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The “No Grandi Navi” Campaign protests for alternative scenarios in Venice, Italy

Michele Vianello*

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(*) Department of Design
IUAV University of Venice
San Polo 2468, I- 30125 Venezia
vianello.michele@gmail.com

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Abstract

The paper expounds the recent developments in the Italian State legislation regulating the cruise line traffic in Venice after the Costa Concordia disaster, and the attitudes of the local City Council in dealing with this issue in the city planning process. The focus is placed on the social movement that was born in order to counteract the official attitudes and their inability to tackle the problem comprehensively and effectively: the Comitato No Grandi Navi – Laguna Bene Comune [No Big Ships – Lagoon as a Commons Committee]. Perspectives of analysis are giving in order to frame the objectives, techniques and discourse of the Comitato and understand what is new about it, in comparison to more traditional forms of resistance and protest in Italian cities.

Introduction

The cruise line traffic has seen a constant increase in the harbour of Venice since 2004 (Tattara 2013), due to a series of economical factors, regarding the re-organisation of this sector of tourist economy (Soriani et al. 2009; Vèronneau and Roy, 2009) and some path dependency patterns related to the modern productive history of Venice, especially the conversion of the Breda Fincantieri shipyards of Marghera, an industrial suburb of the city, to construct cruise liners .

Due to the peculiar environmental conditions of Venice and its lagoon, besides the great historical value and vulnerability of its built environment, such an increase made local and international concern arise (UNESCO 2012). This happened especially after the Costa Concordia disaster in Giglio Island on 13/01/2012, in which a cruise ship partially sank, within the borders of the environmentally protected area of the Arcipelago Toscano National Park, causing the loss of 32 lives, plus 2 persons officially missing. The environmental and social risk posed by the cruise line traffic in Venice is just one of the many elements threatening the delicate environmental equilibrium of the lagoon, both in terms of charge on the tourist “carrying capacity” (Canestrelli and Costa, 1991) of the city, and of environmental danger potentially caused to the lagoon ecosystem. But, it is also the only one that is not currently *effectively* regulated by any norm.

The most important issues addressed by the public concern on the cruise line traffic in the Lagoon of Venice are related to three set of problems:

_The environmental issue.

Air pollution of big ships is disregarded in environmental policies. Moreover, the risk posed by of an eventual accident to Venice historical heritage is not assessed.

_The policy issue.

Consistent public budgeting has been devoted to re-structuring the city in order to accommodate the needs of cruise tourism. A MRTS line has been built to connect parking areas, the cruise terminal and the train station area. Major interventions are proposed to re-structure the previously industrial areas adjacent to the Santa Marta neighbourhood and the Passengers Terminal in order to build hotels, parking lots, along with a new tramway line that will make the cruise gateway regionally accessible.

_The social issue

The finance, private investment and event oriented tourism policies (e.g. Biennales of Architecture and Art) have neglected the potentialities for diversifying and setting up a sustainable tourism offer, and of spreading the wealth produced by tourism on excluded strata of the population and off the beaten paths of the city.

This paper analyses some specific implications of the attitudes officially maintained towards these matters and the relative planning policies put in place by the central government, the local administration and the Venice port authority. It then puts them in relation with the popular front of resistance that was formed to counteract them and to promote a broader debate in order to solve the issues. The description of the events happened so far makes the local protest and resistance groups, gathered in the Comitato No Grandi Navi – Laguna Bene Comune [No Big Ships – Lagoon as a Commons Committee], emerge as the only, although manifold, actor consistently promoting a change in discourse to encompass comprehensive assessment of risk and environmental and social impact in planning policies and promoting socially and environmentally sustainable long term visions. This paper discusses the success of some of their tactics in influencing policy making, attempts an analysis of their choices, framing their rationale in the local and national political scenario and finally provides a perspective to study what role and influence this protest might have in future developments discussing their weaknesses and potentialities.

The Ministerial Decree to limit or ban big ships traffic from sensitive marine areas

In March 2012, under the disruptive emotional effect of the Costa Concordia disaster on the public opinion, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, headed by Corrado Passera, in

accordance with the Ministry of the Environment and the Protection of the Territory and the Sea, headed by Corrado Clini, and in informal agreement with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage as reported by the press¹, issued a “ministerial decree” in order to limit or ban ships above 500 tonnes of Gross Tonnage from sensitive marine areas (Ministero delle Infrastrutture e dei trasporti, 2012), namely Marine National Parks, and introduced a limitation of 40.000 tonnes of Gross Tonnage for ships entering the San Marco Basin and Giudecca Canal in Venice.

