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Becoming tourism infrastructure: older age mobilities and the reconfiguration of local mobility environments in Venice

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the lived realities of older residents' daily mobility in an over-touristed city. While walking mobility is a fundamental dimension of the everyday lives of individuals, communities, and places, it is also part of the 'extraordinary' experience that visitors seek for, turning urban space (pavements, streets, squares) into infrastructure for tourists' walking mobility and tourist attractions in itself. In historic tourist centres, the walking practices and performances of residents and tourists are highly enmeshed in tight street grids, eliciting or hindering one another, producing either spectacle or discomfort, leveraging opportunity or unaffordability. While research has focused on the nature and extent of these hindrances and on the more structural dimensions of overtourism, the mobile component of 'living with' tourism has been explored less widely. We use the case of Venice, a notably ageing city, where residents are exposed to the adverse negotiation of overcrowded walking spaces. Drawing on walking interviews with older residents, we examine the spatial scales at which everyday mobility are contested by tourism, and the repercussions on active ageing and life aspirations. In addition, we situate such negotiations as potentially immobilising forces in which bodily ageing quickly clashes with the material and performative elements of an inherently slow mobility environment. We conclude on the tourism-infrastructure relationship-forcing residents' fixity in a space of estrangement under the hegemony of slow tourist mobilities which complicates their ageing in place.

1. Introduction

Tourist infrastructure is an increasingly essential dimension of urban landscapes, sustaining the expansion of visitor numbers and the related economic activities (Judd 2015). Although a unanimous definition is tricky, scholars agree that tourist infrastructure assemble public and private facilities that allow tourists to move, stay, and recreate at a destination (Dwyer, Forsyth, and Dwyer 2010). Yet the blurring of boundaries between users of such facilities

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and other urban amenities invites to question the singularity of tourist infrastructure, as part of broader urban mobility systems that consist of differently capable and empowered users in their mobile negotiation of urban space (Larsen 2008; Sheller 2016, 2018). Conversely, conventional mobility systems – designed to provide accessibility for residents, workers, and others undertaking work, education, commerce, leisure, and social activities – are frequently taken over by tourists and are, in places, converted into tourist attractions themselves (Dileep and Pagliara 2023). In both senses, tourist mobilities come to negotiate the social and built environments for a stable resident population, through their physical presence as well as through the networked provisions of services that they engage (Adey et al. 2014; Gössling 2020; Moscardo et al. 2013; Novy 2018).

This paper is mostly interested in such negotiations. It interrogates the embodied everyday lives of older-aged long-term residents, who may be more vulnerable to persisting mobility hindrances and who have lived through the prolonged effects of tourism-related urban change. We intend to approach their walking experiences, personal perceptions, biographies and aspirations, as they play out in the 'tourist city' of Venice at various spatial domains and in a time of a decreasing and ageing population structure. In this way, we argue that residents, their private spaces like homes, and their own quotidian mobilities may have turned into tourist assets and, in turn, seek to unravel how their dwelling as permanent residents contrasts with the transient nature of mobility assets (Light and Brown 2020; Russo 2023; Sheller 2018).

The case of Venice, Italy, presents us with a unique mobility infrastructure carved onto a historical urban archipelagic landscape of tight streets, canals, and bridges. This very landscape may well be at the core of the city's tourist appeal, simultaneously described as visitor highlight and damnation for residents. Over time, tourist mobilities have become so inextricable from the city's mundane routines that they have usurped the urban functions that sustain residents' everyday life (Salerno and Russo 2022). Yet, while the urban dynamics of Venice and its tourism-related challenges have been extensively studied, with most research pointing at unsustainable levels of visitor mobility and consequent social, economic and ecological changes (e.g. Zanardi 2020), the personal and collective experiences of 'living with tourism' and uneven competition in terms of transport access have only received attention very recently (e.g. Giordano 2025). Despite its prominence in the tourism literature, and indeed in this paper, Venice is an extreme, all-city illustration of what happens in historical centres with a low capacity for physical adaptation – e.g. (semi-) pedestrianised, organically formed areas today under the pressure of tourism consumption. What remains under the radar, however, is the variety of ways in which everyday mobility patterns cope with and adapt to the slow yet hyper-mobilised landscape.

Our approach to this exploration largely draws on two conceptual entry points, which are mobilised to present and discuss our research findings. The first strand of the literature is concerned with overtourism and the impacts of tourist mobilities on resident populations, specifically the ones addressing the multiplicity of scales and dynamics in mobility patterns (López-Gay, Cocola-Gant, and Russo 2021; Salerno 2022; Torres-Delgado et al. 2023). In particular, Novy's (2018) work provides an adequate conceptual canvas to examine the coincidences of and negotiations between different mobilities within a pentagonal framework that shows how tourist mobilities and place consumption are connected. Similarly, scholars have drawn longstanding attention to the space-claiming capacities of tourism and its pertinent socio-spatial justice issues,

related to uneven access to infrastructures, material places, and processes of moving, passing, stopping, and waiting (Brandajs and Russo 2019; Sheller 2018; Verlinghieri and Schwanen 2020).

The second strand involves ageing and life course studies, offering entry points for our empirical focus on older residents and biographical accounts of living in the tourist city. Contemporary ageing is described as an increasingly heterogeneous process that is no longer fixed to a sequence of life stages (Geist and McManus 2008). Instead, life stages intersect, and diverse events may obstruct, pause or alter the course, while subjective and relational factors affect the rhythms and paces of the everyday life of individuals (Berg et al. 2014). Ageing is thus particularly concerned with, and shaped by, its social and material environments, with considerable relevance attributed in research to the home, the family, the neighbourhood or the community in which one ages (Gilroy 2008; Metz 2000). Webber, Porter, and Menec (2010) portray the activity spaces of older adults at seven spatial levels, also including the room where one sleeps, the home, and the immediate outdoors (e.g. yard, parking lot or garden), besides the more common geographical scales of neighbourhood, city, and country.

