

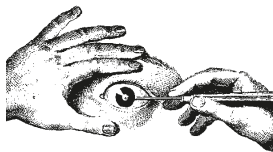


• EYE • ON • VENICE •

# REVERSING COURSE

*Silvio Testa*

CORTE DEL FONTEGO EDITORE



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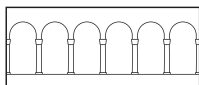
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Silvio Testa

## Reversing course

The path to protecting Venice from cruise ships



CORTE • DEL • FONTEGO

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Silvio Testa, Venetian and journalist, has followed the events that have shaped his city for over 30 years. A passionate rower and sailor, he knows the Lagoon well. He helped to create and was the first president of *Pax in Acqua*, a coordinating group for rowing and sailing societies fighting to limit motorboat wakes, which are eroding the city and the Lagoon.

## Reversing course

Some say that a little book was able to mobilise a city. Indeed, when *E le chiamano navi* (*And they call them ships*) came out in this series in 2011<sup>1</sup>, Venice seemed to take up arms for a long “naval battle” – however, my book only confirmed the city’s profound discontent over the ever larger and more numerous cruise ships. The book perhaps, but only perhaps, catalysed people and groups that had already started to protest.

Within two years, an issue initially raised by a minority became *the* issue of the city, and Venice’s cruise ship problem was known around the world: the growing outrage prompted the authorities to find a solution – but instead of choosing the course that concerned citizens in Venice were pleading for, it appears that they have backed the lobbies promoting an unsustainable path for the cruise ships.

The large ships have not, in fact, been banned from the Lagoon of Venice, nor from St Mark’s Basin (the stretch of Lagoon in front of St Mark’s Square). To allow them to continue arriving at the Maritime Station – their current dock,

<sup>1</sup>The text is now available free *online* on [www.cortedelfontego.it](http://www.cortedelfontego.it)

just behind the city<sup>2</sup> – a new, artificial route has been proposed, to be dredged in place of a small canal in the Lagoon, the Contorta Sant’Angelo Canal. It would become a highway for cruise ships, potentially as destructive as the existing Malamocco-Marghera Canal,<sup>3</sup> and perhaps more so.

This turn of events shines a light on how power functions in Italy, how strategic decisions are taken and how environmental issues, when they collide with powerful interests, face a democratic deficit that has become the source of so much popular discontent. The defence of the common good almost inevitably clashes with the legitimate objectives of financial, economic and labour powers: transparent and participative decision-making processes are needed that respect the rules, both in their form and their substance, especially today when shadows of unnameable interests can be glimpsed behind the construction of public works.

The “Venice case”, with its questionable results, shows how the authorities consider laws to be a hindrance, to be respected in their form but to be bypassed when it comes

<sup>2</sup> Historically, the port of Venice was in St Mark’s Basin, but the lack of a direct link to the train station, built in 1846 under Austrian rule, led to the construction of the Maritime Station (*Stazione Marittima*) near San Basilio, in the west of the city, at the end of the Giudecca Canal. Today, the Maritime Station is used only for passenger ships and ferries, as industrial and commercial traffic has for some time been transferred to Porto Marghera, created in 1919 on the inner shore of the Lagoon.

<sup>3</sup> Also called Canale dei Petroli as it was built between 1964 and 1968 for the petrochemical complex on the inner shore of the Lagoon at Marghera. This canal is 20 km long, 200 m wide and its depth varies from 11.5 to 17 m. It is responsible for much of the loss of salt marshes and other natural features in the central part of the Lagoon. See in this series: L. FERSUOCH, *Misreading the Lagoon*, 2013.

to their substance: those who claim that Italy's politics are irremediably distant from the people and incapable of providing solutions that respond to the common interest can point here.

