudecca

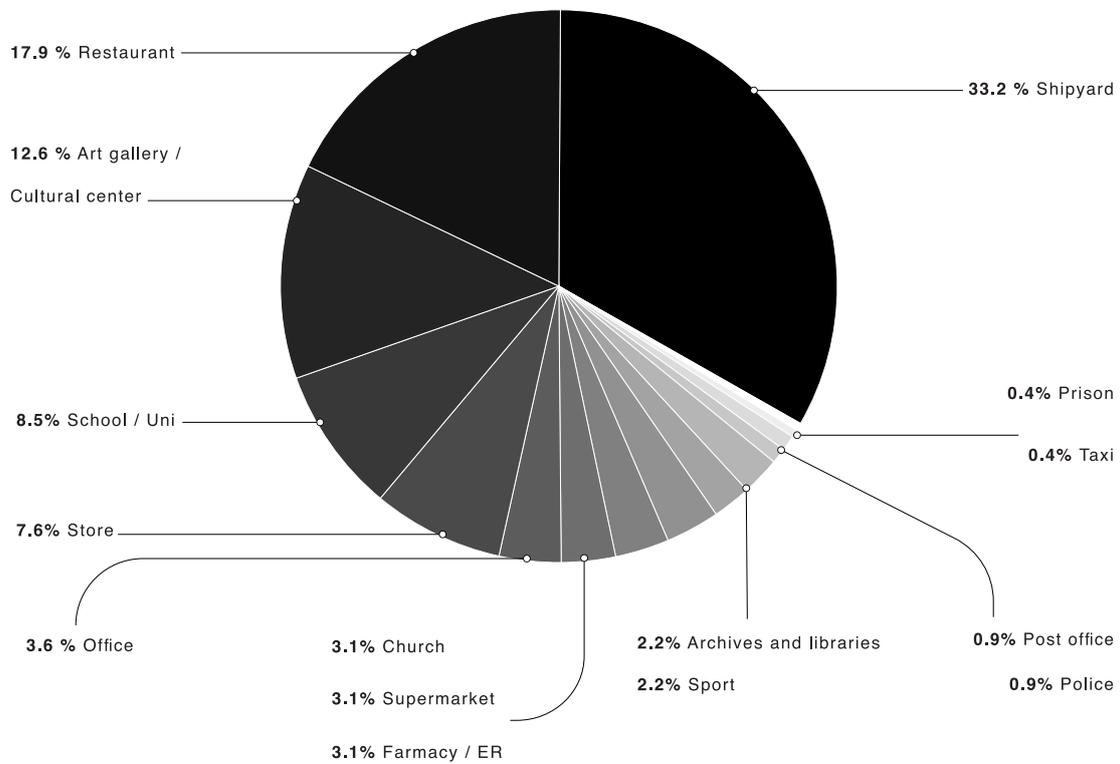


Figure 27

Percentage distribution of building types in Giudecca, without houses and hotels / airbnbs.