While there is limited interaction between these two strands (e.g. Domínguez-Parraga, 2020), most research on tourism mobilities touches at most tangentially upon its effects on the older population (Cocola-Gant 2023; López-Gay, Cocola-Gant, and Russo 2021; Quinn 2007; Sánchez-Ledesma et al. 2020). However, populations around the world are ageing and this process happens increasingly in cities (Plouffe and Kalache 2010). The spatial repercussions of population ageing and the revised requirements to urban space have been well documented and operationalised in policy and practice through the Age-friendly City concept (Buffel, Phillipson, and Scharf 2012; Dogra et al. 2022), but with little attention to the tourism dimension.

Thus, drawing from overtourism studies and ageing literature, our analytical and methodological framework tackles both the material construction of the 'tourist city' and the cognitive, representational, and sociocultural aspects and juxtapositions of being mobile. This approach lets us look at the different spatial scales where people age actively and in place, a rising concern for public health (Dogra et al. 2022; Finlay et al. 2019; Twigg 2004) and a nascent area of research enquiry on tourism-related gentrification (Buffel and Phillipson 2019; Sánchez-Ledesma et al. 2020). Our analysis, subsequently, is aided by the epistemological body of mobilities, in particular, the works that foreground mobility as an empowering bodily asset that usually privileges those who walk furthest, fastest, or most often (Cresswell, 2010; Oliver 1996). Material capacities to be mobile thus forge spaces of 'freedom' vs unfreedom and subalternity; abilities that arguably change as biological ageing reconfigures independent mobile capacities and space-time constructions (Berg et al. 2014). Hence, we focus on the materialities and challenged everyday affordabilities that situate older residents as unevenly empowered under the agency of tourism mobilities.

The organisation of the paper is as follows. In the next section, we present the research methodology, including a contextualisation of the case study. In the third, we present our research findings, interpreting the literature streams presented in this introduction. In the fourth, we follow with a general discussion about the value of these findings for the knowledge on the topic, while we will conclude in Section 5.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Study context

Our work was developed in the City of Venice, a city devoid of rapid, heavy, or space-intensive vehicles on the streets, where slow mobility is nuanced as place quality enjoyed by both visitors and residents (Davis and Marvin 2004). However, the slow inner-city movements by foot and boat on a relatively small plot of land and its tight streets and canal network are carried out annually by an estimated number of nearly 30 million visitors. Visitors' transit tends to be short and rapid, for the largest part consisting of day trips from neighbouring destinations (Van Der Borg 2022), and tying into a well-developed external accessibility system by train, vehicle, and air travel. This contrasts remarkably with the slow movement in situ, making the historical centre prone to over-crowding and the related challenges for quotidian mobility of residents, beyond what could be suggested by a staggering visitor–resident ratio that arguably already reached a capacity threshold by the beginning of the 1990s (Massiani and Santoro 2012). An early exploration of the dimension and spatialisation of 'sharing space' with tourists is due to Indovina (1988); more recent updates are found in Mizzi et al. (2018) and Bertocchi and Nicola (2022).

Indeed, Venice is presented in the literature and the public debate as an emblematic case of overtourism, with impacts that pervade all social and ecological dimensions, and challenge the very continuity of the city as a permanently populated place, following a dramatic demographic decline from 150,000 in 1950 to an estimated 50,000 in 2019 (Cristiano and Gonella 2020; Salerno and Russo 2022). The ratio between old and young people is even more striking: for every 100 children (<15) there were 84 older adults in 1981 against 369 today (Ri-Pensare 2024). Recent initiatives to formulate an Age-Friendly City protocol for Venice's historical centre (HC) and the specific attention to the discriminatory power of urban design regarding bodily ability underline the increasing consciousness about the disabling nature of Venice's environmental features (Revellini 2022; Tatano and Revellini 2023). Perhaps, the most complete documentation of the consequentiality between progressive touristification and population decline is provided by Zanardi (2020) and Salerno (2022), who diagnose direct impacts on the housing market and indirectly by the changing commercial and social environments. As a result, any type of urban residential future is left with dwindling employment opportunities, besides the badly paid and precarious jobs of the tourism sector, and with a relentless erosion of the city's social and cultural vibrancy (Russo and Salerno 2023). The further focus of Gorrini and Bertini (2018) on mobility-related push factors (such as access hindrances to public space, walkways and public transport) present Venice as a very relevant case to study the intersection between tourism mobilities, infrastructures, and the social and cultural gerontology of urban living.

2.2. Data collection and analysis

Walkalongs or walking interviews have been frequently applied in the wake of the mobilities paradigm and following the development of mobile methodologies (Büscher et al., 2011; Evans and Jones 2011). Specific qualities attributed to go-alongs are their

understanding of in situ experiences of mobile bodies, the disclosure of their relationship to the (urban, natural, social) environment, the empowerment of the research subjects through being in their everyday environment, the addition of ethnographic observation to the interview process, and opportunities to capture routes, places of interest, and micro-choices using audio and video recording, photography, and geo-tracking (Carpiano 2009, Day and Cornell, 2023; Vannini et al. 2020). Walk-along interviews, to our knowledge, have not yet been applied for the case of residents in tourism cities, although mobile methodologies have begun to feature in applications of photovoice in gentrified spaces (Sánchez-Ledesma et al. 2020), through video observations of public spaces (Brandajs and Russo 2019), while cycling with older residents' in tourist spaces (Den Hoed and Russo 2024), or by documenting the own mobile experience of *being* a tourist (Rabbiosi 2021). Yet, the performative nature of walking interviews may increase the protagonism of the older population in research processes, as active agents who mobilise and share their skills and expertise to negotiate complex mobility environments (Buffel 2019; Mahmood et al. 2012).

