

Versione italiana

It was the second AperiVida of the year, after the one in June concerning outdoor restaurant seating and public space. During this one in September we discussed the very survival of Venetians in Venice. We started with the "birthday of la Vida". Six years ago, the citizens reopened the Old Anatomy Theater, "la Vida", which for six months was a "city house", frequented and looked after twenty-four hours a day.

Debates, presentations of books and poetry, choruses, theater and concerts in the campo (strictly ended at 9 PM in order to not disturb the neighborhood), a playroom for kids, lunches and dinners; it was a place for love, daily life and exchanges among the inhabitants (who were not only residents of the area, but those who lived in the space and took care of it, even taking turns for the nighttime watch...).

Those six months ended on March 5, 2018, with the voting closed for the political election of March 4. About a hundred police, carabinieri and financial police in riot gear invaded the campo to rout the "occupiers".

For six years since it has returned to the darkness that was there before, illuminated for a year by an exterior tent and then by the AperiVida, which recall the passage from life animated by those who live in the city to the death of urban relations, well symbolized by the attitude of the most recent municipal administrations.

The absence of public policy has combined with "open doors" to any private initiative. Deregulation has led to non-compliance with the rules and regulations of urban coexistence that the Municipality itself has established: from the block on the transformation of buildings into hotels to the urban zoning rules to the regulation of commerce and urban policing. At the anatomy theater, six years of more or less intermittent work were supposed to lead to the opening - illegal, as it is in violation of the urban zoning rules - of a restaurant, the umpteenth in campo San Giacomo. But at the moment there is no trace of it, and the battle against the invasion of outdoor restaurant/bar seating has obtained the commitment of the Administration to not grant any more of them in this area.

The discussion began by taking up the contents of the "invitation" letter to AperiVida, to which Mario and Monica Mariolina gave the challenging title FROM CAMPO SAN GIACOMO TO THE CITY: A PACT FOR VENICE?, which I present here:

The tourism monoculture is killing Venice: everyone notices it, every day. Businesses that are useful for residents, but primarily the homes themselves, are being converted into activities useful for tourists.

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We residents feel like unwelcome guests. Not only us, but also those who come to the city not for tourism but for the needs of daily life (study, work, loved ones).

The city is being taken away from us: first of all the housing, but also the public spaces. The spaces where we meet, play and live. It is the public spaces that guarantee the quality of life that Venice offers to those who know how to understand it, as the great urban planners of the twentieth century understood. The walking, the opportunities for face-to-face contact, the silence, and especially for children, moving about without the dangers of traffic.

The battle against the excess of outdoor seating, which we began more than a year ago, aims at this: restoring this quality of life to the inhabitants, but also to those who know Venice. It is no coincidence that this battle began from San Giacomo dell'Orio: because here is where the glorious battle for our Vida took place, but also because this is one of the places where the quality of life in Venice still survives, and therefore must be defended at all costs. The benches where the elderly and caregivers enjoy the sun, the spaces - as much as they are eroded by the outdoor restaurant seating - where children play, the well around which people talk.

The initial slogan was "not a square meter more outdoor seating at San Giacomo", and we are willing to fight to the end for this. However, we don't intend to stop here. Not far away, in the Bariarea, the quality of life of the residents is threatened even more radically by the late-night noise of those who now are the true masters of the city: the people who use it only to drink and party noisily, regardless of the elementary rights - to sleep, to mental health - of those who live and perhaps work in Venice.

The fight against this degradation, being waged by a committee (Danni da Movida) which is now widespread throughout the city, is the same one, at a more advanced stage, that began here; first for the public use of la Vida and then for the right to public space.

We must start from here to defend in all possible ways and venues, each according to their own abilities and in alliance with all who defend this objective, the right to the city for those - residents, aspiring residents, or simply friends of Venice - who want to use it like a real city, albeit a unique one, and not as a setting for consumption and drunkenness.

We propose discussing whether the idea of a "pact for Venice" would make sense, one which unites and coordinates the actions of all the movements that are working to ensure the conditions that are vital to continuing to have inhabitants and a city: from housing to jobs, from services to healthcare, from the tranquility of living to the defense of the environment - urban and lagoon.

Let us begin to evaluate not only what each of us is doing today, but the possibility and usefulness of collectively coordinating our practices for an idea of the city that goes beyond the tourism

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monoculture. Let’s not wait for another pandemic to show us what a failure that is.

Now, at the end, we move on to the ombre and cicchetti, sharing what we brought with each other. That’s one of the basic “rules of engagement” we preserve from the experience of la Vida...



Important testimony followed from people who were born or came to live in Venice.

I was born in this city and I live here, but now I feel “badly tolerated” and too much, as if its “natural” inhabitants were now the tourists and Venetians were an annoying impediment, not coincidentally invited by the Mayor to leave the city and go to the mainland.

I’m from Romagna but I’ve lived in Venice for 23 years: it used to be beautiful, but now you can’t live here anymore. And yet it would be enough just to observe the rules that already exist: near us there was someone double-parking. After a few repeated fines there’s no problem anymore.

Many of the important civic initiatives to defend the city underway were mentioned, first and foremost those concerning housing, because there are no residents without homes.