The ministerial Decree is a specific type of law envisaged in the Italian legislative system that does not need the Parliamentary approval, putting forward implementing provisions for existing norms. The choice for this fast forward, and perfectly legitimate, law making process and the indirect, although very clear, reference in the decree's preamble to the Costa Concordia disaster (Ministero delle Infrastrutture e dei trasporti, 2012: 39) concur in indicating a felt need in the Government to give an immediate answer to an alarming threat. But the specific legislative process chosen has at least two fragilities that make such a choice hardly understandable for a delicate matter like this one. First, it by-passes the parliamentary debate skipping a fundamental moment of democratic deliberation, secondly, and as a consequence according to Italian legislative system, it can only limit its scope to the mere implementation of provisions, being unable to put forward new laws proper without the consent of the Parliament. The *D.M. 02/03/2012* suffers from these limitations and unfortunately its characteristics concur in making the very structure of the law contradictory and whimsical.

While article 1 prescribes general dispositions to limit the big ships, article 2 recognises the specific conditions for two marine areas: the Cetaceans Sanctuary Area in the Tyrrhenian and Ligurian Sea (Repubblica Italiana 2001: 5) and the Lagoon of Venice. But in the second case the law sets a limit of 40.000 tonnes of Gross Tonnage only for the ships going through the San Marco Basin and the Giudecca Canal while avoiding to regulate the traffic in the lagoon more comprehensively. The further development of the law makes inconsistencies quite evident. Moreover, while it originally was setting the obligation for the Port Authority to set a minimal compulsory distance for ships travelling in the same direction, a subsequent modification ratified in May of the same year (Ministero delle Infrastrutture e dei Trasporti

1 The news of the involvement of the Ministry of Culture, although not official, was reported by local chronicle in national newspapers (BERTASI 2012)

2012b: 7) cancels this provision substituting it with some regulations on the disposal of waste for the ships leaving the Port of Venice. But the inconsistency of the Decree is definitively denounced by article 3 that, after pronouncing the above mentioned restrictions, postpones their application *sine die*, submitting it to the future setting up of an “alternative” way to access the docking area adjacent to the old city.

Article 3 substantially generates a legal loophole in which officially the State, embodied by the government, has set new rules for the safety of Venice but these will effectively eventually be applied only when the Maritime Authority (a local branch of the same Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport issuing the decree) will declare some waterways other than the San Marco Basin and the Giudecca Canal suitable for the passage of cruise line traffic. No deadline is officially set for this operation. The law does not foresee the complete ban of big ships, neither is envisaging an overall policy strategy to protect the entire lagoon ecosystem, nor the historical settlement, from the threat posed by cruise line traffic. The legal situation that derives from this state of things, although stuck and quite paradoxical, has opened windows of possibilities to try and influence successive steps in law making at a local and State level.

The Nature of Protests in Venice: Perspectives of Analysis

The constant growth in dimensions and number of cruise ships had already worried the general public in Venice for some years² when, on the 6th of January 2012, a self-organised alliance of local associations, private citizens with different social and professional backgrounds and activists was formed under the name of Comitato No Grandi Navi – Laguna Bene Comune (from now on the Committee). Exactly in a week time the Costa Concordia disaster was to occur. This curious, and sad, coincidence is rather significant: it turns over what might have been an intuitive assumption: that the protests in Venice were a direct consequence of that event. In reality the formation of a front of protest happened, almost simultaneously to the Costa Concordia disaster, as a consequence of a local process that might be defined the formation of a social movement connected to wider national movements.