The data that we report from are based on walking interviews with 15 long-term residents of Venice's HC, aged between 60 and 82, carried out between October and December 2022. We approached them via local associations and social hubs, gatekeepers to the older Venetian community, based on the following inclusion criteria: minimum age 60, principal home address and employment of daily activities in Venice HC, and participating on personal behalf. The threshold age of 60 for sample selection is a common marker that covers the different stages of later life including (gradual) retirement from working life and phases of liberation and bodily decline (World Health Organisation 2020). *Moving with* this demographic group allowed us to employ a combination of conversation topics and spatial cues, which bring retrospective, biographical information related to the present or everyday situations, and serve as memory aids (Carpiano 2009; Müggenburg 2021). The result – a shared atmosphere of walking together, being 'in place' and on the move with a distinct collective of tourist city residents – was in a sense, participant-led, leading us to 'what participants consider important', inviting us to show their home or homely spaces, a bench on the street, a communal garden, or to mimic their local practices (e.g. buying at a kiosk, have a coffee on the way to work).

The conversation topics were selected from a flexible interview script, adapting to the personal circumstances, interests, and livelihood of the interviewee: use of transport over time, walking practices and feelings, perceptions of the neighbourhood, place identity and transformations, views on future living in Venice and, lastly, personal appraisals of tourism. The interviews usually took between 40 and 75 minutes and followed the habitual walking routes of the participants. The researcher applied audio-recording, note-taking, geo-tracking, and photography to aid recollection and ex-post reconstruction of the routes. Table 1 (Supplementary materials) illustrates the sample details including age, gender, *sestiere* (district) and duration of residence, and a general description of habitual mobility practices. All participants joined under informed consent, and identifiable information was anonymised in compliance with the ethics and data management standards approved by the ethics committee of the Rovira i Virgili University (ID CEIPSA-2.021-PR-0037).

The interview recordings were transcribed and then processed using the ATLAS.ti software for a general structuration analysis, which identified 37 codes divided across

six categories: "ageing" and "city" descriptions, pandemic effects, tourism effects on the city, tourism effects on the neighbourhood, and own leisure patterns. The coding was done following a step-wise inductive thematic analysis as described in Braun and Clarke (2006). The fieldwork researcher annotated the transcript with detailed summaries and descriptions of the walk (incl. time of day, atmosphere, and possible effects on the data). This allowed the team of researchers to both contextualise the narrations found in this study and reconnect them to the concepts identified in the literature, including considerations to stay or move away, perceptions of everyday, proximate spaces (e.g. home and neighbourhood), adaptations of walking mobility (incl. not going out), instances of mental or physical pressures, and other micro-dimensions of urban change.

Whereas a previous publication (Den Hoed, Tardivo, and Russo 2025), based on the same sample and data collection procedure, analysed specific walking practices and place qualities, wellbeing impacts, immobilisations, and coping mechanisms from an individual perspective; the present analysis instead centred on the (infra)structural elements that reconfigure (1) everyday mobility on land and water; and (2) the local and domestic environments across three explicit spatial scales. The next section groups these findings accordingly, while Section 4 offers a transversal reading connected to the literature on ageing in cities and the evolution of places under the pull of tourism mobilities.

3. Findings

3.1. Reconfigurations of everyday mobility on land and water

The walking interviews expose a variety of everyday mobile activities, including planned and unplanned moments, route choices, scenes, and encounters. Walks have very different motivations and above all, very different outcomes, variably extending into the daily schedule of the participant. A walk may end up in a home, in a café or in another home, or can lead to another walk later in the day or week. As Mattia, Dalila and Diana (all pseudonyms) comment: while walking, you meet people and things happen, such as ideas for a new cultural or business project. Vittorio adds that outside of close contacts, social relationships are kept alive through fortunate encounters in the squares (*campi*) or for specific instrumental reasons. Walks are regarded as important per se, which leads us to appraise them in two distinct ways, occurring in parallel: as fictitious mobility that masks a condition of immobility and stuckness and as an active form of dwelling in the city, enacted in the open public spaces of the city.

Most participants are fervent walkers and usually chain together their everyday activities by foot. At first sight, the analysis reflects an image of high *walkability* of Venice's entire HC, where both men and women rely on walking, even in less obvious situations – such as when they have to carry heavy loads while navigating the city's uneven urban morphology, or at night, when crossing dark and sparsely frequented areas of the city. In addition, many of them comment on the importance of walking to support their physical and mental health. However, walking in the HC also contains several recurrent complications. Participants share a common feeling of discomfort from overcrowding in walking spaces such as streets and squares but also at essential connecting infrastructures such as bridges and boat stops. In this subsection, we zoom in on the consequential shifts to their mobilities, while they negotiate their living environment.

First, we observe reconfigurations of the infrastructures themselves. Physical accessibility measures, such as ramps to cross bridges without using steps (Image 1), as well as elevated walkways that ensure the passage of flood-prone areas are often found useful, for instance when using strollers. However, they are only placed on the most frequented routes, i.e. those of the tourists, leaving many residents' routes unattended. Because they reduce the bridges' capacity, the ramps also create more congestion issues. In turn, Diana (68, San Marco) for example, finds how the raised walkways that are placed in case of high tide are 'precarious' and are unusable for anyone with disabilities. As emergency structures put in place following the tidal rhythm, they have become a persistent feature in Venice's walking infrastructure.

