

RA

restauro archeologico

Conoscenza, conservazione e valorizzazione
del patrimonio architettonico
Rivista del Dipartimento di Architettura
dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze

Knowledge, preservation and enhancement
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About management,
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The Management of the World Heritage Site “Venice and its Lagoon”: state of the art and new challenges

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Abstract

This paper aims to bring the perspective of the manager coordinating the technical activities of the World Heritage property “Venice and its Lagoon” and of the scientific researchers directly involved in providing support for its protection. Both have the task of integrating UNESCO’s Guidelines and approaches into daily practices and of implementing the Recommendations of the World Heritage Committee, so that they can be incorporated and concretely applied by competent authorities, stakeholders and civil society to different levels of the decision-making process. The paper will focus on state of the art and new challenges facing the World Heritage property management. It will also share some insights on the main opportunities offered by updating the Management Plan and by fostering scientific research and in-depth analysis to address the issues related to the property’s state of conservation that support the decision-making process (conservation of heritage assets, the pressure of tourism, large ships, wave propagation, protecting the city from high tides, depopulation, etc.).

Keywords

Venice, World Heritage management, Architectural preservation, Climate Change, Sustainability.

State of the art

“Venice and its Lagoon” was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1987, meeting all six cultural criteria for the uniqueness of its cultural and values, consisting of a historical, archaeological, urban, artistic heritage and exceptional cultural traditions, integrated into an outstanding environmental, natural and landscape context. This means an enormous responsibility for the management of the property as these criteria cover a complex system of values: tangible and intangible, cultural, natural, ecological, social, economic.

The property extends for more than 70,000 hectares, including the territories of 9 municipalities facing the lagoon¹.

Its complexity, determined by the large territorial scale and by the numerous transformation processes underway represents an emblematic case in the national and international panorama. This complexity is also evident from the point of view of the governance due to the multiplicity of the actors involved. There are twenty authorities with direct competence on the protection and management of heritage assets within the Steering Committee, chaired by the Municipality of Venice in the role of coordinating the activities related to the Management Plan and to the state of conservation of the Site, in synergy with the Ministry of Culture.



Fig. 1 View of Venice, by F. Trovò, 2022

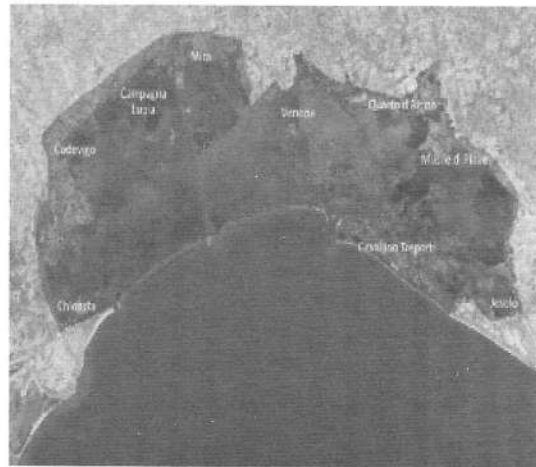


Fig. 2 The property "Venice and its Lagoon", map elaborated by the City of Venice

The management experience of "Venice and its Lagoon" is based on a M.o.U. signed in 2007 by the bodies of the Steering Committee following Law no. 77 of 20 February 2006¹². A first Management Plan, in force from 2012 to 2018, was drawn up and approved through the involvement of all the responsible authorities and other stakeholders in a series of thematic round tables held in 2010 through participatory processes aimed at the construction and sharing of a common vision for the protection of the property³. Over the years, the authorities involved in the management of the Site have committed themselves, according to their own responsibilities, to drawing up reflections, guidelines, and actions coherent with the spirit of the Management Plan, often supported by funding provided by the Law no. 77/2006, ensuring a deeper knowledge of the Site's issues and laying the foundations for developing concrete measures that can positively affect the protection of the Site. In particular two research steps were promoted in this field by the Municipality of Venice, the Superintendency of Venice and the Polytechnic of Milan⁴, in which the Site's macro-emergencies identified by the Management Plan were analyzed using innovative tools, clearing the field from preconceived notions and highlighting areas for intervention and targeted action. For example, the drafting of indications, later partially transposed into the Administration's sectoral regulations that subsequently became binding, was enabled by in-depth studies involving many relevant authorities on the occupancy of urban public property for outdoor seating and trade stalls, by accurate analysis of overlapping tourist flows, and by attention paid to collateral phenomena. Similarly, in relation to historic buildings, binding regulations are crucially needed to limit the proliferation of conspicuous interventions of renovation that have nothing to do with preservation, but rather are attributable to a mere quest for decorum, being far removed from the practices of integration and minimal repair, and therefore incapable of pursuing the preservation of character together with the relative material and stratigraphic readability and comprehension. It is therefore necessary to establish some fixed points in the treatment of historical building components. Significant in this sense is the case of outdoor wall plaster⁵: under the initiative of the local Superintendency, it was possible to set down some precise indications in the 2019 Building Regulations of the Municipality of Venice, such as prohibiting the use of concrete-based materials, obligation to compensate with mortar and other materials similar to the pre-existing ones and in keeping consistent with the nature of the architectural exteriors, as well