This paper takes the precise stance of researching what have been, and are, the tactics of such

² The records of the preliminary thematic discussion, held in 2007 and open to the public, aimed at the preparation for the drafting of the structural plan of Venice (PAT) show this worry. In the thematic discussions, public observations on the "big ships" traffic amount to seven. (Comune di Venezia 2009: 20, 27, 45, 56, 80, 87, 92)

a movement in reacting to law making in the realm of tourism planning and what are their objectives in setting up alternative scenarios. Nevertheless it cannot avoid providing some frame to better understand in sociological terms what is its nature. An essential starting point is defining a social movement as a volunteer unitary mobilisation organising a concerted action in favour of a cause (Neveu 1996, della Porta, Diani 1997, Farro 1998, Daher 2002). This definition raises questions in terms of what is the real collective identity of it, if there is a singular one, and what is the link between the nature of the social movement and the social change it aims to achieve, and whether the protests are its chief instrument of affirmation.

Scholars have been discussing whether the changes in law making have been a univocal, direct result of the pleas of social movements and their protests in Italy in the 60's and 70's or whether the changes in law had more complex patterns that were supported, catalysed, or accompanied by social movements (Daher 2012: 8). A possible answer to this question today when analysing the Committee's structure and pattern of action, might come from some simple observations of the change in nature of the social movements from their early manifestation to present day. In the 70's the idea of collective identity of a social movement was central and tended to encompass an exhibition of “different” lifestyles in the public realm in order to obtain general recognition for the objectives of social change and promote a theory of absolute conflict with existing power structures (Touraine 1983). From the 80's onwards many Italian social movements tended to choose a negotiant approach to achieve their objectives (Diani 1999), dissolving their collective identity into more loose and volatile forms of participation (della Porta, Diani 2004), although taking on more socially encompassing attitudes in terms of accepting more types of participants. The 70's approach, although being “stronger” had the tendency to reduce the singularity of each participant in the social movement to a *singular* collective identity, something often seen at the time as the chief characteristic of a social movement (Pizzorno 1980). Recent developments in the Italian research (Daher 2012) have proposed some perspectives to analyse how the movements have changed their nature from a strongly structured, collectively identifiable body to a more fluid and complex set of practices that go beyond collective identity, and from social structures characterised by strong ties between lifestyle and protests to more flexible form of identification and participation (Diani 2008: 58). This perspective has been here considered very relevant to understand the specific Committee's structure and its approach to the struggle: in fact it tries to enumerate what is left of the “traditional” ways of protesting while it encompasses some metaphors in the analysis to grasp what is new in them: are movements

taking on *institutional* strategies? Are they shaping themselves as *associations*? Are they adopting *lobbying* techniques ? (Daher 2012).

The Committee and its specificity

The case of the Committee shows how this perspective is a very useful one in order to understand how a local movement is re-configuring traditional ways of protest to contest tourism policies. In order to tackle the problem the paper takes the approach of decomposing the social movement into “minimal units of analysis” (Daher 2012) in the most clear way possible, so as to find coherent justification to narrate its story as a unitary one, without incurring into the mistake of superimposing a singular identity onto a multidimensional phenomenon (Melucci 1984).

The Committee is composed of at least three classes of active participants:

- _ “centri sociali”: collectively self-managed, often squatted, spaces for social aggregation promoting political and cultural activities where participants are at the same time promoters and organisers.
- _ “traditional” associations, registered, with a charter of rules and officially enrolled members.
- _ private individuals.

The structure of the Committee is a free association that uses a googlegroup mailing list as an organising device, open to all, but the acceptance to which is scrutinised by active members. This instrument is used in order to set up assemblies, generally held every second week, in which tactics, actions and communication strategies are discussed. It has no hierarchical structure and has only one spokesperson³ that deals with the press and issues public announcements and notices approved by the assembly through the approach of a deliberative democracy, and publishes them on a site⁴. This sort of arrangement might allow us to classify the Committee as a fluid, internet based, societal bond among groups and individuals. But the reality is much more interesting. While all participants as individuals, being members of associations, *centri sociali* or private citizens, have equal right to propose and discuss, it is the relationship between these classes of participants that are relevant, and make the novelty of this organisation evident.

3 As a spokesperson of the Committee Silvio Testa was chosen: a journalist who authored the pamphlet "E le Chiamano Navi" (Testa 2011)

4 The site is curated collectively under the coordination of Silvio Testa, it recollects materials and communication about the protest and serves as an interface between the protesters and the general public, <http://www.nograndinavi.it/>

The twofold nature of the Committee

Since the definition of social movement chosen here focusses on its mobilising capacity, the analysis has focussed on the two type of groups composing the Committee that inevitably have stronger organisational power: the *centri sociali* and the associations.