In addition, we see how everyday mobilities – be it by foot or boat – are articulated by a combination of social and material adaptations to their points of origin and destination. Participants carefully choose their routes, to either mingle with or avoid the crowds (e.g. never in the weekend, only early mornings), while some have modified their shopping habits because of higher commodity prices in areas of strong tourist intensity. The extra distance needed to access affordable basic products such as houseware and groceries is experienced as a burden by Edoardo, Raffaella and Mattia, and leads participants to walk beyond their local neighbourhood. As Rafaella (71, Dorsoduro) summarises:

> Venice used to be made up of many microcosms, here in Santa Margherita, near Rialto. My husband lived near Rialto and, within 50 meters, there was everything: the bakery, the greengrocer, the pharmacy, the meat, the orthopaedic supply store. They were all microcosms that could be self-sufficient. We are talking about 40 years ago and the prices were perhaps a little expensive, but not as much as now. Clearly, as the city became depopulated, services decreased, even the shops that people needed. Now there are still some shops that resist, but they are

Images 1 and 2; 1) showing the temporary structures of foot ramps on selected bridges, 2) showing the 'non-places' of tronchetto as seen during the boat interview with Alvise.

> increasingly rare and the tendency is to only have shops for tourism. (...) So if we need something we have to leave the neighbourhood or go to Mestre. [the mainland part of the city]

On the topic of retail substitution, Dalila (60, San Polo) comments that she has counted 22 real estate agencies when walking around her small local area. The inconspicuous, hidden places, artisan shops, or art and crafts' studios of interest to residents like her have been replaced by industrial products and commercial activities that mainly serve short-term housing needs. Changes to walking infrastructures and everyday destinations have thus altered mobility patterns, with a general tendency to more hindrances, inadequate material solutions, and longer walking distances.

Second, walking practices themselves show a particular mix of the discretionary values of Venice's 'walkscape' and of direct, physical obstacles to walking following the saturation of the spaces generated by the gazing tourists. The interview with Nicola (82, San Marco) shows a striking concurrence of, on the one hand, present-day wellness and physical ability and, on the other, existential doubts about Venice's future and its residents. As Nicola zigzags speedily through a packed street, he explains how he finds pleasure in seeing the beauty of the city in photography and volunteering. His bodily privilege, among others, also appears from the way he compares his routine of accessing the house with that of a less-abled neighbour:

> Come [here] a moment, I'll show you the lift. I have 50 steps to go home, which is also good for me because I'm 82 years old. It happens that I'm in good condition, but there are many who at 82 years old don't have this. Mrs [neighbour] still lives here. These are the stairs. There are exactly 16, another six, 22, then another floor, another 15 to get to the third floor. Then internally I have another 15 to go from the house to the kitchen.

Then, when asked to expand about his physical activity levels, Nicola quickly tells how outdoor walking leads to mixed feelings, tension, and an emotive outlook on the future of the city:

> This [invasion] forces me to be tense all the time. That's not an enjoyment. I am forced to push people away; I cannot look at the city. There's this monument. How wonderful! It's a fantastic city. That [tense] city will be my future. (. . .) I hope to last other 30 years. Personally, though, this city has no future, it's unavoidably doomed for many reasons. It would require more than a miracle, a miracle that does not come true.

Third, the importance of water transport stands out, not just because of the canal connections to move within the HC but also because of its function to access cars and public land transport. Parking garages, taxis, buses and trains are all located at the westernmost point of the island, which means that participants always travel a substantial time before they can access this gateway to the mainland. They usually go to the mainland for social and family activities in other parts of Venice municipality (e.g. Mestre, Marghera), the wider urban area, or nearby cities such as Padova or Treviso, a trip that often starts by using the public water transport. Some, in addition, have their own boats: rowing, ship building, and navigation skills in the complex Venetian lagoon have a cultural and historical status. They use them for five main reasons: to tour the lagoon, as cultural and sports activity, as 'escape' from the everyday hassle of the city, for heavier errands, and to quickly access the mainland in case of emergencies. Dalila (60, San Polo) explains how these reasons intertwine in the use of her rowing boat:

> Well, let's say that I'm very focused on my work now, so I live, work and go rowing mainly. For me, rowing means getting away from all the chaos of tourists in the city. I go out to the middle of the lagoon and I still manage to find a few places in the lagoon where there's silence, where there's a bit of peace, fortunately. So that's what I focus my life on.

In recent years, however, participants note that opportunities for private water transport have reduced, while tourism-related water transport has expanded. Docking areas near key destinations are no longer available to private boats, while water taxis, gondolas, and shipping for hotel and restaurant services are given free roaming space. Canals and quays are congested, and it is forbidden to moor on most of them. Despite these physical hindrances, people often keep their boat and pay for a docking space, even if they only use it a few times a year. Outside of the five reasons above, they highlight the intricate attachment to Venetians' water identity, practicing and passing on their rowing technique to others (e.g. grand/children). Part of the interview with Alvise (68, San Polo) took place by boat, where he recounts having brought his son and pregnant daughter-in-law to the car park for them to go urgently to the hospital in a mainland city. This also underlines the broader observation that (boat) mobility to leave the HC is a collective undertaking: people often rely on friends or family members for a lift to or from the car park, to bring the boat back, etc., a social resource that is increasingly under pressure due to the touristification of the city's labour and housing markets. These types of mobilities often occur in marginal areas, such as Tronchetto, the intermodal area where boats meet cars and where vessels for garbage collection and package deliveries gather (Image 2).

The touristification of Venice HC does not only affect the affordances of the (walking or water) infrastructure for older residents but is also relevant for their sense of place and connection to the city they used to know. Milena (76, San Polo), who, like most participants, grew up or spent most of her life in the HC, compares its urban fabric to that of the Venice she got to know. Today, she finds the city has lost its distinct 'personality': it is less frequent to wander around and stumble on workshops, shops, and art or craft spaces where (older) residents' social and work life takes place, while large events at universities, museums, and the Biennale are flourishing. She thus finds that something has gone missing:

> Venice has lost that intermediate dimension of a city. It has [either] become a little town that is for us four remaining Venetians, [or] it has an international dimension. So it lacks that intermediate band that makes it a living city. Unfortunately, that is declining.