We began with the mother of all battles against overtourism: the one being waged by the group Alta Tensione Abitativa (ATA) for the regulation of short-term tourist rentals in a way that can rebalance the relationship with long-term residential leases. Their fight has achieved significant recognition: it has been taken up by the administrations of big cities and brought to the attention

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of the Regions, and it has landed in Parliament, where ATA has illustrated a draft bill in the Senate that will be presented by several parliamentarians. The goal is to fill a gap, given that ours is almost the only European country to not have regulated the matter.

Venice, thanks to the so-called “Pellicani amendment”, is the only city that - for over a year - could already establish this regulation, but our Mayor does not see fit to do so.

The use of public space is always at the center of attention, thanks in part to the experience at la Vida, and we spoke about initiatives to defend the campos and the streets from outdoor restaurant/bar seating. The vaunted approval of the “pianini” (plots for use of public space) has not stopped the expansion of outdoor seating and the “regularization” of many concessions that did not exist before Covid has not prevented the emergence of others. Accordion expansion beyond the assigned spaces seems to be a generalized practice.

Yet it would be enough to combine more systematic compliance checks with the obligation to mark the limits of the spaces granted.

Many testimonies were heard about disturbances caused by nightlife, first throughout the city, then also on Lido and in the central areas of Mestre, and about the actions to contain them, thanks to the initiative of another grassroots citizens’ group: Gruppo Danni da Movida.



The use of provisional ordinances that they would now like to make permanent was denounced: boasted about as defending the rights of the citizens, they are actually worsening the existing legislation.

Two things must be done: repeal the ordinances and enforce the indications of urban policing regulation which places limits on gatherings and noise both by time of day (protecting with particular care those around lunch time and those at night) and by setting limits to be respected throughout the day.

During the event more signatures were collected for the appeal to contain the disturbances in the Bari area. There was also testimony about how the instructions for officers are in effect "don't disturb the operator".

The Municipality was present, with the President and head of the urban planning and commerce commission speaking, confirming its path of defending citizens' rights and listening to the categories. However, he announced that the city councilor had not made themselves available for a public assembly about outdoor seating and nightlife disturbances that he wanted to organize. So, the commission will be forced to limit itself to expressing an opinion as a Municipality, without a direct influence on the administrative level, but playing the political role of listening to the movements and categories, done in commission to give some weight to the voices of the city. Voices were also raised critical of the Entry Ticket and to the role of control played by the mysterious Control Room on Tronchetto. The state of crisis in public healthcare (with the struggles we are forced to engage in to have the minimum services - for the Giustinian as a community home or for the lack of primary care doctors) was recalled, with the invitation to be present at the session of the city council at which it will be discussed (only because the citizens have collected the signatures).

There was also a proposal to evaluate whether the "non-use" that the owner is making of the old anatomy theater (perhaps because a restaurant without outdoor seating doesn't make sense and the constant watch by the community could lead to trouble...) might not make it possible to ask the Region (e.g. by launching a collection of signatures) to buy it back and return it to the city. Professor Laura Fregolent's intervention was important and authoritative. At the AperiVida last spring she presented, and with her students from IUAV helped us to read the work of mapping the 'plots' for use of public space. After recalling how the presence of urban social movements itself constituted an important value in safeguarding democracy, she criticized the Municipal Administration's methods of planning public space.

For example, the commerce and taxation divisions work on the plots. Now, it is

certainly essential to ensure the resulting revenues for the city coffers. However, it is important that urban planning is also involved in all acts that affect the use of public space. In order to allow the citizens to live in the area it's important that one finds benches, greenery and fountains in the campos and fondamentas, in addition to outdoor restaurant seating. And that in addition to bars and restaurants they can take advantage of public spaces for relationships and meetings, free of charge, indoors and outdoors.

The very fact that many campos are indicated as replacing green and relational spaces in the current charter of standards attached to the master plan speaks clearly in this regard.

So, what conclusions did we reach, before moving on to the delicious food and wine that are the founding feature of the AperiVida, and which once again did not disappoint expectations?

A general orientation regarding the issues of administrative defense of the public spaces occupied or threatened by outdoor seating and nightlife. No to ordinances, yes to the application of existing regulations, marking of the spaces granted and control of management irregularities (accordion expansions). But above all to make the controls real, constant and at the right hours - by default and starting from the citizens' reports.

The recognition of a necessity: each association (those present today, but also the others that make up the thinking skeleton of our city) must continue to do its part and oversee the problem or the part of the territory it takes care of.

However, two other things are needed:

- create a mutual support network and an explicit alliance that strengthens them so that "they are not alone"
- systematize the individual battles and individual proposals, so that their intertwining gives rise to an "idea of the city and territory" that is friendly to the environment and the citizens, and which has real roots.

Many are enthusiastic about such an idea, as proven by the statements of appreciation for the invitation text that came even from those who could not attend.

To move forward we need to work on the two points referred to above: the definition of the network and the systemization of the proposals and actions. The AperiVida of 26.09.2023 has called: we'll see if, from whom and how the responses come, and what steps they can propose... Two things are required: we need to put in a little time and effort, while trying to be as agile and lean as possible, and to rid ourselves of the mindset (unconscious or otherwise) according to which "what my association does is the best, what the others do is acceptable".

Translated by [Paul Rosenberg](#)

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