## 1. The risks

In 2006, the year of the first protests, the largest ship to enter the Lagoon was the *Brilliance of the Seas*: 90,000 gross tonnes, 293 metres long, 2500 passengers. Ships made 850 transits through St Mark's Basin (425 to the Maritime Station and the same back<sup>4</sup>), with 885,664 passengers. Today, according to the statistics provided by Venezia Terminal Passeggeri (VTP, the company operating the piers at the Maritime Station) and the Port Authority<sup>5</sup>, we've reached 1,815,823 cruise passengers and 1096 transits through the Basin, without counting ferries for Greece (426 transits), riverboats (260 transits) and hydrofoils (668 transits).<sup>6</sup>

And the dimensions of the ships have grown: on 2 June 2012, the *MSC Divina* made its first visit, the largest ship

<sup>4</sup> Cruise ships enter the Lagoon at the Lido "mouth" and arrive at the Maritime Station by crossing St Mark's Basin and the Giudecca Canal; leaving, they return following the same route.

<sup>5</sup> The Port Authority of Venice is a public body that governs all port operations: for the cruise sector, it does so via Venezia Terminal Passeggeri (Venice Passenger Terminal), a company created to manage the piers.

<sup>6</sup> [www.vtp.it](http://www.vtp.it) › *risorse* › *allegati* › *Statistiche-1997-2013.pdf*



that had ever entered the Lagoon: 140,000 gross tonnes, 333 metres long, 68 metres high, capable of transporting 3500 passengers. The twin ships *MSC Fantasia* and *Voyager of the Seas* have come to Venice – 311 metres long, 63 metres high, 15 decks, each with an ice skating rink and a casino on board. Also the *Carnival Magic*, 306 metres long, 3600 passengers. And the *Costa Favolosa*, 294 metres long and 61 metres high, 114,500 gross tonnes, 52 suites, 1000 rooms, 3800 passengers – it offers its guests the Hall of Mirrors of Versailles, the Imperial Palace of Peking and the Circus Maximus of Rome.

The race to gigantic dimensions doesn't stop. The *Norwegian Getaway* was recently launched, 146,000 tonnes and 324 metres long, 4000 passengers. Its hull will be decorated with sirens that hold up the sun over the waves. In autumn of 2014, Royal Caribbean will launch the *Sunshine*, 158,000 tonnes. And in 2016 a sister ship of the *Oasis of the Seas*, 220,000 tonnes and 363 metres long, the largest in the world: its 5402 passengers will be able to enjoy seven thematic areas, like a “Central Park” – a natural park surrounded by tropical gardens – climbing walls and swimming pools with simulated surfing waves.

What's the impact of all this? Behind the glossy image of these great ships hide the risks of accidents, pollution, erosion in Venice and the Lagoon, noise, vibration and tourism overload (the cruise industry is part of the tourism merry-go-round that, with 30 million visitors a year, is devouring the city<sup>7</sup>). The Port Authority has always minimised these problems, publishing one-sided studies that provide absolution.

<sup>7</sup> See, in this series, P. LANAPOPPI, *Dear Tourist*, 2014.

In the booklet, *E le chiamano navi* (*And they call them ships*), I sought to provide a critical assessment of their claims.

In recent years, Italy has been struck by two grave shipping accidents: the tragedies of the *Costa Concordia*, wrecked on Giglio Island on 13 January 2012 (32 deaths), and the *Jolly Nero*, which knocked down the pilot's tower in the port of Genoa on 7 May 2013 (9 deaths). What if an accident occurred in the Lagoon of Venice, on the route between the Lido entrance from the Adriatic, through St Mark's basin and the Giudecca Canal to the passenger terminal? Can anyone truly guarantee that a mechanical failure, a fire on board, a fuel spill, a terrorist attack, or an officer's sudden illness, moment of madness or professional carelessness won't lead to a disaster?