She takes the example of a cinema (Image 3), a type of amenity that constitutes this intermediate level for her. The changing dimensions of the city touch upon a transversal theme related to the proximity of everyday activities and destinations. The general disappearance of walkable 'destinations', such as shops, health services, cafés and other public places where to gather without feeling overwhelmed by tourists, not only leads participants further away from home but also reveals a loss of local identity. From the joint interview with Luigi and Adele (78 and 77, Dorsoduro):

Images 3 and 4; 3) a remaining cinema run and visited by Venetians shown during the interview with Milena, and 4) a former bakery shown by Adele.

Luigi: Here, this is a bakery, this is a bakery and now I don't know what it will be, but lately they take everything. This [other place] is also a tourist location, then there are more for goodness sake, they're not the only ones.

Adele: Anyway this was an old bakery. I remember it because they still made bread, very traditional small loaves of bread, from when I was a child. They had continued to make them. [see Image 4]

Researcher: And now is this bread still found or not?

Adele: No, absolutely not. (. . .) It was called *bovolo*. I haven't seen it anymore.

3.2. Reconfigurations of the local and domestic environments

Whereas earlier analyses have shed light on the negotiations of tourism in urban landscapes like Venice (Quinn 2007), the analysis in this paper hints at a relevant reconfiguration of the small-scale activity spaces, i.e. the own home and the immediate outdoors (Gilroy 2008; Webber, Porter, and Menec 2010). Such reconfigurations span across three dimensions: the home or building, the immediate surroundings, and related, changes to the own body.

In relation to the first dimension and considering that our sample mostly consists of people in their third age with adult children, some with families of their own, the 'closeness' of families seems to dwindle. Although Venice was stately a good place to raise a family in the 1980s or 1990s, most participants now witness how their own children are incapable of keeping their household 'in place'. Even if their children wish to stay in the HC, having developed close family and social ties, e.g. during childhood, secondary or higher education, higher-educated jobs are only available on the mainland. These findings confirm results from Russo and Salerno (2023) about the later life perceptions of university students who settled in Venice after completing their studies. The scarcity of

affordable housing, the lack of certain amenities, and the awkward transport connections act as a strong displacement driver for family and other social contacts. Sandra (68, Dorsoduro) describes these complexities in the case of her son, who has returned to the parental house after living abroad:

> My son works in [mainland], and for example this morning, he had to take the bus at 4am. If he could have a car in Piazzale Roma[1] it would be perfect, because sometimes his shift finishes very late. There are no incentives to help the residents, especially the young people. Now [son] lives with us because they are looking for a house, (...) trying to rent somewhere.

Besides concerns and contemplations to leave the HC altogether due to the high housing prices and living costs, participants also refer to the material and affective changes to their homes. Residential buildings in Venice HC are narrow and often have shared areas that used to be lively spaces to meet neighbours and share food and drinks, where people knew each other and could rely on others in case of need (e.g. looking after children or older people). In this respect, a gradual change to the home and homely spaces is reported: both shared and the private areas are changing into passageways rather than places to dwell or hang out. Over time, participants see how their buildings have become inhabited (or remain empty) by temporary populations. As Adele (77, Dorsoduro) explains:

> When we arrived, there were eight families in our apartment block, and two more downstairs, ten in total. Now there are two tourist rentals, two flats of non-residents, in fact there are three. (...) Or [the owners] almost never come. And that was a dwelling, a family lived here and now it's a guesthouse.

The second dimension of this analysis is the shrinking sense of home in the immediate surroundings. At this level, we find a mix of social and material factors that effectuate 'losing touch', as the majority of participants are convinced that the progressive departure of long-term neighbours represents a loss of social fabric and trust. Everyday activities, including caring tasks, social life and housework become more arduous when mutual aid networks disappear. Trust and security issues particularly resonate with participants, including during encounters with strangers in staircases, losing comfort when being in formerly shared areas, and perceived risks posed by people they do not know or understand. By extension, these issues also apply to the immediate surroundings of the home, including common habits to bring chairs to the street or the square to chat with the neighbours, eat together or meet new people. Some participants look for remnants of this landscape, as such practices are mostly impossible in today's Venice: public space use is highly regulated as exclusively dedicated to mobility, and caters for the needs of visiting populations. When walking with Nicola, for instance, he comments on the 'endangered' practices of playing children, whose activities would now clash with the 'new' uses of the city.

Notably, the surroundings that can be considered 'immediate' are perceived to be disappearing. For example, the streets that can be accessed without crossing bridges, steps, or lifting the shopping cart (*carrello*) or walker become the only spaces to access without assistance (e.g. Image 5). Adding to it, green spaces in the city are scarce, while resting areas are not always accessible or well-maintained (Image 6). In this context, participants either report about their own mobility issues, including injuries but also permanent conditions, or about walking with people in need of support. One participant

(Eleonora, 79, Dorsoduro) mentions the 'invisible' older adults that live in Venice HC. Eleonora is part of a network of volunteers who provide social assistance, a service that is no longer offered by public organisations. She explains that a serious mobility issue may easily result in home confinement, in the absence of adequate accessibility measures. Volunteers buy food and other products and offer company, while family ties and the existence of a network of people who occasionally visit at home are essential for this group.

Images 5 and 6; 5) walking the bridge with a carrello, an important mobility aid used to carry goods during the interview with Raffaella, and 6) a small park in the Avogaria area with broken benches.

