

*versione italiana*

While the maneuvering for political position for the upcoming elections in Venice in 2020 is fully underway, one thing seems certain so far: the accelerated pressure for the use of Marghera as an alternative approach for the Grandi Navi, after the two barely avoided disasters in just thirty days along the route to San Marco. The subject takes on an emblematic and selective value because it displays, better than any other issue, the point of convergence between foreign and local interests in Venice, who with the Brugnarò administration have shifted the center of gravity of Venetian politics regarding the tourist economy in a way that has never happened before.

We are talking about the circuit of “tourism multinationals - local infrastructure - unlimited growth of arrivals”, an international trend that reaches extremes in Venice.

The idea is: use the current administrative advantage to push the tourism phenomenon to a point of no return, and consolidate the social block created by these interests, thus guaranteeing the reproduction of consensus for the time needed to complete the program.

It is a raid, inspired in for the short-term by a Mayor who refuses to consider the consequences which others are instead left to confront.

#### Tourism to excess

But this is not an isolated design. Zaia's Veneto is knowingly banking on it too, having digested the fact that the growing difficulties in the region's traditional manufacturing economy, bereft of a real industrial policy, can be compensated for by the growth in the tourism economy - the first region in Italy - positioning the region in the global market as “The land of Venice”, thus projecting a free brand for guaranteed success upon the entire region.

From here the work of renewing the image of a Veneto that aims to join the two UNESCO sites of Venice and the Dolomites with the insertion of the Prosecco site in between. This was approved at Baku on the same day that UNESCO abandoned its protection of the Lagoon after over thirty years, under pressure from the lobbies of the Grandi Navi who are in the lagoon now.

This is a kind of genetic mutation of UNESCO, which now works for political reasons to grant its own brand to the sites who apply in support of a local product.

Here is Zaia's interest, as always unrelated to events in the lagoon, in a cruise ship home port from which future shares of “seafarers” can be sent towards the lands of prosecco and the peaks of the Dolomites.

For years the mountain tourism market has dreamed of connecting with the overtourism in Venice, offering an alternative trip to the Dolomites. Now with the awarding of the 2026 Olympics, obtained thanks to an alliance with Milan, the region is now considering building new

infrastructure in the direction of the transalpine outlet towards the North.



### The Lagoon and Infrastructure

Infrastructure and tourism: a critical partnership for supporting the flow of a growing quantity of international visitors.

But the two large infrastructure systems for Venice and Veneto, the port and the airport, the gateways of access for international tourism, directly interact with the equilibrium of the environmental system of the Venetian lagoon. To this day there is still no general plan for managing the lagoon's ecosystems - water, soil and air - a mandatory requirement that UNESCO, after years, decided to ignore at Baku, going against its own words, and undermining its own credibility as an entity that works *super partes* in the name of public interests.

On one side, the PRG of the commercial industrial port that dates to 1965, an era of industrial expansion and the related *canale dei petroli*, today must work out a repositioning in the circuit of intercontinental logistics, discounting the 12 meter limits of nautical accessibility that burden the

lagoon basin, as well as the positions of Mose, of which it is not known when, how, or if it will work, with the prospect of growing sea levels within a few decades.

On the other side is the cruise ship industry which is lined up to undermine the commercial role of the docks at Marghera, making its own contribution to the de-industrialization of the Venetian economy, with the support of the local Confindustria which has inherited a mandate and a name to which it has not replied with industrial action.

However, the suggestion of an historic step with the conversion of the Venetian industrial port to one for passengers raises many more unknowns than you think, all to be resolved under pressure from the cruise lobby and its local representatives.

In the short run, the coexistence of passengers and goods along a narrow one-way canal in order to reach the port at Marghera represents an unacceptable penalization of the industrial and commercial economy of the port. In the long run, the project to double the size of the Canale dei petroli will instead irreversibly compromise the hydraulic equilibrium of the central lagoon, and with that the entire lagoon ecosystem. This is something about which many feign ignorance, interestingly enough along with all the environmental legislation which since 1973 has required care of the lagoon.

At the opposite side there is the airport, the other large infrastructure, which appears to be well established in the circuit of strong expansion of international flights, with the particular task of attracting crowds from the Asian markets. Precisely due to its business success the airport now tends to behave like an autonomous and self-referential entity, a sort of citadel unto itself on the Venetian periphery that has decided to play its own game.

There are two relevant projects: the connection of the train station to the regional network, and the development of a second track at the margins of the lagoon to support a doubling of the tourist capacity in the long term.

The first is a real opportunity for a rail connection to the routes of Treviso and Ronchi dei Legionari, creating an integrated system of airports in the Northeast. However, regarding the arrival of trains at Marco Polo, there has been suggestion made of an underground route - the so-called loop - being pursued by Save even though the plan carries serious geological unknowns and higher costs that would seem to be preparation for a subsequent branch under the lagoon for Venice. It's that undying idea of modern underwater transportation, after which the recent proposal for a cable car system across the lagoon aroused sincere incredulity and no small amount of mockery.



### Political choices and election scenarios

Once again the impact of infrastructure on the lagoon ends up defining political positions with respect to the underlying strategies between development model and gathering electoral consensus.

The fact that it is the leaders of the tourist economy who are dictating the terms of the political debate reveals the distortions and the serious limits of the current administrative situation in Venice. The administration has established a dialog about the future of the city with these interlocutors, grounding it in a vision that is subordinate to foreign interests, as if Venice did not have a traditional heritage of environmental and cultural resources that are being deliberately trivialized and humiliated by the tourism monoculture.

The question of the ports is far more urgent, however, than that of the airport.

The first has its roots in the economic and social fabric of the city, as is logical with a thousand years of port history behind it, but with a difference in sensibility between residents of the lagoon - one third - and residents of the mainland - two thirds - that is based precisely on the issue of the

lagoon. For one it means the survival of the lagoon's habitats, for the others it is a constraint on the expansion of industry based on the stereotypical image of Venetian tourism.

From here comes the push to convert the entire lagoon economy to the domain of cruise ships, even though they represent a minority voice in the whole maritime economy of Venice, and in the face of their devastating impact on the lagoon environment.

On the one hand, therefore, is a plan for the short term homogenization of the entire Venetian economy to tourism - cruise ships in the lagoon, lodgings in the cities, real estate revenues concentrated and widespread, flattening of the labor market - inspired by the outgoing Brugnaro administration's idea of the city as showcase; on the other hand, there is a civic strategy for Venice that pursues the European model of the sustainable city, capable of joining environment, society and economy as the legacy of a centuries-long history to be updated and joined with new strength.

Less urgent, instead, is the issue of the airport, despite its environmental impact.

There are two reasons. On the one hand, its marginal position with respect to the urban settlements, due to its location on the edge of the lagoon, where it heavily impacts only a fringe of the city. On the other hand, the fact that it brings jobs to a vast metropolitan hinterland that has limited interest in Venetian politics.

Today, more than in the past, the challenge of modernity for Venice is measured in the relationship between legitimate public interests pressing on the capital city with the cross-section of local interests that want representation and lasting prospects for work.

Facing this, Venetian politics presents a clear alternative between the current short-term mercantilism of the Brugnaro administration and the building of a conscious sustainability for the long-term.



*The photographs are taken from the Twitter account @LuigiBrugnaro and they show the arrival of a cruise ship at Marghera, with the Mayor on board for the final approach from Malamocco until arrival, on the day of the festival of Redentore, during which the Grandi Navi are not allowed to pass through the canale della Giudecca and in front of San Marco.*

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Translated by Paul M. Rosenberg for **Campaign For A Living Venice**