As stated previously *centri sociali* are collectively self-managed spaces for social aggregation promoting political and cultural activities where participants are at the same time promoters and organisers. They often use squatted buildings as spaces for their activities, and either hold them illegally, or manage to get temporary right of use from city administrations.

Unfortunately the phenomenon is poorly studied in historical terms but has a consistent qualitative research done on it (Consorzio Aaster et al. 1996; Caniglia et al., 2002; Bugliari Goggia, 2007; Branzaglia et al., 1992). As an initial remark it must be said that the first *centri sociali* were set up in the 70's, and that the current ones are, to some extent, their direct descendants, especially in terms of the strong stress put on collective identity. The multifaceted nature of this phenomenon in different cities in Italy is hard to grasp due to the research limitations mentioned above. Several studies, especially after the turning point of the G8 protests in Genoa that marked a failure of their tactics to influence public opinion due to police violent repression (Becucci 2003, Veltri 2003), have approached their democratic structures of deliberation, and their attempt to restructure themselves, focussing on the strong role of informal leadership, within a structure of official absence of hierarchy.

The associations that compose the other 'structuring half' of the Committee are instead the incarnation of a new form of resistance that has been coalescing in Italy around the catchword Commons (*Beni Comuni*)⁵. Such a cultural and social phenomen was shaped around the popular mobilisation to propose two referendums to block the privatisations of water supplies and services in 2011, making an explicit cultural reference to an attempt of reform of the Civil Code done in 2007 by a commission in the Ministry of Grace and Justice, headed by Stefano Rodotà⁶. Such a proposal aimed to introduce the new category of Commons in the Civil Code, which would complement the existing ones of private property and public good. This social phenomenon, that appeared in that moment, has all the characteristics of contemporary forms

5 A relevant result of the knowledge production shaped around the idea of the Commons in Italy has been Beni Comuni, un manifesto, by Ugo Mattei (Mattei 2011)

6 The final report of the works of the commission has been published on the site of the Ministry of Grace and Justice (Ministry of Grace and Justice 2007)

of protests: it is volatile and allows free and flexible forms of participation and, under the heading of “Commons” managed to mobilise hundred of thousands of people and eventually give a substantial contribution for the victory of the “yes” (to keep water supplies away from private hands) in the referendums of 2011 after a series of six referendums that did not reach the threshold of the legal quorum. These associations, are often traditional ones, gathering educated professionals and private citizens around specific interests (environment, health, civil rights) with the objective of promoting and spreading a new cultural discourse on how to manage public assets and resources (Bersani 2011) dealing with the externalities of economic processes.

The role of *centro sociale* Laboratorio Morion⁷

The protests against big ships in Venice gather together these two different kind of approaches, represented in the local specific context by *centro sociale* Laboratorio Morion and several local association among which Ambiente Venezia, Medicina Democratica, Legambiente can be listed. Laboratorio Morion, exemplifies the time continuity and natural evolution in terms of strategies of struggle, discourses and actions of the radical approach to contestation through protest, typical of the social movements in the 70's. And as those movements it features many of the characteristics of shared collective identity, lifestyle, cultural codes and productions that were their key aspects. The associations, as a network, are a good sample of the new kind of attitude in protesting that activate many forms of loose participation around specific objectives for determined periods of time, managing to have wider numerical and cultural impact on society.

The story of the Committee is a story of an alliance between long tested forms of struggles, and new techniques of gathering consensus, producing scientific and thematic knowledge, widening radical discourses to civil society. This alliance is not a merger of different entities into one body, it is rather a strategic cooperation around an objective beyond the scope of which, each associated member maintains its specificity. In light of this decomposition in elementary units, the analysis chooses to put the *centro sociale* Laboratorio Morion at centre

7 The observations featured in this paragraph are built upon a narrative method: a series of non structured interviews conducted by the author with members of Laboratorio Morion. The interviews were in-depth repeated conversations aimed at reconstructing last year's *oral history* (Nagy Hesse-Biber, Leavy 2006), of the movement and were held with a limited number of activists. This approach was chosen in order to reduce the inevitable relation of power that is established between researchers and activists (Creswell 2007: 40). The author, not being a trained professional in sociological qualitative analysis, limited the scopes of the interviews to explore the characteristics of personal and collective stories of the movements in connection with the activities of the Committee and the No Grandi Navi protests.

of the analysis. It does so with several objectives, although none of them hints at the fact that the identity of the entire committee should be understood as something reducible to the instances of this specific agent. Since the point is trying to give an account of how protest in the tourist city is being restructured around new objectives and discourses, the *centro sociale*, as a category that stands out as one of the most long standing forms of organising dissent, contestation and protest in Italian cities, is specifically relevant to put in perspective the changes.