The last dimension zooms in on bodily change and follows from most participants' awareness that the material circumstances of Venice complicate their ageing in place. The prospect of walking when getting older, keeping climbing stairs and bridges, using boats, and even leaving the house creates a sense of anxiety. While some participants express having had temporary mobility issues (e.g. having had an injury, caring for family members), Giampiero (78, Castello) has sight issues and needs regular medical check-ups. His two sons and daughter live in the HC and help him with daily errands. Such generational continuity is rather unique in the sample, as other participants' children have mostly moved elsewhere in the Veneto region or further afield. Giampiero is aware of his vulnerability and has become more frugal when it comes to leaving the house. With his wife, who uses a walker, he carefully chooses his 'outings' once a day:

> [But] we do walk. Calmly, obviously, with some support we sit in [Castello's main street] Via Garibaldi and have a coffee, because we need some movement. There is a lift [in the house]. If the lift stops working: goodbye.

The reliance of Giampiero's mobility prospects on his social environment clearly shows when he talks about the medical appointments of his wife, for which they juggle going to the nearby GP (accessible as of now with wheelchair assistance), to the hospital on the mainland, and the increasingly unavailable health services at home. Both of his sons work in the traditional naval construction industry, nowadays circumscribed but very common during Giampiero's working life. His social resources and sense of safety – a consequence

of his proximate social network, local family ties, volunteering activity and labour history – facilitate the persistence of his mobile activities, while other participants may fall short on social resources when, for instance, experiencing mobility loss. In contrast, other participants admit to reconsidering their housing options, between moving to better-serviced areas such as the mainland or the outer part of the archipelago (Lido), and attempts to maintain residency in the HC with the risk of 'premature' immobility.

The decision to stay in the HC also implies a 'choice' for the hassle of crowding and environmental pressure, the lost social connections, or the high housing and maintenance costs. Participants primarily indicate socioeconomic complications and doubts about the affective values and quality of life. They mention affective dimensions such as feeling known in the immediate surroundings of the home, maintaining social and family ties without requiring mobility, and experiencing the pleasure of (limited) movement as reasons to 'hang on'. On the other hand, cases such as Milena's (76, San Polo) shows that adaptations to support ageing in place, such as downscaling the house or finding a step-free environment, are not straightforward in Venice. Instead, she reports a situation where her economic affordances have become a burden to finding something new:

> So now I find myself in a moment when I would like to sell my house: because the family house is too big, I have a dilemma. I would like to stay not only in Venice, but also in my neighbourhood, because I'm close to Piazzale Roma and the station, and close to my brother. I don't know if I'll find [a house], I don't know what I'll find. To be able to pay the expenses of where I live, I had to open a bed and breakfast. I have two rooms dedicated to bed and breakfast because the house is too big for me alone. But as the years go by, the prospect is not to continue indefinitely.

4. Analysis and discussion

A transversal reading of the outcomes from our fieldwork brings out some insights which reconnect or add to existing scholarship on ageing in cities and the evolution of places under the pull of tourism mobilities. Research on the relationship between older age and place widely acknowledges the importance of the neighbourhood scale (Buffel, Phillipson, and Scharf 2012; Wang and Lee 2010). Restrictions to mobility at this scale and a progressive lack of proximate places spur further physical decline, loss of independence, institutionalisation, and even death (Webber, Porter, and Menec 2010). In our results, we see the intensification of (foreseeable) dependencies on either a thinning social network or on private services, which in turn rely on precarious labour and complex housing arrangements for care workers (Nelson and Bigger, 2022). Moreover, the relationship between home and self-identity echoes the definitions of a declining *ontological security*, which stresses the continuity and trust derived from the reliability of persons and material elements (Giddens 1991). For most participants, and especially those who are 'stuck' in place, tourism-related mobilities seem to be at odds with all that supports independent living and active ageing. Though older age is a period in which independent mobility generally declines, the walking patterns, rhythms and paces of many participants show that physical decline is not the main reason for reduced opportunities. Instead, reduced activity spaces, progressive rescission of social ties, and time to invest in relationships and meaningful activities, all recognised as positive ageing qualities (Gilroy 2008), are under pressure from external

stressors that operate through the material and social assemblage of 'proximity'. The progressive substitution of local shops and services, besides representing a loss of daily functions, also erodes their sense of the city's 'personality' and web of third places, once markers of health, social vibrancy, and a close-knit community (Finlay et al. 2019).

The hindrances faced by ageing resident groups have been studied as part of wider urban change processes, such as gentrification, which is noted to expose such groups to anxiety and depression, waning social ties, and the risk becoming 'invisible' as active neighbourhood agents (Buffel and Phillipson 2019; Cocola-Gant 2023; Sánchez-Ledesma et al. 2020). While the home and the immediate outdoors are usually associated with warmth and safety, the "loss of economic, social and cultural roles" may make it "a place of entrapment, since many of those roles (employment for instance) have a spatial dimension" (Gilroy 2008, 146). In our results, in addition, we find how homely spaces have become the hotspots of tourism-related urban change, simultaneously affected by the functional changes of homes towards serving as tourist infrastructure, the material and cognitive shrinking of proximate places of belonging, and one's own bodily ageing. Even when the perception of waning opportunities does not result in relocation, 'those who remain' are faced with physical obstructions and emotional distress that darken the prospect to all that constitutes ageing in place (Cocola-Gant 2023; Domínguez-Parraga, 2020).

The observed triggers of emotional insecurity around not seeing a future at home stand in sharp contrast with the city's efforts to make it a welcoming place for tourists. This makes the question of ageing in place in cities like Venice a deeply political one: the guise of healthy ageing becomes tangled with neoliberal (tourism-led) interests, resulting in "tacit forms of governmentality and biopolitical control that permeate discourses about health and activity" (Clotworthy 2020, 37). What follows, for those in this study, is that the benefits of active ageing such as physical and cognitive wellbeing, mental health, social health, and better sleep (Dogra et al. 2022) are under direct pressure at multiple spatial scales. While participants have known Venice as a natural environment to age actively, offering physical activity and a familiar social life at the doorstep, some now reconsider their perceptions about having a home and being at home in Venice, caused among others by the rising cost-of-living, the progressive invasion of tourism in the domestic sphere (shared entrances, staircases, corridors), and security concerns.