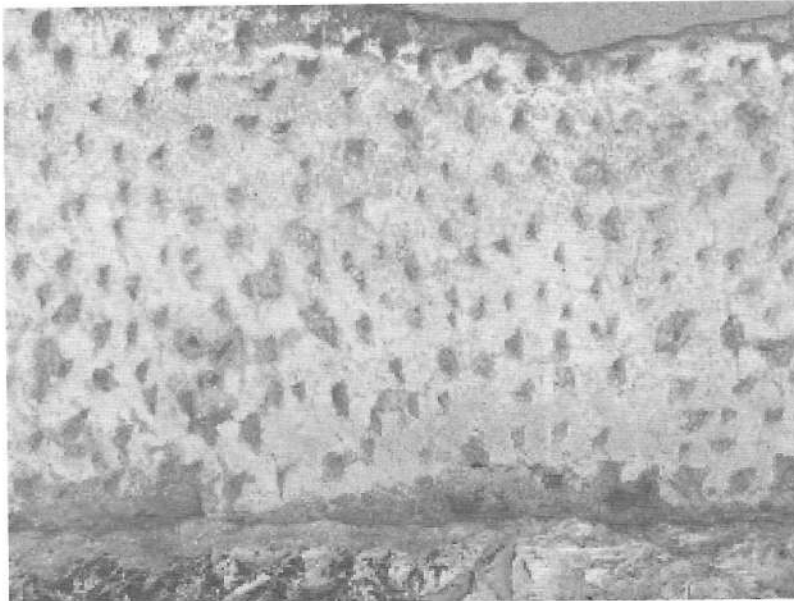


Fig. 3 Detail of historic plaster made by cocchiopesto and marmorino, by F. Trovò, 2022

as other effective indications on the thickness of additions, on relations with stone cornices and other aspects of workmanship. Furthermore, the so-called *Abaco degli Interventi*, a document drafted by the Municipality of Venice together with the local Superintendency, establishes that the replacement of a preserved historical plaster requires a landscaping authorization not only whenever the color is modified, but also - a very important innovation - when there is a change in materials. This discourages demolitions, because the colour can be reproduced easily even on new layers.

The set of indications provided by the Management Plans for World Heritage properties may characteristically be associated with soft laws, such as Guidelines, Best Practices, that do not possess compulsory legal value. Whenever it has been possible to translate the body of knowledge deriving from studies and research into binding norms, we can say that the desired process in the Management Plan has been fulfilled and that the objectives of preservation and good management have been achieved⁶.

Perspectives and future challenges

While the Management Plan 2012-2018 was being implemented, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (W.H.C.) and its Advisory bodies have monitored the state of conservation of the property for pressures related to tourism, depopulation phenomena, dramatic climate change effects and several other environmental issues. The passage of large ships in the San Marco Basin and Giudecca Canal has taken on particular importance, together with the emergence of some infrastructure and development projects with potential impacts on the Site's Outstanding Universal Value. Since 2014, UNESCO has been in constant relations with Italy to report on the situation in Venice and its Lagoon and on the necessary safeguarding measures to be put in place. While the first



Fig. 4 View of the Venice lagoon, San Lio Piccolo, by Municipality of Cavallino Treporti

Decisions issued by the W.H.C., such as the one adopted at the Doha session on 7 July 2014, supported in particular by the ICOMOS Technical Review on the Management Plan (February 2014), concern Infrastructure and Tourism, subsequent Decisions reflect a more urgent tone and seriously consider inscribing Venice and its Lagoon on the Danger List (see Decisions 40.COM.7B.52/2016, 41COM.7B.48/2017, 43COM.7B.86/2019). The threat of a potential inscription of the Site on the Danger List has forced a strong reaction from authorities at national and local level. Numerous programs and actions have been started to meet the requirements established within the Decisions that address critical aspects and weaknesses encountered as illustrated in the State of conservation reports drafted by the State Party. Banning cruise ships from sailing in front of St. Mark's and along the Giudecca Canal, taking effect on 1 August 2021, was recommended by UNESCO since 2014 (see Decision 38 COM.7B.27/2014, Recommendation No. 7), largely contributing to keep the property on the World Heritage List. However, the attention of international organizations remains paramount. Decision 44.COM.7B.50 adopted by the W.H.C. in July 2021 contains in fact a long and demanding series of obligations relating to the safeguarding measures that will be verified in 2023 and which are currently addressed through a significant cooperation process among relevant institutions, also in the updating of the Management Plan. Crucial challenges have to be faced to guarantee the protection of Venice and its Lagoon both in its social and cultural survival, threatened by phenomena triggered by mass tourism, and in its physical survival, endangered by rising sea levels related to climate change. A city, to be defined as such, must have a solid core of permanent residents. Venice has a plurality of functions, and among these permanent residence plays a fundamental role in preserving its identity. This is a matter of absolute priority for historic cities and UNESCO World Heritage sites, that have for many years witnessed an exponential growth in tourism with a corresponding impoverishment in their residential function, jeopardizing the integrity, both of its physical structures, and its socioeconomic fabric. Climate change