Figure 28

Land use in Giudecca

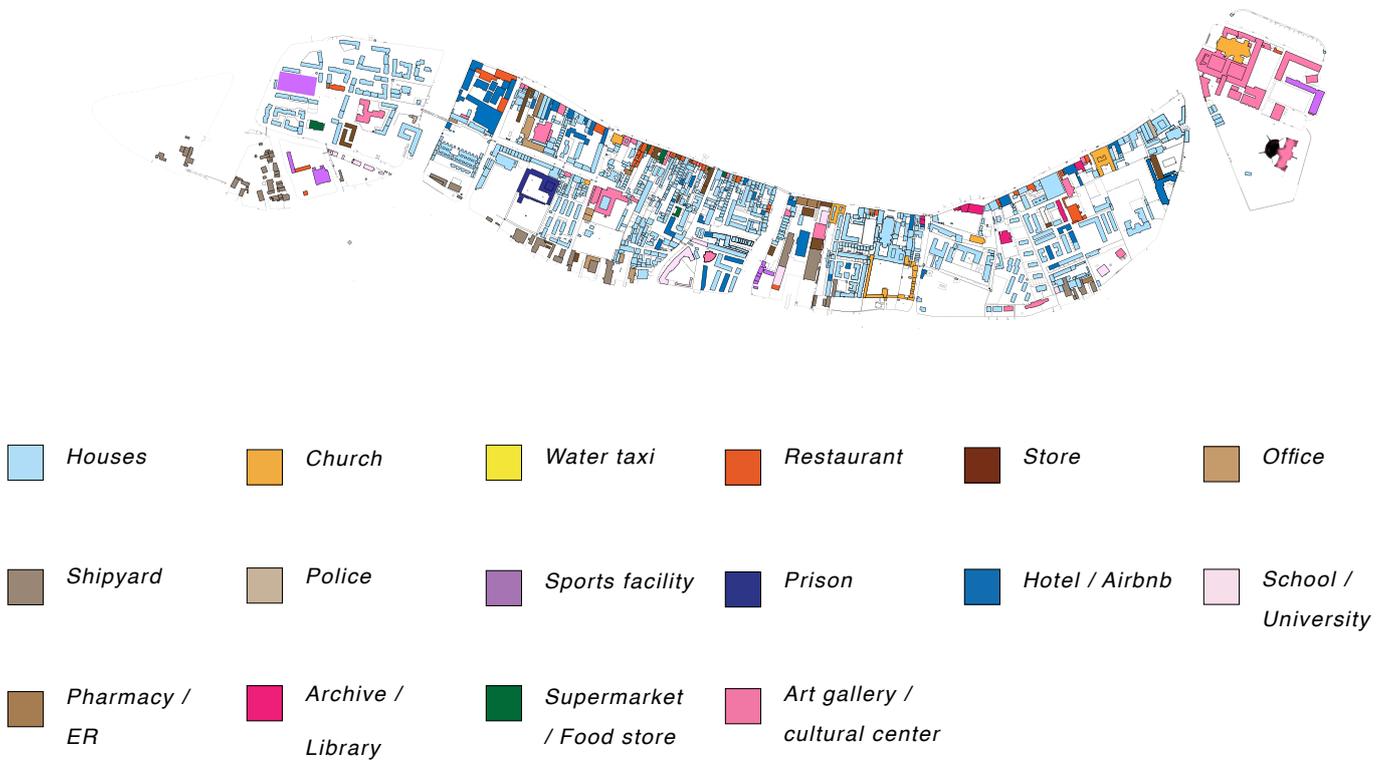


Figure 29

Building use in Giudecca

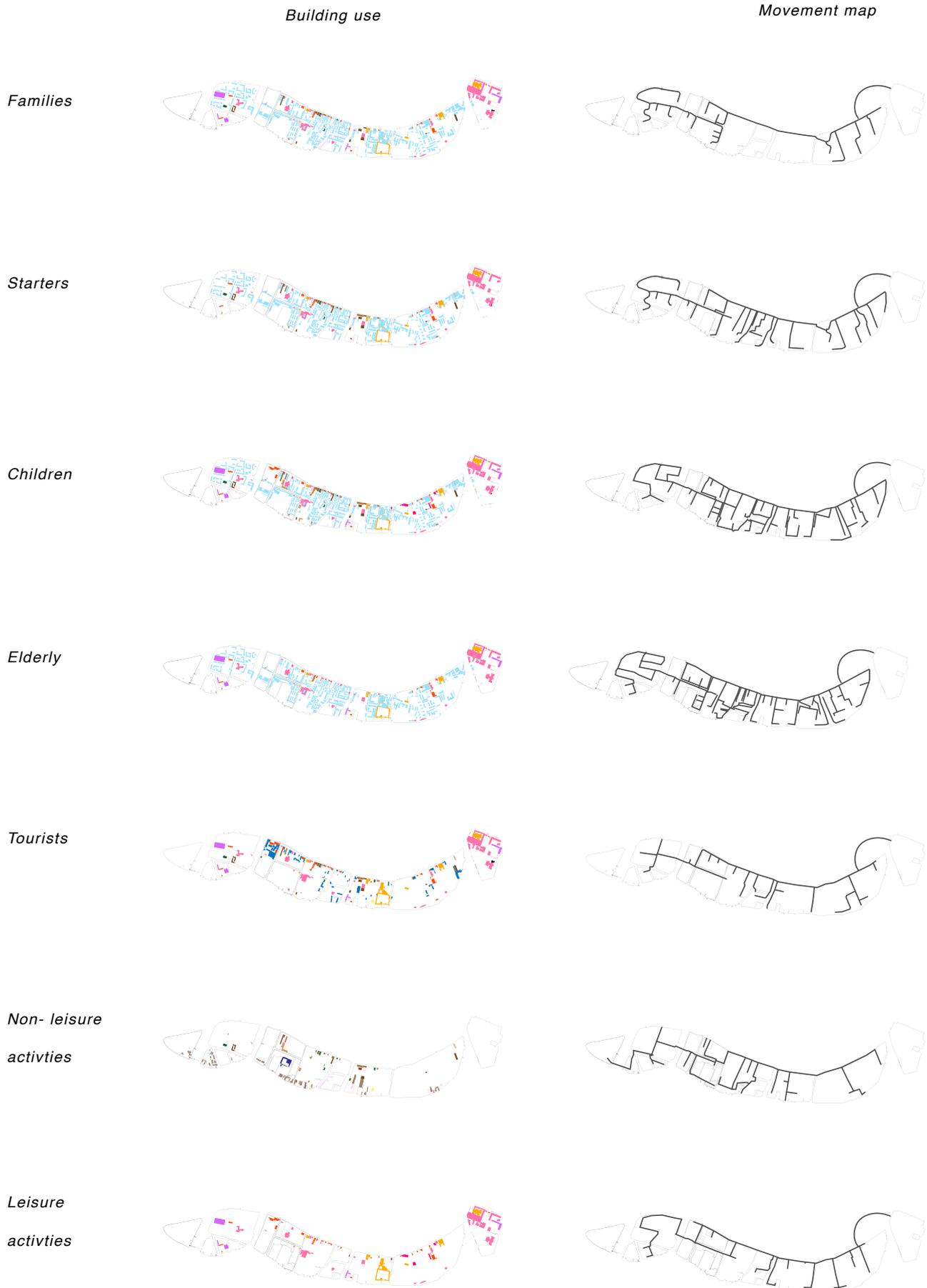


Figure 30

*Building usage / movement maps for different users in Giudecca*

## Chapter 9

### Urban interventions in Giudecca: assessing strategies for enhancing livability in Venice

In this chapter, case study examples of public space in Giudecca are evaluated, to assess the effectiveness of current interventions, with a specific focus on enhancing the quality of life for residents in Venice. Through an analysis of urbanist drawings, their impact on revitalizing the local community will be unfolded. Specifically, this section looks at the implementation of initiatives such as cultural associations, the uses and extensions of 'fondamenta', and the use of green spaces. This investigation offers insights into the current strategies adopted by Venetians, in order to set a foundation and precedent for viable future interventions, based on the successes and failures of today.

The first interventions investigated are cultural centres, a very prominent typology of building use in modern Giudecca. Two examples of varying success are examined, the 'Renato Nardi Cultural Center' and the 'Zitelle Cultural Center', along with other structures dedicated to public space.

#### Renato Nardi Cultural Center

The 'Renato Nardi Cultural Center' was established in 1981 by municipal councillor Luigi Giordani to revitalise Giudecca. Giordani stated, upon its foundation, that *'in that period the only places of cultural communion were only two cinemas, therefore the innovation that the foundation of this headquarters brought at the time was remarkable'*.

However, because of this same social background, Giudecca does not respond actively to the activities that the Center offers. Giordani reportedly complained about the problem of city absenteeism due to the excitement of the center, especially among local young people <sup>70</sup>. Furthermore, the funding for this space is largely based on sponsors, and the work is led by volunteers, so the lack of economic stability has influenced the

70. Pizzeghello, Stefania. 2015. "Una Venezia Da Scoprire: L'isola Della Giudecca E Le Sue Associazioni Culturali."

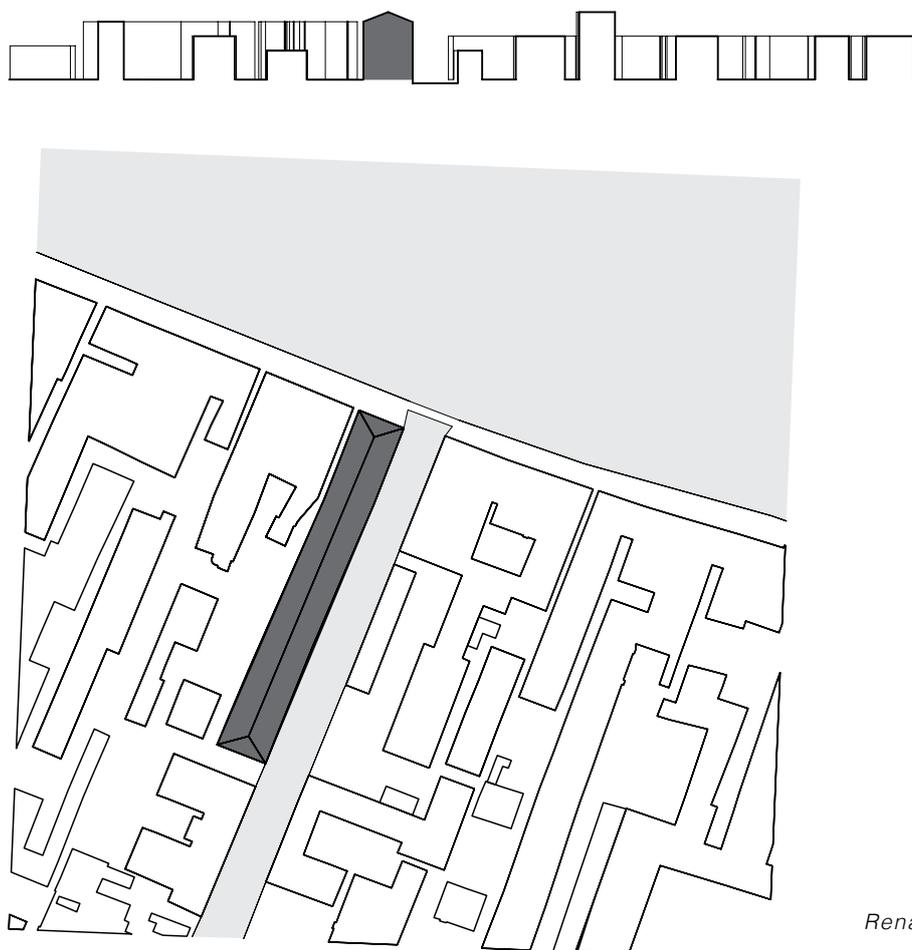


Figure 31

Renato Nardi Cultural Center section and plan

success of the center. Finally, elderly people also do not respond well to these initiatives, as they '*participate very little to the activities on the island*', often considering them '*suspicious*'. This can be due to the increasing amount of facilities for tourists, which invalidate the efforts of establishments trying to elevate the quality of life of residents.

Looking at the figure 31, the center is located inside of a building on the fondamenta that looks at the Giudecca canal. This central location should lead to a widely populated center, however what can be seen from photographs, is that most of the activities take place indoors, having no connection to the context around the center, especially to water. The activities within the center focus on architecture, photography and videotape competitions, as well as national, collective and personal exhibitions of painting and in all artistic sectors <sup>71</sup>. Despite initiatives aiming to integrating the island into the city center, and placing residents first, the ultimate success of the center is doubtful. It essentially fails at becoming a space that is used by residents, taking on a more administrative role.

71. "Chi Siamo." n.d. Circolonardi. Accessed April 20, 2024. <https://circolonardi.wixsite.com/circolonardi>.

## Zitelle Cultural Center

On the other hand, Zitelle Cultural Center in Giudecca is an example of a positive establishment for social revitalization. It was initially established as a Neighbourhood Office in the 1980s, and underwent structural changes through an Urban Project, aimed at urban regeneration. Managed by administrator Rossana Papi-ni since 2007, the center expanded its offerings to cater to a broader audience, collaborating with cultural associations and schools. Despite initial resistance, it became a significant cultural hub, hosting a variety of activities such as political debates, artistic workshops, concerts, and theater performances. Through col-laboration and community engagement, it has become a 'vital' cultural center for both Giudecca and Venice, *'ensuring that anyone who came there did not consume their presence in a day, but that this presence could also be prolonged over time'* <sup>72</sup>.