The embodied responses to the pervasive change in our study city occur in a slow yet hyper-mobilised environment and therefore have everything to do with its historical trajectories of physical infrastructure development and territorial decision-making (Sheller 2016, 2018). Its uneven mobilities come to a further expression when considering how the walkability of Venice, widely enjoyed by the annual millions of tourists, has turned the very dimensions on which it stands – safety, accessibility and 'pleasureability' – against its residents (Gatrell 2013; Gorrini and Bertini 2018). The psychological stress, unease with material interventions, and reduced affordability of essential services observed in this study show how a walking-dominated environment may hinder its own residents' walking practices. The frictions caused by the concentration of tourist flows in narrow *calli* or on bridges, the occupation of public squares by terraces, and the pollution caused by the motorised vehicles that mainly serve the tourism industry (water

taxis) turn Venice's "'therapeutical' and walkable landscape into an unhealthy and disabling environment for those depending on it on a quotidian basis.

These frictions, in addition, hint at the emergence of a form of mobility injustice that does not necessarily follows economic, cultural or class lines but involves a carefully (and possibly, biopolitically) inscribed reconfiguration and reimagination of the objects and networks that form the mundane spaces of a living city (Kristensen, Rudolf Lindberg, and Freudendal-Pedersen 2023). Several scholars have pointed to the role of discretionary walking mobility in later life as a way to stay connected to the city and to the community (Musselwhite 2017; Siren, Hjorthol, and Levin 2015), in this study as a matter of exercise, accessibility, and ability to experience urban aesthetic attributes. Indeed, the slow, open-air walking mobility system of Venice is positively valued as a source of socialisation and staying in shape. However, as Nicola's example illustrated, 'fast' walking is both an expression of healthy ageing and of dissent towards slower-walking tourists. The multi-layered nature of functional and discretionary walking, as seen in participants' performances, negotiations, and immobilisations that discriminate between bodily capabilities and capacities to cope with stress and tension, subsequently resonates with the recommendation of public health authorities about individual responsibility for well-being (Dorato 2020). The narrative of ageing actively by regular walking has been deeply interiorised by all the participants. By those standards, Venice's historical centre can be understood as a sort of ubiquitous public health infrastructure, though a contested one (Gorrini and Bertini 2018), resembling the modernist utopia of "the possibility of engaging in sports should be open to every inhabitant of the city. And it should take place at the very door of his dwelling" (Le Corbusier quoted in Dorato 2020, 88). Indeed, tourist mobilities' effects on the ability to walk and 'be well' erode older residents' agency to age in place, suggesting that, in this case, touristification is a transversal challenge that goes much beyond the social policy and community development approaches usually promoting active ageing (Dogra et al. 2022).

Access to water transport adds another layer to the material reconfiguration of affordability. We find a pervasive redefinition of the boundaries and moorings of private water transport to accommodate tourists' mass transportation (Dileep and Pagliara 2023; Quinn 2007; Van der Borg 2017). Boat ownership and navigation skills, deeply rooted in Venetian lifestyle, are thus intentionally marginalised by progressive measures against the use of private boats. As such, the city's policy to enable water mobility for tourists results in a form of *governmobility* (Bærenholdt 2013) by which the way in which Venetian residents resort to and experience water mobility – one of the many pleasurable affordances which historically justified a sense of pride of place and belonging – is progressively reconfigured. What remains then is the use of private boats to seek distance from the tourist crowds, rowing to the last quiet parts of the lagoon, offset against disappearing proximate wellbeing opportunities, or to offer a boat trip to the hospital on the mainland to compensate for the dwindling medical services in the HC. In addition, the use of 'hiding' places in streets and alleys away from the tourist grid, and in the lagoon (Davis and Marvin 2004), shows how the residents' residual mobilities are assembled in an undercurrent of alternative practices and leisurescapes away from the city's tourist spaces.

Such mobile negotiations come on top of the reimaginations of home and public spaces (Russo 2023) and mundane city routines (Salerno and Russo 2022). The notion of having become surrounded by strangers, either through direct encounters in staircases

and permeable domestic spaces, through perceptions of unsafety, or through indirect ruptures in social and mutual aid networks, makes ageing in place an 'out of place' activity. To an extent, long-term living in Venice, walking and dwelling in its streets and waterways is thus upheld as a choice for resistance to urban change in the face of more age-friendly relocation options (Light and Brown 2020). The nature of walking, both shaped by and shaping the environmental characteristics of the neighbourhood (Gatrell 2013), as well as the historical and cultural value of water transport (Quinn 2007; Van der Borg 2017) seems to be prone to deepening mobility-related inequalities into (many) other life domains.

Beyond the ageing domain, an erosion is observed of the material foundations for the everyday movement of humans, goods and services. The subtext of the city as a tourist infrastructure, also encompassing other material facilities such as hotels and other accommodations, shops, information points, and digital access tools leads to the forma-tion of a "destination infrastructure" (Fayos-Solà and Cooper 2019, 12) in which there is no place for inhabitants who maintain an embodied relation with city, even if they stay there for the privilege of its slow mobility environment. This slowness now immobilises resident populations, in this paper demonstrated by 1) reconfigurations to walking infrastructures through physical accessibility measures that do not necessarily cater to (older) residents' needs; 2) the demise of the discretionary values of walking; 3) the extension of these issues to water transport, crucial in Venice's context, and amplified by the dilution of its urban services; and 4) the related loss of proximity functions and changing social fabric in the HC. In the case of Venice, it is particularly interesting how leisure and place consump-tion stands on place-based amenities that are usually part of everyday city life – e.g. arts, entertainment, shopping, and food – but are now turned into sites of tourist activity. Such multiplicity of tourist mobilities and place consumption, then, resembles Novy's (2018) 'pentagon' of overlapping mobility flows and shifting cultural notions in which cherished characteristics of a place variously transform into tourist infrastructure, erode or disap-pear. Similarly, it is striking that a city once known for its cosmopolitan resident popula-tion and relying on deeply ingrained cultural distinctness has turned to the uniformity of mass tourism, in our case culminating in the estrangement of residents from the fixity and safety of their homely spaces as well as of their dynamic everyday mobility environments.