is one of the greatest challenges of our present time, even more so for Venice and its Lagoon, among the World Heritage sites most threatened by sea level rise and by processes of subsidence. These phenomena all interact with the effects of other threats, such as large-scale infrastructure, urbanization, tourism pressure, and others. Of fundamental importance for heritage conservation are also the energy efficiency of historic buildings and the need for innovative non-invasive renewable energy strategies. All such elements have repercussions on the physical integrity and authenticity of Venice and its Lagoon; the Management Plan must therefore take care of these aspects in close collaboration with relevant bodies such as the Superintendencies. The concerns highlighted by international bodies have thus laid down the foundations for starting an incisive and interdisciplinary work on the effective integration of W.H.C. recommendations within the Management Plan and the legal instruments under review - such as the Special Law for Venice (*Legge speciale per Venezia*) - as well as within other important programs and interventions for the protection and safeguarding of Venice and its Lagoon.

Approximately 14 years passed since 2007, when the work on the Management Plan started. Over the years we experienced and benefitted from the evolution of concepts and approaches in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention⁷, reflecting the changes in our society, for example the need for more inclusive approaches, for integrating conservation in urban development, and the paradigm shift of integrating conservation of World Heritage with sustainable development (see Historical Urban Landscape Approach/2011, UNESCO, Policy Document for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention)⁸. While on one hand work carried out over the years to respond to the numerous recommendations of the W.H.C. Advisory bodies' missions has provided from a technical point of view an opportunity to strengthen skills and awareness within the Sites' Steering Committee, on the other, changes of leadership at the political level in the various competent bodies have required time and resources to fully steer policies and actions in the direction of properly managing the property in compliance with the UNESCO'S Operational Guidelines and approaches.

Conclusions

It is not enough for the efforts undertaken during the years to be recognized: they must be further strengthened in all relevant bodies, institutions, communities and among all the stakeholders, aware of the significance of UNESCO's designation "Venice and its Lagoon" as an opportunity and of what it entails as a commitment for the territory as a whole. The pride of this prestigious designation must be accompanied by a great sense of responsibility linked to the awareness of living, visiting and intervening in a territorial context that is unique in the world, so much so that it represents a heritage shared by all humanity.

It is not a short path, nor is it without obstacles, given the various problematic aspects that understandably have gradually come to our attention, especially with regard to the critical aspects highlighted in the management of such a multifaceted context, as well as to the goals and actions to undertake as a commitment for future developments. It is not merely a question of building a management process by signing formal agreements among all the subjects responsible for the property's protection and enhancement. It is also essential to build proper capacities in the way the territory is to be planned and decisions implemented to have a significant impact in such a delicate, complex and dynamic context like Venice and its Lagoon in order to implement policies and actions to

balance conservation and development and to put in place an effective governance of the territory involving all stakeholder and civil society. We are confident that addressing the decision-making process with passionate commitment, daily work, adequate professional skills, scientific knowledge, with everyone's contribution, we will be able to achieve the goal of protecting Venice and its Lagoon and of passing it on to future generations, honoring the commitment to the international community to give Venice a future of sustainability in line with the principles of the World Heritage Convention.

¹ Cfr UNESCO, *Venice and its Lagoon SoC documents* - <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/394>; <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/394/documents/> - last visit 11 July 2022

² Cfr Law no. 77 of 20 February 2006 *Special protection and use of Italian sites of cultural, landscape and environmental interest, included in the "World Heritage List", placed under the protection of UNESCO* - https://storico.beniculturali.it/mibac/multimedia/MiBAC/documents/1524743501791_L77_aggiornamento_17.pdf

³ Cfr KATIA BASILI, GIORGIO DE VETTOR, (edt.) *Il Piano di Gestione 2012-2018 Sito "Venezia e la sua Laguna" Patrimonio Mondiale*, Venice, Ed. 3b press, Venezia 2014 - Cfr http://www.veniceandlagoon.net/web/piano_di_gestione/documenti/ - last visit 11 July 2022

⁴ Cfr PAOLO GASPAROLI, FRANCESCO TROVO', *Fragile Venice – Processes of wear on the urban system and possible mitigations*, Firenze, Altralinea, 2014 PAOLO GASPAROLI, FABIANA PIANEZZE, FRANCESCO TROVO', *Resilient Venice – Mitigation and monitoring measures to manage change*, Firenze, Altralinea, 2020

⁵ Cfr UNESCO, *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL)*, 2011 <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/activities/documents/activity-638-98.pdf>

⁶ Cfr UNESCO, *The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/> - last visit 11 July 2022

⁷ Cfr UNESCO, *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, 1972. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext>; 5 Strategic Goals of the World heritage Convention <https://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/> - last visit 11 July 2022

⁸ UNESCO, *Policy Document for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention*, 2015. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/sustainabledevelopment/> - last visit 11 July 2022