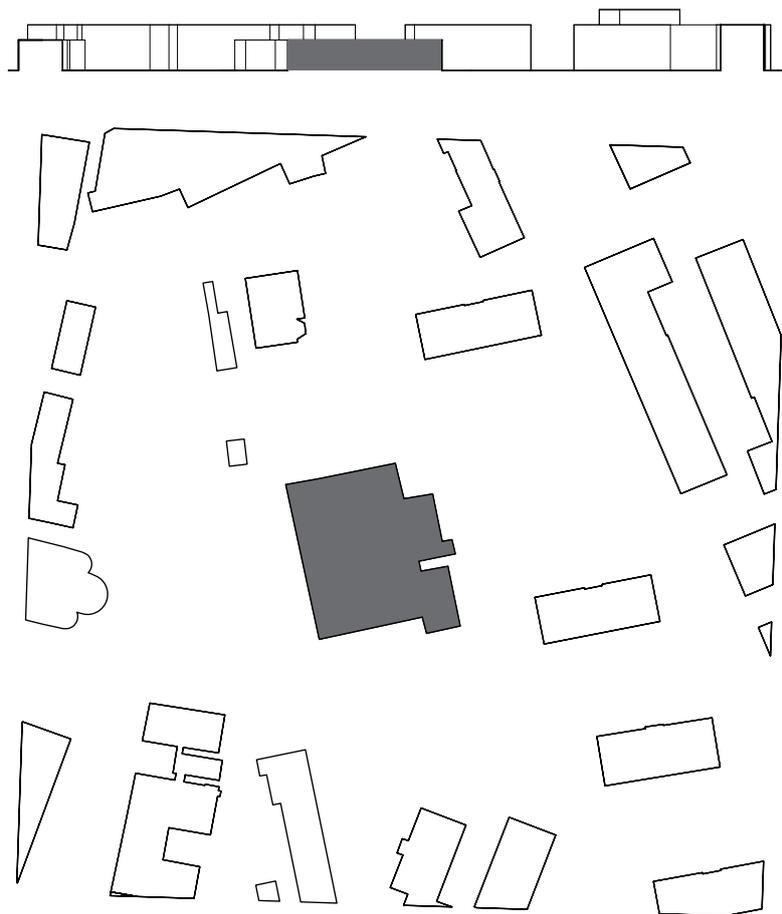


Figure 32

*Zitelle Cultural Center section and plan*

72. *Ibid*

This is reflected in its urbanist location. It is more inland than the Nardi center, located within the Giudecca library. This already establishes it as a place revolving around culture, attracting visitors who are inherently interred in the history of the islands. This means that students, researchers, and people affiliated with the university will have exposure to the center. Offering a variety of activities and programs attracts those who look for a break for literary studies, and enhances community-building. This combats the trend of residents seeking solitary spaces in search of authenticity, using flexibility as a strength, but outside of labels and economic gain for third parties.

### **Red benches**

Another example of successful public space is the extension of fondamenta through the use of strategically placed benches around the island, as illustrated in figure 33. This initiative is not specific to Giudecca, but something found throughout the whole of Venice, creating zones of relaxation that break from the frenetic 'touring' and the incessant search for more. Places of rest are of utmost significance in highly populated areas, as one can take a break from urban life and in turn, enhance the experience.

In Venice benches have assumed a new role, that of bringing awareness to social issues, as well as offering views and point of break. The 'Stati Generali delle Donne HUB Association' established in 2015, is known for its focus on enhancing women's societal roles. They initiated a project in 2016 by introducing the first "*Panchina Rossa*"<sup>73</sup> (Red Bench) in Lomello, and the initiative has quickly spread in Venice, as well as internationally. In fact, the red benches of Venice, have been successful for both locals and tourists. They aim to be more than just spots to rest, representing moments of tranquillity and contemplation in the midst of intense urban sphere. Their strategic locations as privileged vantage points provide residents and visitors alike with a moment of peace and reflection.

For example, the solid stone benches on the opposite side of the Giudecca canal, overlook those placed along the Fondamenta delle Zattere in Giudecca. Here, the battery of wooden red benches establishes a materials conversation, along with favourable perspectives<sup>74</sup>. This urbanist strategy is enhanced by street

73. Pistolato, Giacomo S. 2017. "Le Panchine Rosse Di Venezia." *My Venice Apartment*. November 10, 2017. <https://www.myveniceapartment.com/it/le-panchine-rosse-di-venezia/index.html>.

74. *Ibid*

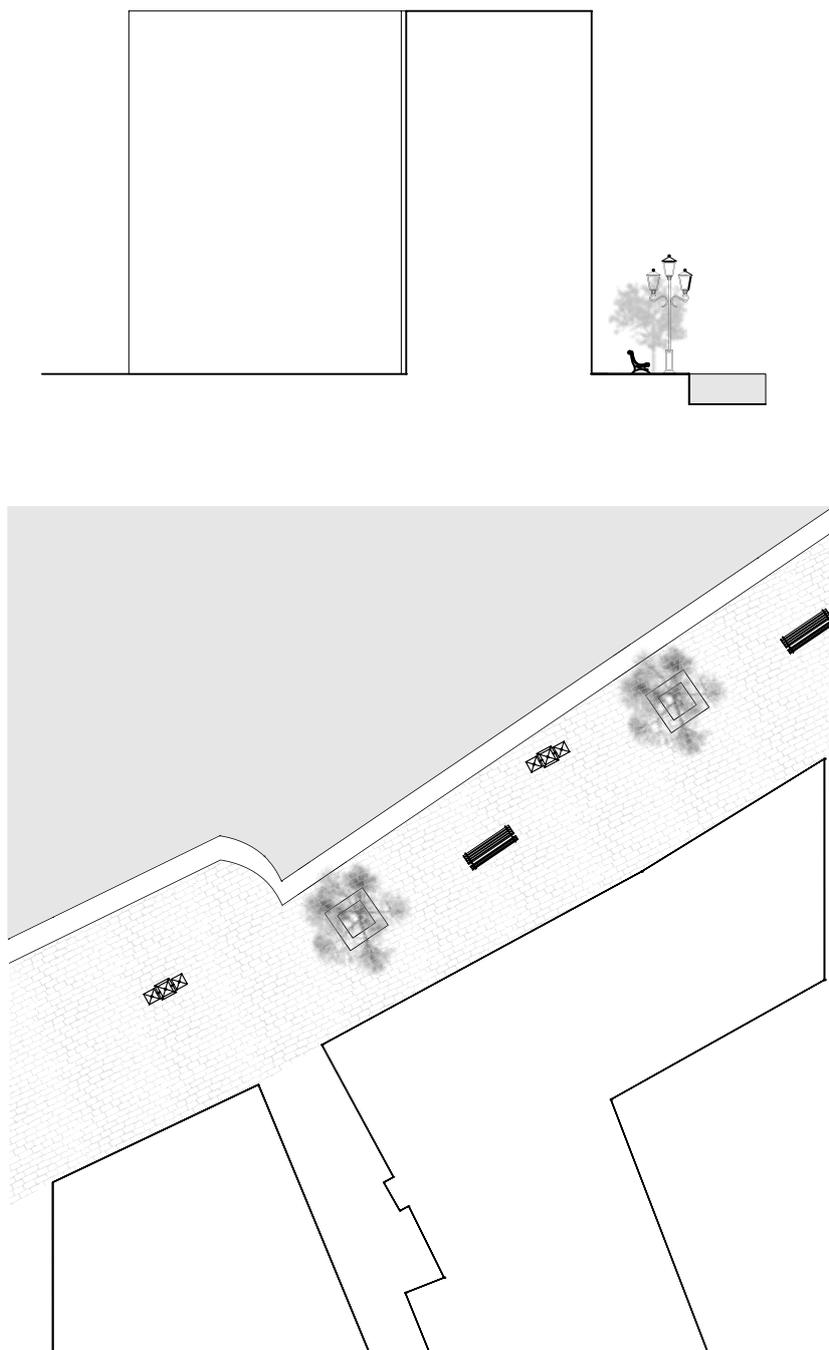


Figure 33

*Benches distribution along Giudecca's fondamenta section and plan*

lights which are ornate and detailed, as well as the use of trees that provide shading and rhythms in Venice's urban language.

A last reflection on the use of benches in Venice, relies on the critical rereading of their morphology.

A bench, in essence, is a piece of indoor furniture placed outdoors. This inevitably signifies a domesticated public space, which aims to bring in qualities one normally associates with the private realm, into a public setting. If a bench is to the public what a couch is to a house, then one really understands the subtle, yet successful application of this simple element. A bench is not linked with economic gain or centralities, it signifies a privatization of the public space, through an overlap between private and public spheres.

This concept was introduced by Leon Battista Alberti in 1452 in Florence. A famous quote by the architect states :

*'All the power of genius and all the art and skill of building things are consumed together in partition. For the parts of the whole building and the whole of the individual parts, so to speak, and finally the relations of all the lines and angles into a single work of agreement and cohesion, this division of utility, dignity, and attractiveness is undertaken with consideration. **But if, according to the opinion of the philosophers, the city is a kind of the greatest house, and the opposite of the house itself is a kind of smallest city, why should not the members of these very things be said to be the smallest kind of houses?'***

*Leon Battista Alberti in De Re Aedificatoria, Book One, Chapter IX.*

*(Alberti 1452, as transcribed by Jacobi 1521: xiv)*

Therefore, if the city is the house and vice versa, then urbanist policies should work the same way as interior ones do. This would alter the current perception of public space, one that varies so much from the private realm. A house is domesticated, made for people in scale and function, and incorporated atmospheric qualities that most times determine its success. However, public space is often built for machines much larger than humans, and wants to cater mainly to the needs of the economy, the transport of goods, and forceful safety features. There is much less trust in individuals one they step out of the house, and urbanism can accentuate

this by not building for people. If indoor is for living, and outdoor for moving, then we are confined to exist in malls and tunnels, never in contact with what is 'outside'.

Simple, yet daring strategies like public benches aim to change this perception. It appropriates public ground. It becomes an outdoor living room. And that is what residents need: feeling at home in their city.