Despite the change in nature of social movements that according to many contemporary approaches prove an innovative and fit role of groups with weak collective identity (della Porta, Diani, 2004; Daher 2012: 171-177), something that eventually inable the, to encompass complexity and multidimensional aspects of contemporary society, Laboratorio Morion seems to be alive and kicking. It is maintained here that this vitality of Laboratorio Morion in the protest against the big ships, and its objectively very central role can be attributed to different factors. On one hand Laboratorio Morion kept a strong and constant presence in the space of the city, among citizens, conducting several struggles (right to housing, immigrants' rights, insurgent cultural practices) for many years, rather than basing its action on a volatile network of relationships. On the other hand, and maybe as a consequence, it maintained a capacity to mobilise a consistent number of people for gathering financial support through volunteer subscriptions.

On a second level of reading, Laboratorio Morion has also been fundamental in providing “manpower” for the most spectacular actions that were the mark on the media of the No Big Ships protests, and this especially due to biographical reasons of the Laboratorio Morion activists (they are younger than the average protester). So while Laboratorio Morion lacks many of the contemporary characteristics attributed to newer social movements, although it compensates them allying with the association of the Committee, it has a very strong inertia and capacity of providing continuity to struggle. According to several members of the Committee the entire campaign had as a central element the power of financial and social mobilisation of Laboratorio Morion.

This story is one of collective cooperation: the Committee was exactly formed as an alliance of different agents, so that each of them could offer its very specific contribution to make the protests effective by summoning up energies, creativity and knowledge while increasing the

amount of individuals involved; animating a protest that has a visual and spatial impact but that is also truly open to civil society, using *institutional* strategies, having *associative* characteristics and opening the path to *lobbying* techniques with local and national institutions and media.

The next paragraph will show how such an alliance displays practices connected to the ideas of the *institution*, *association* and *lobby*, working metaphors to understand contemporary forms of protest (Daher 2012) without any of its members having to make a compromise about its own role and identity, and quite effectively achieving results.

Legal Windows: the Venice structural plan PAT and the law proposals 143, 263, 754 and 2403 of 2010

The legal loophole created by the law *D.M. 02/03/2012*, transferring the power to designate new accessible waterways for big ships to the Marine Authority, plainly does not address the problem directly. It is in fact through an agreement and in coordination with the Port Authority, that must issue a Harbour Plan, that the flows of naval traffic can effectively and globally be restructured.

Harbour planning has been regulated so far by a law of 1994, (Repubblica Italiana 1994), and its successive modifications, but since 2010 there has been a parliamentary discussion to comprehensively reform the law in order “to enhance the competitiveness of Italian ports in the face of International restructuring of naval activities”, something that led to a Senate law proposal (Servizi Studi del Senato 2011). The proposal introduces new regulations required by European norms, such as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (VAS), and several other modifications. What is most interesting for this study are two things: on one hand the fact that the law removes the obligation to reach an agreement with city councils concerned with harbour transformations prior to the drafting of an harbour plan (Piano Regolatore Portuale), and that the law proposal was voted in the Senate, after almost two years of having being pending in the works of Senate Commissions, on the 12th of September of 2012, after the disaster of *Costa Concordia*, without further discussion to take into considerations the possible effects of cruise line traffic accidents. So while the *D.M. 02/03/2012* introduces only contradictory provisional norms that postpone the solution of problems in Venice, the delicate matter of planning the traffic and docking of big ships in the lagoon is delegated to a law the structure of which was laid out two years before, one that decreases democratic public

involvement of local administrations in the strategic choices.

