

Versione italiana

There is a wonderful and tragic sound of silence in Venice, in these days of the Coronavirus; a sound which, at least for our generations, has never been heard. But there's another sound of silence, just as tragic and hardly wonderful: that of the mayor of Venice, Luigi Brugnaro who, unlike his other first citizen colleagues, has not been heard from for days.

After his statements in front of the microphones of journalists who asked him, on Sunday, February 23, why he had not suspended Carnevale, to which the response was that of guaranteeing public order and avoiding a mass exodus (something which would not have been a concern if the gatherings had been suspended on Saturday and not Sunday); after the ranting exhibition, singing in the area around his home, where along with his wife he sang an apotropaic tune against the contra virus; after the absolutely "innovative" idea of displaying children's drawings about the virus and their hopes on the windows and terraces of the city; after some advertising video about cleaning the streets and public transportation quote, there has been nothing, at least when it comes to communication about the emergency to the citizens.

Only two videos: one dated March 13, shot with a cell phone inside the church of the Madonna della Salute where the mayor, with a large tricolor sash, recites a prayer entrusting the city to the Virgin. Well intended, certainly, and absolutely not to be criticized, if it wasn't for the fact that a mayor, apart from the intercession, hoped for by all, of the Madonna, also should be entrusted with communicating concrete actions that must be put in place to eradicate dangerous epidemic. And maybe the prayers were enough...

Luigi Brugnaro

The only other video, at least to our knowledge, is from March 15. It was filmed at the mayor's home, where, amused and laughing, he reassures us that he is not sick as some would have it, and suspects that "perhaps some would hope for that", says he is confident and to calmly remain at home to play an instrument, if you're fortunate enough to know how to do it.

Since then, only members of the Brungaro Administration have spoken: on March 17, the Welfare Commissioner, the young Simone Venturini, who sends a greeting to the residents of the Municipality Housing Communities from his office in Mestre. While mistreating a ballpoint pen and pencil, he returns to the idea of the drawings and projects that young residents could do in these peculiar days. The drawings could then be displayed in various offices of the municipality of Venice.

Simone Venturini

And then there is the communications masterpiece par excellence: the video which the

Commissioner of Transportation, Renato Boraso, publishes from home. In a domestic context, with an antique covered by the scarf which the Dalai Lama gave to Boraso during his visit to Venice in 2009 in the background; a young boy sits next to him in embarrassed silence, displaying a drawing with the writing "it will be okay", a slightly impatient puppy and a statue of the Madonna at the center of the scene, resting on the ground like a garden dwarf.

Supported this scenery, Boraso launches an appeal to the "dear fellow citizens of Venice and of Mestre", trying to instill confidence and courage, because Venice, he says, has over the years overcome even worse (for example the plague). And then there is a prayer to the Madonna (with much caressing and support on the head of the statue), and the thanks to everyone who is working, not forgetting however the scarf from the Dalai Lama, which he hopes brings great fortune to the city. And he finishes with the electoral motto of the mayor "Ghea podemo far" (we can do it).

We can leave it to the mass-media analysts to interpret the scenery; the symbols, pajamas, suits and slippers, puppies, Madonnas and scarves. We are interested in making a simple comparison: between the communication of other mayors and that which, in this dramatic moment, has been offered by the city of Venice. For example, and remaining only in our region, we can look at the communications from the mayor of Belluno, Jacopo Masato, who gives an almost daily rundown of the coronavirus situation in his city, offering useful advice to the citizens. And he does this from his office at the municipality, with the seriousness and official notice required of the responsibility.

Jacopo Massaro

Or the strong appeals from the mayor of Treviso, Mario Conte, who on Sunday forcefully rebuked the too many citizens who, ignoring the prohibitions, continue to be found walking along the Sile and in gathering places.

Mario Conte

Not to mention the mayors of the small communities, truly in situations of extreme difficulty, who always present themselves to the citizens with a tone appropriate to the moment and with calls to responsibility, and not a generic "stay calm and everything will be okay" - something which everyone, obviously, hopes for, and which the mayor does not have to say; or at least he should not say only that...

Venice, at this moment, like other cities, feels alone and desperate, faced with a never before seen dramatic situation. The situation is aggravated, at least in the historic city, by its specific conditions: a high population of older people, not all self-sufficient; the few local stores and small supermarkets, which do not easily permit adopting the security criteria that have been imposed;

the economy is on the ground, due to the nefarious preference for the tourism monoculture, which this virus managed to destroy in 15 days. In short, this is an extremely serious drama which the city and its inhabitants are living through, for now sedately and in silence.

So the question suddenly comes to us, regarding the absence of communication of the normally talkative mayor. Why leave the niche of emergency communication to the citizens empty or delegated, we don't know if willingly or not, to his commissioners? To be a good commander-in-chief, history teaches us, it's essential to give correct and timely information (just as I write, the mayor of Treviso is posting the locations of stores that do home delivery of goods on his Facebook profile), instill trust, always be on the field with the presence, the voice, and the authority called for by the duty.

This is what Governor Zaia teaches, who has been working tirelessly at organization and communication, and is cited as a national example of good governance. In the end, that is what Venice's citizens, who increasingly feel that they are without an authoritative and present leader, are lacking. For now, and in the hope that something changes, we can only wait: that the mayor's silence will finally be broken, to say something useful and sensible to the citizens of Venice, Italy and the world.

Translated by Paul M. Rosenberg for [Campaign For A Living Venice](#)