### Women's prison vegetable garden

Finally, another widely successful public space initiative is that of the local vegetable gardens. Those can be found around the whole of Venice, but one of the most successful is the garden of the Giudecca women's prison, a regeneration project founded in 1994 that aims to be both urban and human.<sup>75</sup>



Figure 34

*The vegetable garden within the women's prison in Giudecca, section and plan*

75. SANTI, MARIO. 2024. "Alla Ricerca Dell'uso Dello Spazio Pubblico a Venezia." *Ytali*. February 22, 2024. <https://ytali.com/2024/02/22/alla-ricerca-delluso-dello-spazio-pubblico-a-venezia/>.

The vegetable garden within the women's prison on Giudecca Island, was originally part of a convent, re-purposed later as a prison. In 1995, the Rio Terà dei Pensieri cooperative began restoring it, achieving organic certification in 2007. Spanning 6 thousand square meters, it cultivates regional vegetables like Treviso radicchio and Paduan broccoli. Inmates maintain the garden, which serves as a rehabilitative activity. Produce is sold weekly outside the prison and distributed to local solidarity groups. Surplus herbs are used in cosmetics by the cooperative <sup>76</sup>.

The garden showcases how agricultural projects in carceral contexts can foster rehabilitation and community integration. In fact, the garden is open to the public once a year with the annual festival <sup>77</sup>, with the city's entry into the prison and the exchange of products grown by the inmates. Therefore, this communal intervention has:

- Revitalised a green space that was once unused
- Offered healthy activities for the inmates of the prison, bringing them closer to nature
- Lessened stigmas and brought the public closer to the prison.

Therefore, the vegetable garden is a widely positive intervention for communal and public use.

In conclusion, the evaluation of public spaces in Giudecca provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of current interventions aimed at enhancing the quality of life for residents in Venice.

The case studies examined illuminate the complex interplay between urban design, social dynamics, and community empowerment in the pursuit of sustainable urbanism. By drawing upon the successes and failures of current interventions, this research sets a foundation for future urban interventions in Venice and beyond, grounded in principles of inclusivity, resilience, and human-centred design.

76. Marrucci, Nara. 2011. "L'orto Della Giudecca: Un'oasi Di Pace Dietro Le Sbarre." In *Orto - Guida All'orto Fai-Da-Te. Istruzioni E Consigli per Coltivare Le Tue Verdure*. October 25, 2011. <https://www.inorto.org/notizie-dallorto/orti-collettivi/l-orto-della-giudecca-un-oasi-di-pace-dietro-le-sbarre/>.

77. Montagnoli, Livia. 2015. "La Festa Dell'Orto al Carcere Della Giudecca. Oltre 20 Anni Di Attività per Un Grande Modello Di Economia Carceraria." *Gambero Rosso*. March 12, 2015. <https://www.gamberorosso.it/notizie/la-festa-dell-orto-al-carcere-della-giudecca-oltre-20-anni-di-attivita-per-un-grande-modello-di-economia-carceraria/>.

# Chapter 10

## Giudecca's renewed landscape: an analysis of urban redevelopment in the Junghans Industrial Complex, Campo di Marte, and Sacca Fisola

Having investigated public and collective spaces, this chapter focuses on residential buildings, specifically social housing complexes found in Giudecca, emerged as restorations of old industrial complexes after the relocation to the mainland.

This exploration delves into three prominent redevelopment projects: the Junghans industrial complex, the revitalized Campo di Marte, and the strategic development on Sacca Fisola.

The Junghans industrial complex, re-imagined by architect Cino Zucchi in the late 1990s, exemplifies adaptive reuse, transforming industrial structures into affordable housing. In the eastern end, the redevelopment of Campo di Marte initiated in the 1980s, led by architect Álvaro Siza, underscores a delicate balance between historical context and modern exigencies. Finally, Sacca Fisola, an urban intervention beginning in the 1960s, showcases comprehensive planning by the Municipality of Venice.

This analysis of transformative projects illuminates Giudecca's adaptive urban landscape, emphasizing the symbiosis of historical preservation, contemporary functionality, and sustainable development in shaping the island's resilient future.

### **Junghans industrial complex**

The transformation of Giudecca's industry, particularly in the area of the former Junghans factory, highlights the cyclical change in the identity of the sestiere. The majority of the renovated buildings were allocated to affordable housing, contributing to the re-population of the initially uninhabited area.

The project was born through a competition in 1995, and designed by Italian architect Cino Zucchi (born 1955) in the late 1990s. The complex was adapted to new functions without altering the structure of the buildings significantly. The majority of the renovated buildings were allocated for affordable housing, consisting of five residential blocks, comprehending 127 dwellings for university housing, between 46 singles and 81 doubles, as well as commercial spaces <sup>78</sup>.

The plan incorporates the existing urban fabric, creating an integration of new buildings with the existing network of paths, opening them up towards the sea. Towards the South, the industrial structures were replaced by four linear buildings. The new square and canal facing the lagoon provide new views of the existing landscape, enhancing the focus on public spaces <sup>79</sup>.

The morphological layout of the project aimed to create a blend of two heterogeneous scales present in Giudecca – the compact northern urban fabric and the southern industrial complexes.

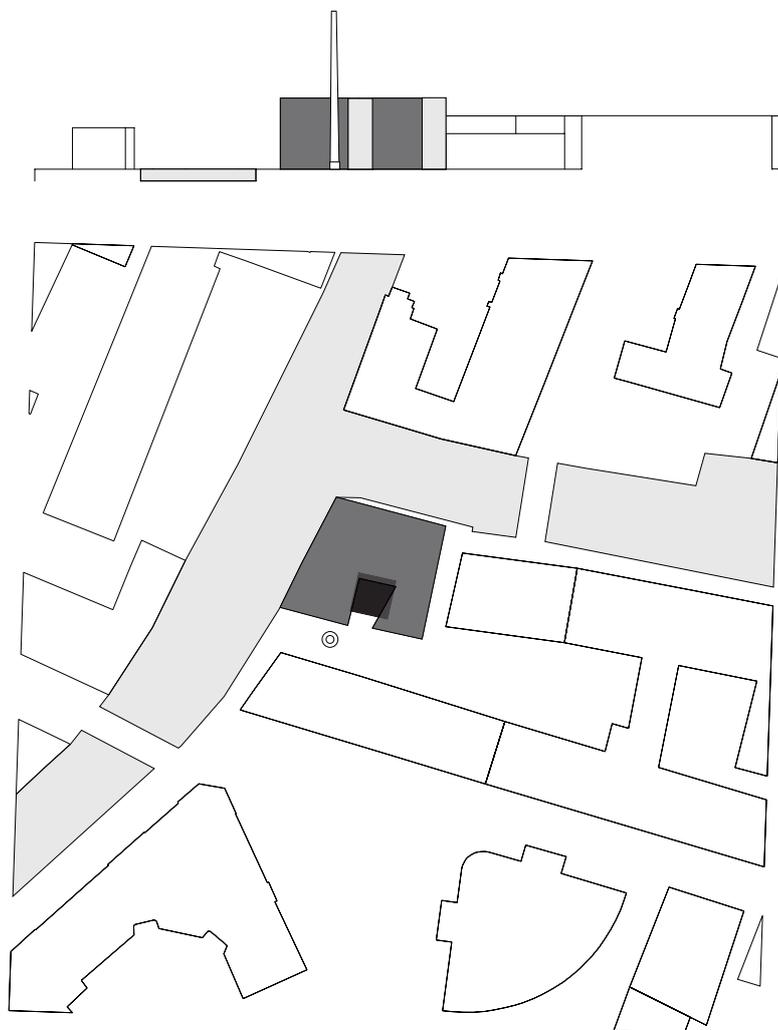


Figure 35

*Junghans industrial complex section and plan. 1997 - 2003, 16 dwellings in a public residential complex commissioned by Municipality of Venice*

78. "Urbanistica, Paesaggio E Territorio - Offline." n.d. [Www.urbanistica.unipr.it](http://www.urbanistica.unipr.it). Accessed May 21, 2024. [http://www.urbanistica.unipr.it/index2.php?option=com\\_content&do\\_pdf=1&id=56](http://www.urbanistica.unipr.it/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=56).

79. Gasparon, Marta. 2022. "Venezia, l'Ex Junghans Agli Studenti Universitari: 127 Alloggi." [Www.ilgazzettino.it](https://www.ilgazzettino.it). May 2, 2022. [https://www.ilgazzettino.it/nordest/venezia/venezia\\_junghans\\_studenti\\_universitari\\_iuav-6662684.html](https://www.ilgazzettino.it/nordest/venezia/venezia_junghans_studenti_universitari_iuav-6662684.html).

## Campo di Marte

The revitalization of Campo di Marte in Venice started in the 1980s with the design of Portuguese architect Álvaro Siza (born 1933). Siza's project, influenced by the city's unique fabric, impacted Giudecca's social and architectural landscape to some extent, as it faced challenges in completion, and is undergoing modern renovations.