The current situation has left two legal windows open for action to the Committee: one is influencing the works of the parliamentary commission in the Lower Chamber that is currently discussing the modifications to *l. 84-1994* approved by the Senate⁸ so that it could encompass more democratic participation rather than diminishing its role; the other one is influencing the city administration of Venice to set local strategies in its planning policies so that it can confront and negotiate with the Port Authority, when it will draft its plan under the current regulations, on the basis of a stronger democratic mandate. While the first of this legal windows has not been the object of any specific protest activity on the side of the Committee so far, the second one has seen a series of possibilities for staging multiple forms of protest, including the *associative*, *lobbying* and *institutional* tactics of protest. These were held in the frame of the participative process part of the structural plan of Venice (PAT, Piano di Assetto del Territorio), a document setting the general objectives of city spatial management and transformations, later to be defined in a zoning plan of interventions (Piano Interventi).

In the course of 2012 the Venice City administration ratified, with a rather complex process of deliberation, the approval of the PAT (Comune di Venezia 2012a). This process was the occasion for the Committee to deploy a mixed strategy of action that saw on one hand the organisation of traditional mobilisations in public space, to exert pressure on the work of the City Council, on the other hand the use of a technique of *association*, *institutionalised* participation and *lobbying*. The Committee gathered together the most relevant knowledge produced by associations belonging to the group and filed official observations to the plan signing them with the names of the associations, thus making official their partnership in a public document. Secondly, by taking part in the official process of participation, part of the process of planning, they accepted to conduct part of their protest within the boundaries of institutionalised ways of expressing dissent. When their observations were dismissed as irrelevant by the City Council's counter-observations, the Committee's members were ready to deploy their third technique: while staging a protest in the public space during the days of final approval of the amendments to plan (20th and 21st of December, 2012), they already had secured an alliance with two city councillors belonging to the local political group “In Comune”, part of the majority, to propose the addition of an extra norm to the implementing

⁸ The official site of the Lower Chamber (Camer dei Deputati) lists these modifications as an issue currently being pending for discussion in the its IX Commission (Servizio Studi – Dipartimento Trasporti, Camera dei Deputati, 2012)

technical provisions of the plan. This mixed technique managed to obtain, in a backdoor way, the inclusion in the norms of the PAT (Comune di Venezia 2012b) of a new article, the *35bis*, and the commitment to promote official studies on the environmental risks of cruise line traffic.

Once again, a regulation of cruise line traffic in the lagoon of Venice that should have been one of the strategic features of public policies, is confined to a secondary position. But while in the case of the *D. M.* that was eventually due to the choice of a hurried and inappropriate legislative instrument, in the case of the PAT it seems that the causes should be sought in an impossibility, and maybe unwillingness, of the City Council to lead the opening up of a wider democratic discussion on the issue, and start a negotiation with other organs of the State. It was in fact thanks to the Committee's action that the issue of the big ships was at least partially tackled in the planning documents.

The technical implementing provisions, with the inclusion of article *35bis*, set the individuation of a limit in dimensions for ships to be declared compatible with the “old city and the lagoon environment”. The counter-observations report, annexed to the technical implementing provisions, declares the “opportunity” for the Port Authority to review the observations on the big ships in the drafting of its harbour plan, and announce official studies to set the limits according to scientific standards (Comune di Venezia 2012b). These are positive steps, although of little practical value, but they strangely reject other studies as non-scientific such as the preliminary one produced by one of the members of the Committee: prof. Giuseppe Tattara of the University Ca' Foscari of Venice (Tattara 2013), not on the basis of scientific peer-reviewing but on the basis of unspecified motivations (Comune di Venezia 2012b). Although the article *35bis* is a clear victory of the Committee and sets a precedent in at least one norm, the counter-observations report (that motivates the rejection and reception of public observations to the plan), declares that the levels of sustainability of public choices have already been set by the participatory processes and, for what concerns the city policies, will be assessed by a public body (the Permanent Observatory on Transformations) whose scientific standard of evaluation are not made explicit, according to the informations currently accessible.

