

**Versione italiana**

For the third consecutive vote in five years, after Baku, Fuzhou and Riyadh, the meeting of the twenty-one members of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (WHC) has decided to deny and overturn the opinions issued by the technical bodies on the state of the site “Venice and its Lagoon”. This tells us that the problem is not the quality of the investigation but the nature of UNESCO itself.

With respect to its original mission UNESCO has now transformed into a tourism marketing tool, which in the eyes of the global tourism industry and the local administrations directly involved has become a source of income much more than of protection.

And once again, Venice plays the role of symbol and victim of this clearly unintended outcome. The input of tourism trade policy, with its international market of favors, a typically political specialty, is imposed on the “cultural” bureaucracies of the national delegations entrusted with the role of judges at the UNESCO meetings every two years. In essence, bartering between revenue and protection.

At Riyadh 2023 the remarks about Venice were repeated, in this case concerning the total laissez faire of tourism policy, and the Japanese member of the committee took it upon himself to propose to the entire assembly the rejection *in toto* of the UNESCO technical investigation, blocking any contradiction present. The assembly approved this unanimously, just before lunch. The technique of consummate political professionals! And here lies the weak point of the procedure.



But it's not over. Only twenty-four hours after the assembly's vote in Riyadh an unprecedented document took shape which, with UNESCO's investigatory language, formalizes, summarizes and discloses the reasons for such a rush, directly adoption precisely the arguments that the administration in Venice put forward in its own favor, transforming them into prescriptions. In practice, it is a self-assigned remedial exam with a deadline of December 1, 2024. Exactly at the conclusion of the period of tourism experimentation hastily adopted by the Venice City Council just two days before Riyadh, a measure conceived fully six years after the announcement of that experiment. Farce is added to the weakness.

These measures aimed at containing tourism, which have sat unused since 2017, will thus be tested in 2024, at the end of which we can now expect the self-certification of their success. In practice it's a local emergency management plan enacted and transferred to the national tables, committed to guaranteeing the success of the announcement of a simple intention. A topic which, in and outside the city, has gathered a vast and detailed area of political, cultural, technical and administrative dissent, starting with the very idea of placing a tourist toll ring all around Venice. A novelty in Europe and in the world, that is in fact unmanageable.



The euphoric cheering with which the Venice municipal administration welcomed the decision in Riyadh can in fact only be explained by the fear that an international body could interfere in Venetian affairs, in view of the possible repercussions on local consensus. A sort of “masters in our house”.

The narrative in vogue hinges on the triumphalism of unlimited tourism growth of all four forms that fuel the Venetian tourism business.

That of the hotel offering in Venice and Mestre and the short-term Airbnb type rentals which control a total of 80,000 beds throughout the city, followed by the growing “day-tripper” tourism, and finally the evening and nocturnal metropolitan alcohol tours that enliven nights in Venice. Thirty million visitors annually, equal to an average of eighty thousand per day, which can be divided between peaks of one hundred thousand and a milder sixty, for a total of over six hundred visitors per year for every remaining inhabitant of the historic city, which is losing its residents in proportion to the growth of tourism.

The social bloc that has consolidated around tourism represents the actual target that the administration intends to reassure in the swing of promises between urban livability and guaranteed redistribution of low wages and high incomes.

The fact remains that beyond some scathing judgements which have emerged in the city regarding the usefulness of UNESCO and its modus operandi, UNESCO's impact in the city is still a biannual event to be measured against because it is one of the indicators of the official image that the city projects in the world, which the city cannot avoid.



If the questions of MOSE and cruise ships can essentially be taken by outside observers as “mission accomplished”, this is not the case with tourism, which constitutes a process in evolution, a direct expression of the market that the part of the city that benefits from it considers desirable as the only source of the local economy. Likewise in parallel the political party that draws consensus and legitimization from the exercise of the absolute dominant tourism liberalism is determined to avoid considering all the consequences of its management of the city.

However, there is no doubt that the Venetian community will soon have to reckon with the tourism overload that is oppressing it, regardless of all the entry fees and tax alchemies devised so far by the current council and the “homework” that it has declared will be completed by December 2024. This tourism absolutely must be regulated, given that the tools, the ideas and the will to do so all exist. The challenge has been launched, and it concerns the whole city. The proposal just voted on by the current majority clearly has the dilatory intent of reaching the next electoral deadline with

the complacent laxity of an entire decade of overtourism behind it from which to draw further votes and support.

However, it will no longer be possible to circumscribe or conceal the damage produced from the eyes of Venetians and the world, and procedural tricks or political plots will no longer be enough to mask it.

Translated by [Paul Rosenberg](#)