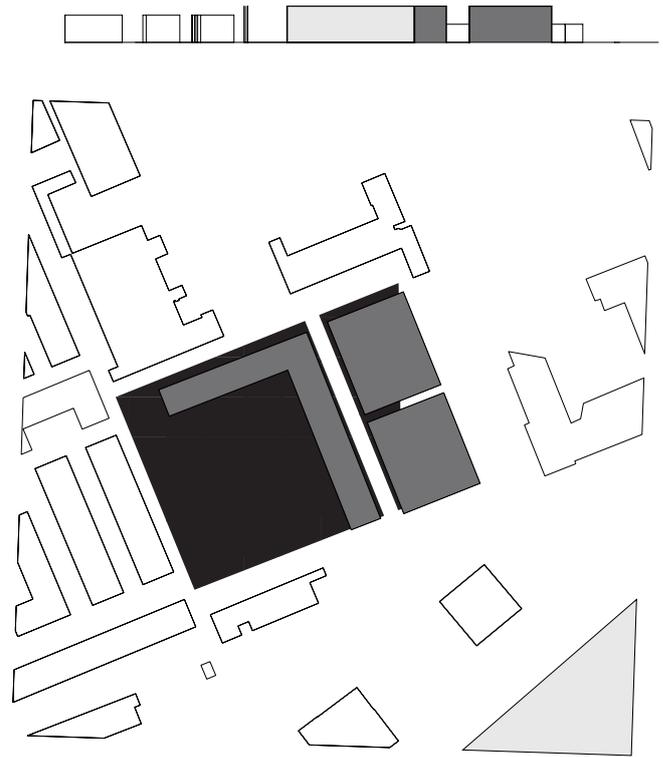


Figure 36

*Campo di Marte redevelopment. 1983 - ongoing, 82 dwellings in a social housing complex commissioned by IACP and Municipality of Venice*

In the 1980s, the redevelopment of Campo di Marte, located in the Eastern end of Giudecca, took shape through an international competition initiated by the former Venice IACP, now known as ATER Venezia. This competition involved prominent architects such as Álvaro Siza, Aldo Rossi, Carlo Aymonino, Rafael Moneo, and Mario Botta. Álvaro Siza emerged as the winner, and the project allowed for the potential involvement of other participants in the future development of the area.

The architect designed residential public housing in ordered and rhythmic urban fabric based on the elongated structure of the old cadastral division between the Giudecca Canal and the Lagoon. He studied the urban analysis of Egle Trincanato, a researcher at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia, to identify typological invariants of the popular housing fabric in Giudecca.<sup>80</sup>

80. *Architecture, Hidden*. 2017. "Housing Development at Giudecca Island (II)." *Hidden Architecture*. January 25, 2017. <https://hiddenarchitecture.net/housing-development-at-giudecca-island/>.

Over the following decades (1986-2006), only the Italian architects Aldo Rossi and Carlo Aymonino were able to complete their works based on Siza's project, while the latter's remained partially incomplete due to the contractor's bankruptcy in 2010. In 2015, Portugal proposed to ATER Venezia to install its official representation at the Venice Architecture Biennale of 2016 in the incomplete part of the block designed by Álvaro Siza. This proposal played a role in triggering the completion of the project's 32 additional dwellings, and the construction of an adjacent square. <sup>81</sup>

The Campo di Marte redevelopment serves as a testament to the evolving narrative of social, architectural, and urban rejuvenation in Venice, reflecting a fusion of historical context and contemporary challenges <sup>82</sup>.

### **Sacca Fisola - Ex Fregnan**

In 1960, reclamation work began on the island of Sacca Fisola in Venice: a major intervention with a significant urban impact, resulting in a total of almost five hundred housing units <sup>83</sup>. Located in Eastern side of Giudecca, the project started in 1984, mandated by the plan to finalize the Sacca Fisola residential system, resulting in a competition organized by the Municipality of Venice for public housing development.

Designed by Italian architects Valeriano Pastor, Pietro Mainardis, and Iginio Cappai, this comprehensive plan addressed the southeast area of Sacca Fisola, bordered by the Lavraneri and Sacca San Biagio canals, envisioning a layout divided into three sections: the peripheral zones occupied by residential complexes and the corner designated for public space.

The initial phase, completed in 1989, featured a central courtyard and waterfront views toward Giudecca, utilizing double-height pillars with attached structures. The subsequent phase, finished in 1998, consists of four linear bodies, each approximately 9 meters high and 11 meters deep.

81. "Venezia Giudecca." 2008. *Ater Venezia*. December 23, 2008. <https://www.atervenezia.it/ente/venezia-giudecca/>.

82. Borzomi, Tomaso. 2021. "Campo Marte Incompiuto Dopo 38 Anni." *Www.ilgazzettino.it*. May 30, 2021. [https://www.ilgazzettino.it/pay/venezia\\_pay/campo\\_marte\\_incompiuto\\_dopo\\_38\\_anni-5991993.html?refresh\\_ce](https://www.ilgazzettino.it/pay/venezia_pay/campo_marte_incompiuto_dopo_38_anni-5991993.html?refresh_ce).

83. "L'ATER Di Venezia E La Sua Storia." 2018. *Ater Venezia*. July 2, 2018. <https://www.atervenezia.it/ente/ater-di-venezia-e-la-sua-storia/>.

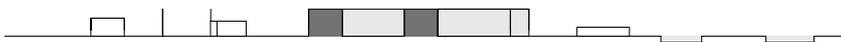
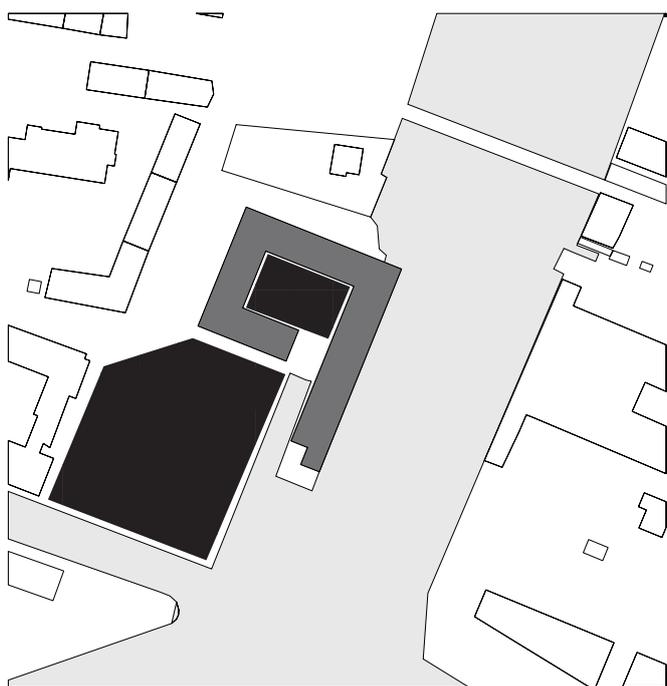


Figure 37



*Sacca Fisola - Ex Fregnan redevelopment.*  
 1984 - 98. Public residential complex. 82  
 dwellings commissioned by IACP

These structures are systematically arranged around a semi-open courtyard to the west, directly communicating through covered walkways with the adjacent public spaces <sup>84</sup>.

The façades are rhythmically articulated by horizontal string courses, emphasizing a spiral layout with pitched roofs. The complex accommodates 38 units with diverse typologies, offering flexible room arrangements, private outdoor spaces for ground-level residences, and shared access through common staircases for upper-floor units. The external areas follow a grid pattern reflecting the modularity of the load-bearing walls <sup>85</sup>.

The completed project not only addresses housing needs but also integrates seamlessly into the historic fabric of Sacca Fisola, preserving trees and fostering a sense of community.

84. AB. 2020. "Case Di Residenza Sociale Del Comune Di Venezia Nell'area Ex Fregnan, a Sacca Fisola | Conoscere Venezia." *Conoscere Venezia*. May 1, 2020. <https://www.conoscerevenezia.it/?p=42609>.

85. "Intervento Abitativo Nell'area Ex Fregnan Lotto 2." n.d. *Www.insula.it*. Accessed March 3, 2024. <https://www.insula.it/index.php/interventi/interventi-edilizia/venezia-giudecca-e-sacca-fisola/383-intervento-abitativo-nellarea-ex-fregnan-lotto-2>.

# Chapter 11

## Architectural intervention and socio-spatial dynamics: Gino Valle's Giudecca Housing Complex

Gino Valle's housing complex is situated on the southern side of Giudecca, on the Western border with Sacca Fisola. To the North one finds the former Stucky Mill, now Hilton Hotel, to the South the Venetian lagoon, and to the West a housing project undergoing construction. It bordered directly North and South by large green areas, respectively, a large public park enclosed by tall brick walls, and a derelict shipyard site, seemingly unused.

The architectural complex was designed by architect Gino Valle (Udine, Italy, 1923 - 2003). Valle studied at the IUAV in Venice from 1942, along with prominent Italian architects of the time <sup>86</sup>. In Venice, his project for the Giudecca social housing complex signifies a key moment in his career, where he focused on environmental aspects juxtaposed by Venice's traditional urban language.