5. Conclusions

The diverse negotiations of mobility infrastructure in the case of Venice reflect an intricate entanglement of 'hypermobility' propelled by global tourism flows, slow mobilities that pervade the city, and induced immobilisations for local older residents. The touristification of infrastructure is found to be dynamic, constantly making more inroads on what long-term residents consider local/innate to the city: everyday activities, mobilities by foot and boat, urban services and amenities, their socio-spatial connections, and even their own home spaces. Conversely, our exploration shows how residents' everyday mobilities – from domestic spaces to fulfilling daily errands – may have become part of the city's tourist infrastructure, as their domestic spaces – stretching out of the house proper – are trodden by and adapted to the needs of unfamiliar visitors. Long-term older residents are thus faced with a choice to cope with these intrusions or to leave the city in which they have invested affective and economic resources over the course of a lifetime.

While population ageing often has negative connotations for urban resilience and socio-economic development, it is a societal reality that will intensify in cities. To understand its implications for the changing dimensions of tourist infrastructure, we have mobilised the epistemological frames of overtourism and ageing studies, moving away from a merely material and technology-driven orientation on infrastructures, towards a socio-technical construct that involves the variegating bodily capacities to use, perceive and adapt to their changes and dis/enable them as daily living spaces. The dwindling capacities to both ageing in place and walking in the city are subject to erosions that have a deeply ingrained political nature: priorities are with securing tourists' pleasureability rather than guaranteeing conditions of affordability for the declining stable population. Disinvestment in reproductive services (groceries, houseware, health services, places supporting wellbeing) further discerns a politics of mobilities which foregrounds mobility as an empowering bodily asset that traditionally privileges those who walk furthest, fastest, or most often (Cresswell, 2010) or, in our case, who stay shortest (Salerno and Russo 2022). (Older) residents' walking practices then remain as fictitious mobility that masks a condition of immobility and stuckness and as active form of dwelling in the city, enacted in the open public spaces of the city by the intimate objects that are the ageing bodies of Venice's older residents.

The findings of this paper offer an understanding of the sensory and psychological effects of these combined impacts through the practice of walking itself. In particular, the paradoxical imbalance between, on the one hand, the city's depopulation and ageing and, on the other, the reduced mobility opportunities for older people, both produced and shaped by tourism excesses, underline the urgency for a more comprehensive understanding of the consequences of urban change trends, including touristification, in a time of urban population ageing. This may well be a call for attention to resilience planning to, for instance, address the need to maintain public services that support ageing in place, the taming of the housing pressures and hindrances caused by reconversion to the short-term rental market, and a revision of conservationist policies in relation to accessibility infrastructure.

From a methodological point of view, walking interviews were a powerful tool to track the motivations, negotiations, and longings of those choosing to "live with" tourism (Russo and Salerno 2023), allowing a specific focus on ageing bodies and perceptions on the later stages of the life course. Following McDowell (2010, 161), "through interviews we are often searching for the difference that place makes", while "in interpretation we test these particularities against more general theoretical explanations". Findings about not being able to flee, entanglement with social and material belongings in Venice HC, about the tourist penetration of everyday spaces and about walking as a form of dwelling amidst an estranging environment were obtained by 'walking the walks' that would go unseen under the hegemonic slowness of tourist mobilities. In that sense, it has proved to be a useful to addition to the emerging body of tourism scholarship that applies mobile methods (Brandajs and Russo 2019; Rabbiosi 2021; Sánchez-Ledesma et al. 2020). Inevitably, this method excluded the participation of the more 'invisible' older adults, who could not count on some degree of (assisted) movement. This was partly mitigated by retrieving secondary information from other participants, through which we obtained a picture of their own mobility prospects and learned about collective ageing experiences in an urban structure in which physical frailty may quickly escalate to home confinement. Despite this solution, further research could explore the more static elements of living with urban change,

ranging from the ageing-in-place experiences of physically restricted resident populations to the less observable exclusions of more immobile populations in urban change processes, and engage with longer-term ethnographies of living with tourism for social groups that rely very much on place-based qualities (alike Quinn 2007), possibly accompanied by creative methods such as mental mapping. Similar potential is attributed to using an intersectional lens in tourism studies, aimed at detecting gendered patterns of difference in the combined exclusionary effects of gender, age, and bodily ability in the lived and perceived (im)mobilisations of later life (e.g. Twigg 2004).

More generally, comparative research may be useful to study residents' mobility experiences in different tourist-heavy cities and provide broader insight into the challenges of urban tourism, also addressing contextual dynamics such as population change, modal shifts, sustainable mobility policies, etc. (Den Hoed and Russo 2024). Likewise, new hindrances in later life mobility may be placed more explicitly into contemporary urban studies, a process started by Mahmood et al. (2012) and Siren, Hjorthol, and Levin (2015), among others. This is particularly important given the often-homogeneous approach to 'the' older population, the diverse trajectories and biographies in which bodily ageing unfolds, and the given the value of mobilising older adults' know-how and expertise to negotiate mobility and ageing collectively (Buffel 2019).

Note

1. The gateway square of Venice, accessed through a land bridge from the mainland is the last place accessible by cars when entering the city. Cars are prohibited in the HC and the area around Piazzale Roma is stacked with parking garages, that are nevertheless very expensive and insufficient to cater for the demands of residents (c.f. Giordano (2025) in this issue).

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