

versione italiana

The first article ever published on the [Campaign for a Living Venice](#) web site was on Sept. 10, 2016, entitled "Venice is Crisis: UNESCO's Ultimatum". After UNESCO had sent inspectors to report on the growing problems in Venice at the request of Italia Nostra-Venezia, the World Heritage Committee released a series of actions it required the city and state to take by February 2017.

The story since then is well known. Each time the Committee has seemed ready to follow the recommendations of its own inspectors and declare Venice endangered, some government action has seemingly postponed the final decree - Brugnaro's visit to Paris with his secret report in 2017, dossiers sent to UNESCO by the government, and perhaps most well-known, the Draghi government's decision to ban cruise ships from the Bacino di San Marco.

Now here we are in 2023, and once again the recommendation was to add Venice to the Endangered list. Conditions have clearly worsened by all available measures. And yet the decree was averted again... by the entrance ticket? Is it possible that the announcement that Venice would trot out its by now stale and untested idea of charging an entry fee to day visitors to the city on an 'experimental basis' - next April! - was really why Venice got a pass from UNESCO again? The review of this year's WHC session from the group World Heritage Watch suggests otherwise. In fact, WHW's diagnosis sees the problem *as systemic to UNESCO*, not clever maneuvering by Brugnaro, et al., as they point out in their most recent press release:

The UNESCO body suffers from some of the same systemic flaws that cripple the UN Security Council: Member states of the World Heritage Committee can abuse their power and take politically motivated decisions contrary to the obvious facts, while civil society remains consistently excluded from its decision-making processes.

The critique offered here is particularly valuable because we learn that UNESCO's WHC has also refused to classify other sites that are clearly in danger:

WHW considers the most blatantly wrong decisions to be the committee's refusal to inscribe de-facto acutely endangered sites on the "List of World Heritage in Danger", such as Venice, the fortress and cultural landscape of Diyarbakir, and the volcanoes of Kamchatka, *"although this had been recommended by its own expert Advisory Bodies"* (emphasis mine).



© Andrea Merola

Sites where ongoing destruction is taking place, such as the Victoria Falls in Zambia/Zimbabwe, and the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest on earth in Bangladesh, Historic Cairo and the Acropolis of Athens, were not even scheduled for inscription on the so-called “Red List”; in the case of the Acropolis, Greece – itself a committee member – had prevented the site from even appearing on the agenda.”

WHW goes on to point out that the WHC was more than willing to add new sites to the list, against the recommendations of its own Advisory Bodies and contrary to its own ethical code:

Conversely, the World Heritage Committee knew little restraint in inscribing new sites on the World Heritage List. Out of a total of 50 nominations, in 16 cases the Committee inscribed sites *“against the recommendation of the expert Advisory Bodies”* (again emphasis mine)... and 14 had been submitted by member states of the Committee itself – contrary to a request of an earlier Committee that states should refrain from submitting nominations while they are members of the Committee, in order to avoid the appearance of bias or political influence.”

So, how are we to trust a body that ignores “the recommendations of the expert Advisory Bodies” and allows political influence to bias its decisions? World Heritage Watch has its own specific recommendations:

We therefore call on the 195 States Parties to the World Heritage Convention to initiate a reform of the Rules of Procedure of the World Heritage Committee at their General Assembly in Paris in November to remedy glaring abuses, and to elect states to the Committee that offer greater guarantees of adhering to the spirit and letter of the World Heritage Convention. There is also an urgent need to enshrine a sanctions regime that takes effect when certain objectively verifiable

facts are established.

An urgent need indeed. The current system is clearly dysfunctional, and as WHW Chair Stephan Doempke rightly states, "The common heritage of humanity is being brought to ruin before everyone's eyes".

-Source: *WHW Press Release Sept. 25, 2023*