Figure 38

*The Giudecca social housing project is located South - West, connected to the rest of the city centers by vaporetto lines*

86. Barillari, Diana. n.d. "Dizionario Biografico Dei Friulani." [www.dizionariobiograficodeifriulani.it](http://www.dizionariobiograficodeifriulani.it). Accessed May 21, 2024. <https://www.dizionariobiograficodeifriulani.it/valle-gino/>.

The residential project built between 1080 and 1986 consists of 94 apartments ranging from 46 to 90 square meters, taking up approximately 36,000 cubic meters <sup>87</sup>. The intervention, allowed by the law 25/1980, which allowed operations in the historic center to provide accommodation for evicted people, was developed on an area located on the edge of Venice, at the time occupied by production activities in decay. The complex develops longitudinally, following the route of Calle dei Lavraneri, and is based on three building typologies composed within a square modular grid <sup>88</sup>.



Figure 39

*Section of the project showing the terraced units, located in between a shipyard to the South, and a green urban space to the North*

Targeting low-income families and individuals struggling to secure housing in the city, the project aims to foster a mixed-income community, promoting social cohesion and inclusivity.

This project embodies a coherent design ethos characterized by a progressive diminution in building height, transitioning from four stories in the North to two stories in the South. This intentional arrangement aimed at ensuring each residence with unobstructed views of the lagoon to the South, while maximizing exposure to natural light throughout the enclave's interior spaces and interstitial areas. The eastern and western borders of the development are delineated by two continuous four-story row houses, framing the intervention and contributing to its overall visual cohesion making the complex fixed in the site, and incorporating water as a key urban element <sup>89</sup>.

87. "Complesso Di Abitazioni Popolari Alla Giudecca." n.d. ArchiDiAP. Accessed May 21, 2024. <https://archidiap.com/opera/complesso-di-abitazioni-popolari-alla-giudecca/>.

88. "NUOVE ABITAZIONI POPOLARI ALLA GIUDECCA - Scheda Opera - Censimento Delle Architetture Italiane Dal 1945 Ad Oggi." n.d. Censimentoarchitetturecontemporanee.cultura.gov.it. Accessed October 2023. <https://censimentoarchitetturecontemporanee.cultura.gov.it/scheda-opera?id=1404>.

89. "Giudecca Apartment Blocks – Atlante Architettura Contemporanea." n.d. Atlantearchitetturacontemporanea.cultura.gov.it. Accessed October 2023. <https://atlantearchitetturacontemporanea.cultura.gov.it/en/edilizia-residenziale-alla-giudecca-venezia/>.

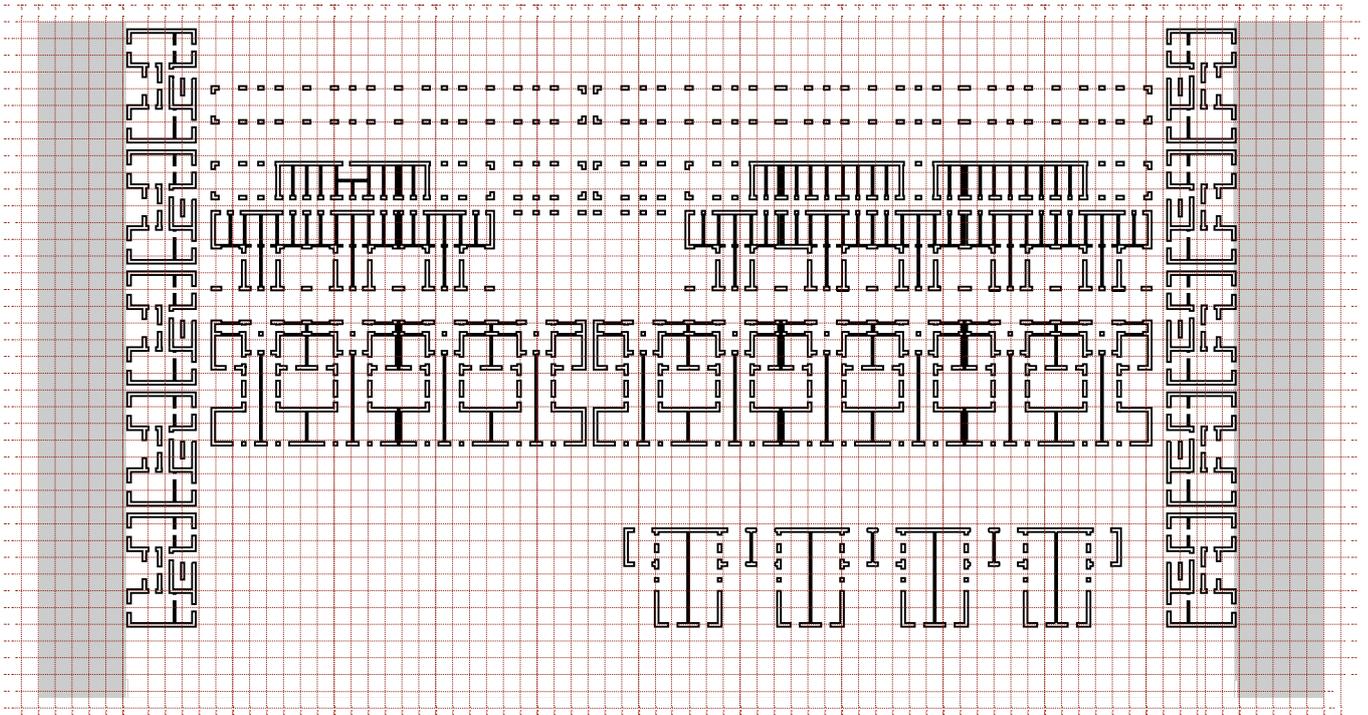


Figure 40

*Ground floor plan of the project with the 1.75 m grid Valle designed it upon. The grid allows for repetition, and creates different degrees of 'public squares' throughout the building, following Venice's toponyms*

Valle's architectural intervention has a nuanced response to site-specific features and historical context. Honoring Venice's distinctive urban morphology and spatial hierarchies,

Valle operates on a 1.75-meter grid, seen in figure 40, marking the compact nature of the project, which regularly opens up, through its orthogonal geometry, into a various courtyard (of varying sizes, homaging the campi, campielli, and corti).

The selection of materials and colours employed in construction establishes a harmonious dialogue with the surrounding lagoon environment. Valle uses a material language that stems from the site, with soft pink bricks, utilized for both cladding and structural elements, emerging from the ground, that harmonize with white reinforced concrete elements, used for structural integrity. The application of green-coloured plaster coatings on the staircase blocks and traditional roof tiling further reinforces the contextual resonance with the Venetian context.

The project emphasizes the strategic utilization of private, public, and collective spaces, drawing from the Venetian division of streets to enhance the residents' quality of life. The integration of these different spatial typologies 'balance private, public, and collective spaces, to create a harmonious urban environment that caters to the diverse needs of its inhabitants". This approach is linked to Valle's conceptual references, such as Chinese boxes that play with geometry as they inscribe themselves as the project evolves.

However, despite the successful geometric evolution in theory, the project relies at times too heavily on these parameters, not taking into account the actual livability of these spaces.

For example, upon entering the building to the North one is welcomed by a dark sequence of columns, supporting the buildings above. This nod to the Venetian 'sotoportèghi' appears excessive, as these do not offer views of the lagoon or the green sites around, but act only as transitional spaces. Furthermore, the need to stick to a grid ultimately emphasizes the disconnect between outdoor and indoor, or public and private spaces. The indoor, private spaces aim to be self-sufficient completely detached, and closed off from the outdoors. Specifically, the Northernmost dwellings host three bedrooms, two of which are double bedrooms and a living room of only nine meters squared. Valle seemed to not be concerned by how five people would live in a similar house, prioritizing his architectural vision. The result of this, however, is the fact that one-tenth of these apartments currently are uninhabited. For a city like Venice, where residents struggle to find housing, it is telling that people refuse to occupy such spaces, deemed unlivable.

In essence, Gino Valle's architectural endeavours within the IACP complex in Venice epitomizes a departure from conventional spatial paradigms, reflective of his immersion in Modernist architectural principles. The architectural intervention, despite its visual impact and meticulous attention to materiality and colour, exemplifies a departure from contextual considerations, veering towards an ambiguous experiential realm. Valle's inclination towards a Modernist architectural vocabulary is discernible through his deliberate rejection of contextual references in the private realm, in favour of a universal architectural language.

Therefore, Valle's conceptualization of the project underscores a fundamental shift from traditional notions of space and context, emblematic of his engagement with the Modernist ethos. The architectural intervention, while resonant with Valle's commitment to urban integration and spatial coherence, forms a detachment from the intrinsic qualities of the site, signalling a departure from his earlier works, and preoccupation with site-specific design solutions. Instead, Valle embraces a vision of 'urbanity' characterized by architectural autonomy, imagining the building in an alternative metropolis, which should function alone, densely, and efficiently.