Conclusions

The story of the protests organised by the Committee in Venice provides a valuable example

of the restructuring of protests today, in terms of setting new objectives and techniques while maintaining aspects and tactics of traditional protests of the 70's. This paper has taken the stance of understanding how this evolution has had the capacity of setting new standards for creating new alliances and achieving objectives in influencing law making. There are some lessons to be learned from it, especially in order to understand, in further researches, what might be the objectives that the movement might set for itself in the future, whether their techniques of protest can be made more incisive, and whether the movement can have a relevant role in the promotion of a more intense democratisation of the (tourism) planning policies at a national level.

The Committee has put a stress on the problem of changing the discourse of the rationale behind public policies, especially in context of the urban management of the city of Venice and its tourism policies, but making a bridge between its proposals and wider problematics. The 90's have seen the rise in the progressive political forces discourse of the role of privatisations of public assets to achieve better and more efficient allocation of resources. This approach has seen a local incarnation in the course of the mandates of several progressive mayors. Massimo Cacciari (mandates 1993-2000 and 2005-2010), interestingly synthesised these ideas in terms of vision in his *Azione pubblica e Azione Privata per Venezia [Public and Private Actions for Venice]* (Cacciari 1995). The book is a research aiming to demonstrate the potentialities of opening up Venice public assets to private capitals in order to provide long term innovative visions for the restructuring of the city and its role in the globalised world economy (Bonomi 1995): in urban planning terms it proposes scenarios of big compound development in the inland, the privatisations of historical *palazzi*, and the organisations of big events such as a regional expo besides the potentiating of existing biennales. Even during the mandate of mayor Paolo Costa (mandate 2000-2005), internationally known as the scholar that promoted the idea of calculating a maximum “tourist carrying capacity” (Canestrelli, Costa 1991; van der Borg 1991) and eventually apply it in Venice's tourism policies, these ideas were not accompanied by a rethinking of the active role of the public actions in shaping city's future, rather than supporting the leading private initiative, that has emerged as a central drive especially in the reconfiguration of cities for tourism purposes (Judd and Fainstein 1999). The designation of Paolo Costa to the head of the Venice Port Authority in 2008, the body entitled to draft the Harbour Plan and manage and coordinate private and public investments of more than 600.000.000 € (Venice Port Authority, 2013: 51, 71) (including cruise line traffic management), did not bring to the forth a

commitment towards a wider democratic debate on the destiny of Venice as a world tourist destination. The Committee potentially represents the opinion of a very relevant part of the electors that have been choosing only progressive mayors ever since 1993. The generalised feeling of having been excluded from the decisions has resulted in the felt need to change the discourse from “privatising Venice” to the idea of the Commons (Ostrom 1990), a complex system of appropriation of resources that sets rules of mutual control and cooperation among appropriators in which the design of institutions (and eventually of space) reflects the commitment to incorporate externalities and regenerate resources as part of the process of appropriation. The change in discourse is one of the most relevant features of the committee's long term strategy and at national scale it matches with the previously mentioned movement for the Commons emerged from the popular mobilisation in the referendums against the privatisation of water supply and services.

The second relevant element that can be sorted out from the struggle that the Committee puts forward is the role of the academia and of knowledge production supporting and critically framing such a new discourse. Setting a clear scientific construction to critically frame and test the paradigm of Commons in actual situation is absolutely central and it has been part of the protests when associations and scholars jointly produced thematic studies on the effects of cruise line tourism in the lagoon of Venice. Italian academia not only might provide research tools to this endeavour, but should definitely make a strong point so that all scientific studies are evaluated, even for the purposes of public administration, not according the supposed independence of scholars from the movements, but according to impartial scientific standards. This issue, on different level of reading, also relates to the necessity for progressive scholarship to re-address the idea of scientific 'positivist' study not as something that should be looked at with suspicion due to its alleged connections to “oppressive state-centric politics”, but as a tool that can possibly substantiate the requests of movements for changing laws (Wyly 2011). Even reading Lefebvre's *Right to the City* outside the most recurrent interpretations, one can find a clear call for a new kind of non technocratic scientific constructions as one of the main means, along with political confrontation, of achieving the objectives of social change (Lefebvre 1968).

A third interestingly element is that the story of the Committee is that it verifies a prediction recently formulated by the proponents of the *spatial turn*, and especially by Edward W. Soja (Soja 2008): social movements are to build successful and broader alliances and fronts of

struggle if they will compose the different identities of protesters around matters of spatial injustice.

WWW Documents

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