In navigating the complexities of contemporary architectural practice, Valle's embrace of Modernist principles catalyses re-imagining the relationship between architectural form and urban context, albeit at the expense of contextual specificity. Ultimately, Valle's architectural intervention in Venice highlights the dialectical tension between tradition and innovation, advocating for a re-evaluation of Modernist architectural principles in the contemporary context <sup>90</sup>.

90. Valle, Gino, and Francesco Moschini. 1987. "Complesso Di Abitazioni Popolari Nell'isola Della Giudecca, Venezia, 1980-'86." *L'Industria Delle Costruzioni*, no. 186 (April).

# Conclusion

## Navigating the urban landscape of Giudecca and historical cities: Towards a sustainable, inclusive, and contextual architecture

Venice stands as a testament to the enduring allure of historical cities. Yet, behind its dreamy facade, lies a complex tapestry of urban challenges shaped by external agents, affecting the lived experiences of its residents. As the city struggles with the pressures of overtourism, underpopulation, and housing crisis, the need for thoughtful interventions in its urban fabric becomes ever more apparent.

Throughout history, external agents have played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of Venice's development. From the merchants and traders who fueled its Renaissance splendor, to the tourists and developers who seek to capitalize on its cultural heritage today, the city has been subject to a constant influx of influences from beyond its shores.

However, amidst these external pressures, the voices and experiences of Venice's residents remain paramount in shaping the city's identity and future trajectory.

In exploring the urban landscape of Giudecca, a microcosm of Venice's broader challenges, and problems faced by historical cities worldwide. This study has underscored the importance of prioritizing resident experience, through the design and planning of public, collective, and private spaces.

The sestiere's complex history, characterized by prosperity, industrialization, deindustrialization, and tourism, has shaped its architectural and social fabric. Through an examination of various architectural interventions, public spaces, and social housing projects, this study has sought to illuminate the nuanced interplay between urban design, interventions (and non-involvement), and the effects of those on the residents, to shape Giudecca's future.

The tension between preservation and innovation is palpable throughout Giudecca's urban landscape. This dichotomy aligns with Venice's status as both a dream destination and a harsh reality, as the city fights, as it has for centuries, unfavorable conditions.

The island's architectural heritage provides a rich tapestry for contemporary interventions. However, as evidenced by some of the most successful structures for residents, the answer to modern problems could lie in the adaptive reuse of projects like the Junghans Industrial Complex and Campo di Marte redevelopment. Architects must strike a delicate balance between honoring the past and meeting the present needs of residents, who are necessary for the socio-economic progress of the city. This study has thus explored examples of the potential of adaptive reuse to revitalize abandoned and uninhabited sites.

Furthermore, the revitalization of public spaces in Giudecca underscores the importance of creating inclusive environments that cater to the diverse needs of residents and visitors, in order to achieve a balance between the two. Initiatives such as various cultural centers, the installation of accessible public amenities like benches, and maximizing the potential of what a site has to offer, serve as examples of successful community engagement and placemaking, fostering social cohesion and enhancing the island's livability.

However, challenges remain in ensuring that public spaces are accessible to all, particularly finding strategies to mitigate tourist flows. This problem in Venice has not been addressed through Modernist principles like Paris or Amsterdam have, due to its unique urban layout and location. Therefore, this thesis suggests looking at the history of the city's urbanism as a trading center, and what urban features were included, in order to dissect and use in a modern key the hierarchies of its streets and squares.

In the realm of social housing, Giudecca serves as a laboratory for innovative design solutions aimed at addressing Venice's housing crisis. Projects like Ex-Frignan in Sacca Fisola, and the neighboring housing complex by Gino Valle demonstrate the potential of thoughtful urban planning to create mixed-income communities that promote social equity and integration. However, as highlighted by Valle's project, architects must be mindful of the lived experience of residents, ensuring that design interventions prioritize human-scale interactions and foster a sense of belonging.

Looking ahead, Giudecca's urban landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for sustainable development. Green infrastructure projects, such as the vegetable garden in the Giudecca women's prison, offer models for successful designs that deal holistically with private, collective, and public spheres.

In conclusion, this thesis has delved into the complex layers of Venice's urban fabric, questioning the paradigms that shaped its evolution and envisioning possibilities for a more sustainable and inclusive future. By examining the interplay between idealism and realism, and assessing the determining decisions behind its built environment, the study uncovered aspects of a 'real' Venice', in order to ultimately shape the Venice of the future.



Reflection

MSc Architecture

City Of The Future

# VENICE

## BEYOND THE DREAM

**Redefining belonging: a comprehensive mapping of external agents' influence and architectural interventions to challenge Venice's housing problems**

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**TU Delft**

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## Introduction

The study of the built environment involves examining various urban phenomena and devising and evaluating strategies to address contemporary urban challenges.

During my master of science in Architecture, Urbanism, and Building Sciences at TU Delft, I have had the chance to question many paradigms I took for granted, in search of a logical truth, one that in my final project explains the current state of Venice, Italy. This helped me dissect the city's intricate urban fabric and the many policies that dictated its shape and function. My graduation project, "Venice Beyond the Dream," uses the approach of idealism versus realism to examine the current role of Venice, specifically when thinking about residents and heritage, and what architecture can do to make the cities of the future more livable.

This reflection comprehensively examines the methodological framework guiding my research, the reciprocal influence between research and design, and the broader academic and societal implications of my endeavours. Evaluating my methods and design translation fairly, this analysis seeks to shine a light on the complexities inherent in urban dynamics, while offering practical insights for future application and practice.

## **What is the relation between your graduation project topic, your master track (A), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?**

The relationship between my graduation project topic, my master's track in Architecture, and my master's program (MSc Architecture Urbanism Building Sciences) is intricately intertwined.

Firstly, my graduation project topic, "Venice Beyond the Dream," aligns closely with the core themes and objectives of the Architecture track within the MSc Architecture Urbanism Building Sciences program. This project looks into architectural interventions and urban design strategies aimed at addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by Venice, a city facing various urban issues such as overtourism and housing shortages. Through a rigorous exploration of architectural principles, urban design theories, and sustainable practices, my project seeks to propose interventions that harmonize with the city's historical context while addressing contemporary socio-economic realities.

This project resonates deeply with the ethos of the MSc Architecture, Urbanism, and Building Sciences program, encapsulating, along with the City of the Future studio, an interdisciplinary approach to addressing contemporary urban challenges. Starting from traditions and learning from history, the project aims to achieve innovation in spatial planning, through incremental problem-solving and the integration of diverse perspectives to generate holistic solutions for the built environment.

At its core, the Architecture track is closely linked with my project. Looking into a city's heritage, the theories and history behind its built environment, and thinking of programs and functions, such as dwelling, public building, and the wider urban context are all significant parts of my academic studies that I am bringing into my final project.

Furthermore, the importance of building sciences, sustainable and ecological architecture, and tectonic solutions are key aspects of my project, as that is, at its core, how the many aspects of Modernism that are part of the project get critiqued and expanded, as the significance of the context is what sets each building apart. This is thus a key point to address when talking about applying the principles and findings of this research elsewhere.

## **How did your research influence your design/recommendations and how did the design/recommendations influence your research?**

The iterative process of research and design within my graduation project has been instrumental in shaping both the conceptual framework of my investigation and the practical recommendations put forth, as highlighted by my methodology.

Initially, my research looked into the intricate socio-economic and urban challenges facing Venice, ranging from overtourism to housing shortages, drawing upon literature and case studies to explain the underlying causes and implications of these issues. However, what made the research challenging, was establishing a clear problematisation, one that could then be answered through my design. Therefore, one of the key aspects of my project was creating links between the material and conceptual, as then reflected in my research.

The beginning stage of the project revolved around mapping the interventions by the 'external agents' between 1945 and 2000, the years when Venice's role as a city last changed. Doing this multi-layered research helped me practice what it means to go from intention to materialisation, through a process of investigating the reasoning behind architectural innovations, that now seem like core parts of the city. It is important to remember that buildings have functions and motives that go further than the activities that take place in them. Architecture is the materialization and account of history, therefore it is just as much conceptual as it is physical.

This research phase not only informed the problem-setting aspect of my project but also provided critical insights that directly influenced the subsequent design phase. For instance, the exploration of overtourism as a global phenomenon prompted a deeper examination of Venice's urban fabric and the delicate balance between curated experiences and authentic urban history. Similarly, the analysis of housing shortages and public amenity deficiencies led to a more nuanced understanding of the spatial and programmatic needs of Venice's diverse communities, and therefore had a strong impact on the programme of my design. Learning from the building types, typologies, the routes that different users take in a certain area, and the climate conditions of a space, are all key ways in which the research influenced the design.

In the transition from research to design within my project, there was a symbiotic relationship between the two phases. Initially, research provided a robust foundation for identifying the challenges faced by Venice and understanding the underlying causes contributing to its un-livability as a residential city. Through an analysis of past interventions and their reception by users, the research highlighted crucial gaps in the city's fabric, informing a bespoke design brief tailored to address these deficiencies.

As I delved into the design phase, the insights learned from the research served as guiding principles for the development of architectural interventions and urban design strategies. The emphasis on preserving local architectural heritage and fostering community engagement emerged as pivotal considerations, reflecting a synthesis of research-driven insights and creative design solutions.

On the other hand, the design phase prompted a deeper inquiry into the role of modernism in Venice's architectural landscape. Feedback from professors underscored the importance of integrating elements of modernist design principles, such as those espoused by theorists like Tafuri, Rossi, and Grassi. This led to a critical

re-evaluation of the project's conceptual framework, fostering a nuanced understanding of how modernist ideals intersect with the city's historical context and contemporary urban challenges.

This iterative process of research and design not only enriched the conceptual clarity and methodological rigor of the project but also facilitated a holistic understanding of Venice's urban challenges. By bridging the gap between research and design, my project was able to propose innovative solutions grounded in empirical evidence and creative design thinking, ultimately contributing to the discourse on sustainable urban development in historic cities like Venice.

## **How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?**

Assessing the value of my approach, methods, and methodology is paramount in conducting a comprehensive study. This was done primarily by an interdisciplinary study, an iterative methodology, rigorous research, and a multi-scale creative design approach.

Conducting an interdisciplinary study was extremely important to my project, as one of the core principles I set at the beginning of this project was thinking of architecture as part of a more complex system than itself. This was important as in my opinion one of the downfalls of architecture is when it is self-serving, focusing on aesthetics and theories more than on the actual application and function within society. My research draws on politics, policy-making, history, and technical design, as well as current events and actions taken by the residents. The value of my design comes from answering what the site needs and offering strategies to what I have observed, rather than the result of unilateral thinking about form. A global perspective is necessary to achieve a valuable outcome.

Furthermore, my iterative methodology incorporates a cyclical method that integrates ongoing feedback to refine objectives, enriching itself with diverse information. The steps (proposal development, archival research and literature review, site visit and data collection, ethnographic site studies, and data analysis and synthesis) are thus continuous since each stage affects the others. This allows my hypothesis to be proven wrong at times, and that is very important to a fair project.

Therefore, conducting rigorous research that draws from multiple sources, authors, periods, and fields enriches my project and helps me assess the quality of my work. By 'standing on the shoulders of giants', I can analyse large amounts of data to extrapolate what fits best in my research (although it is difficult to look at a problem without any sense of bias, having a large dataset can help lessen this problem).

My personal bias, reflecting on the way the design has unfolded itself, was to design something I 'felt' was right, instead of looking at the research objectively and letting it directly influence the design. Sometimes, it is difficult to look past our first preconception of what a building should look like, do, and how it should work. One cannot get attached to a research based design, as concepts change as soon as the investigation evolves. It is thus important to remain objective and analytical, documenting the various steps of the design, and not let one's own ego take over.

Finally, the design was a product of a multi-scale creative approach. One of the issues of creative thinking and designing is often the lack of parameters one works with: the more parameters one finds, the more the decisions can be justified and considered thorough. This was materialized by thinking in different scales, sometimes even outside of the logical order of designing (a 1:2000 urbanist scale can be heavily influenced by juxtaposing it to 1:20 technical solutions). Furthermore, I have tried to take on multiple mediums to represent my thinking, going from site models to material research, to 2D representation. This was important because a project inevitably becomes its representation, and experimenting with various approaches allows for discovering aspects that would otherwise stay hidden.

## **How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?**

Assessing the academic and societal value, scope, and implications of my graduation project, including ethical considerations, involves evaluating its contribution to generating new knowledge through research, its potential impact on urban practice, and its alignment with ethical principles.

My graduation project contributes to the academic field by advancing our understanding of complex urban

challenges and proposing strategies informed by rigorous research and design inquiry. Through an interdisciplinary approach that draws on architecture, urbanism, sociology, and environmental studies, my project goes deeper into the dynamics of urban transformation and the role of architecture in shaping livable, sustainable cities.

The societal value of my research is directly impacted by what it is trying to achieve: a livable city. My studio hypotheses gave us different ideas for what the 'city of the future' will be like, and most of all my project stands for prioritizing spaces for residents amid economic growth linked to overtourism. By focusing on themes such as overtourism, housing shortages, and community engagement, my project seeks to foster more inclusive and sustainable urban environments, spurring ideas that go further than Venice. Through its emphasis on preserving local heritage, promoting social cohesion, and enhancing the livability of urban spaces, my project aims to contribute positively to the well-being and prosperity of urban communities.

Finally, ethical considerations are central to the design and implementation of my project, guiding decisions about stakeholder engagement, environmental impact, and social equity. Ethics can be subjective, so it is significant to be very specific when talking about them. A particular aspect of the ethics of my project that should be explained, is the dichotomy between designing for residents and going against tourism, thinking about social cohesion between countries, and the dangers of acquiring a primarily individualistic and self-sufficient outlook on society. What my project is trying to do is counter-balance a type of superficial tourism that is driving the residents out of Venice, which is ethical under the paradigm of preserving heritage in its totality.

Furthermore, throughout the research and design process, I prioritized principles of inclusivity, transparency, and sustainability, seeking to empower local communities and minimize harm to the environment. By foregrounding ethical concerns in my project, I aim to ensure that its outcomes align with the principles of social justice and responsible management of the built environment. The way this can be assessed is by listening to feedback and keeping an open mind when designing, as the academic nature of this project allows for learning.

## *Own's questions*

**Reflecting on the implications of overtourism in the project, how can architectural and urban design interventions be leveraged to strike a balance between preserving authentic urban heritage and accommodating the demands of a globalized tourism industry?**

Expanding on the implications of overtourism, architectural and urban design interventions must be approached holistically, considering both short-term visitor demands and long-term sustainability. One effective strategy is the implementation of zoning regulations that designate specific areas for tourism-related activities while preserving residential neighbourhoods for local inhabitants. This zoning approach can help manage the spatial distribution of tourists, preventing overcrowding in sensitive areas and preserving the residential character of Venice's historic districts.

Moreover, architectural interventions should prioritize adaptive reuse and renovation of existing buildings to minimize the environmental impact of new construction while preserving the city's cultural heritage. This approach involves repurposing vacant or underutilized structures into multifunctional spaces that serve both residents and visitors. For instance, historic palazzos could be transformed into mixed-use developments featuring cultural institutions, artisan workshops, and residential units, fostering a vibrant urban ecosystem that benefits both the local community and the tourism industry.

In addition, urban design strategies should prioritize the creation of public spaces that foster social interaction and community engagement. By re-imagining underutilized areas as active gathering places, architects can enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

Furthermore, emphasis should be placed on preserving and enhancing the unique character of a city's urban fabric. Design interventions should respect the scale, materials, and architectural styles of the historic built environment, ensuring that new developments contribute positively to the city's visual identity. However, this approach does not require a city to not contribute to innovation, it means that there should be cohesion and conversations between buildings, respecting and growing the

city's ecosystem.

By prioritizing placemaking and heritage conservation, designers can create an urban environment that reflects the values and aspirations of Venice's residents. This approach not only enhances the livability of the city but also fosters a sense of pride and belonging among its residents. Ultimately, by re-imagining public spaces as activity hubs and preserving the city's architectural heritage, urban design can play a crucial role in shaping Venice's future as a livable city.

## **Considering the scarcity of public amenities and housing for Venice's residents, how can urban design integrate local characteristics and port-city qualities to address these challenges? How does this challenge the conventional paradigms of Late-Modernism?**

Addressing the scarcity of public amenities and housing for residents requires implementing urban design strategies that leverage the unique characteristics of Venice as a port city. Rather than imposing generic solutions, architects and urbanists should embrace the city's historic fabric and cultural identity to inform their interventions. This approach involves learning from the vernacular architecture of the city, enhancing community-centric spaces, and fostering adaptive reuse of existing structures to meet the evolving needs of the population.

Furthermore, designers should explore housing typologies that respond to the diverse needs of Venice's population, in both demographic and economic ways, including affordable public housing options for residents. This involves adaptive reuse of existing buildings, adaptive design of thoughtful extensions where possible, and implementation of innovative construction techniques such as modular housing or prefabricated construction, which grant flexibility according to the users' needs. By diversifying the housing supply and increasing affordability, designers can help address the housing shortage and promote social inclusion in Venice.

Additionally, urban design interventions should prioritize the preservation of Venice's architectural heritage and cultural assets. Incorporating traditional building materials and construction techniques can ensure that

new developments harmonize with the city's historic fabric and contribute to its unique sense of place. Moreover, involving local stakeholders, and sourcing the materials locally, can foster a sense of ownership and pride in the built environment, ensuring that projects reflect the spirit of the city.



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