The Port Authority and VTP affirm that along this route, ships travel on a sort of track from which they can't deviate, limited by the shallow depths at the edges of the Basin. But if a ship's hull extends nine metres underwater, then certainly a stretch of lagoon bed lying 7.5 or 8 metres under the surface will only provide a metre or so of mud, not enough to stop the immense momentum. A glance at a depth chart<sup>8</sup> is sufficient to show that a ship could strike land at many points along the Giudecca Canal (in particular, at Palladio's church of the Redentore), or the Punta della Salute, the island of San Giorgio, the church of the Pietà, the island of San Servolo,

<sup>8</sup>For example, there's a chart of the central Lagoon on the city's web site, [www.comune.venezia.it](http://www.comune.venezia.it). The depths indicated on nautical charts represent the average for the low spring tide, the most extreme regular tide: this means that the depths are actually at least one metre deeper than the levels shown on the charts.

or along the Lido from Santa Maria Elisabetta to San Nicolò and the fort of Sant'Andrea, the work of Sanmicheli. Along the Riva dei Sette Martiri, the water is even deep enough for ships to dock, as they have done in the past.

## 2. Pollution

Since 2007, we know that the cruise ships generate severe air pollution, thanks to a study by the Veneto Regional Agency for the Protection of the Environment (ARPAV), which showed that in Venice, the main emitters of  $PM_{10}$ <sup>9</sup> were ships, in particular cruise ships.<sup>10</sup> These are true floating cities, and to allow all their services to function they need to keep their motors running, not only at sea but also when docked.

Following that study, the first “Venice Blue Flag” agreement was signed, a voluntary accord between the cruise ship companies, the Harbour Master’s Office<sup>11</sup> and the Port Authority to reduce the level of sulphur in the fuel burned by ships when travelling through the Lagoon from 3.5% to 2%, and to 1.5% when docked, even though the role of sulphur dioxide in the generation of fine particles is modest. The “Venice Blue Flag” agreement ended in 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Fine dust, solid and liquid particles, that when inhaled can provoke illness and tumours in the respiratory system as well as leukemia.

<sup>10</sup> *Le emissioni da attività portuali (Emissions from port activities)*, Feb. 2007 ([www.arpa.veneto.it](http://www.arpa.veneto.it), *Qualità dell'aria > Dati > Venezia*).

<sup>11</sup> The Harbour Master’s Offices (*Capitanerie di Porto*) form, together with the Coast Guard, a technical body under the Italian Navy whose tasks include maritime safety.

The European Parliament, after considering that at least 50,000 people die each year in Europe due to air pollution from ships, voted in September 2012 in favour of a directive that sets a limit of 0.5% for all ships, but only from 2020.<sup>12</sup> Following this European law, the shipping companies on 20 May 2013 renewed – after five years of pollution without limits – the voluntary accord and agreed to limits of 0.1% from the moment that ships enter the Lagoon (“Venice Blue Flag 2”). Actually, this limit was already in place for ships at dock from 2010, under Italy’s Legislative Decree n° 205 of 9 November 2007. The voluntary agreement, however, only lasted until the end of the year.

In comparison, the level of sulphur in diesel for automobiles is 0.001%, 3500 times lower than the limit for ships on the open seas and 100 times lower than the limit introduced for the Lagoon. But in Venice, a network of air pollution monitoring stations – something found in all mainland cities – does not exist. Sulphur dioxide transforms the marble surfaces of Venice’s monuments into plaster, and it attacks the mortar and facades of buildings.

Inspections and controls are an unsolved problem, infrequent and allocated at random, as the Commander of the Maritime Directorate in Venice, Tiberio Piattella, has admitted: there were 93 checks in 2010 and 69 in 2011 through November for over 4000 dockings at the Maritime Station and in Porto Marghera.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> [www.europarl.europa.eu/news/it/news-room/plenary/2012-09-10](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/it/news-room/plenary/2012-09-10)

<sup>13</sup> See in Facebook, *Fuori le maxinavi dal bacino di San Marco*, File > risposta Capitaneria di Porto, 3 Dec. 2011.

The Port claims that pollution will be reduced to zero at dock, as electricity will be supplied to ships from land (a system called *cold ironing*), but only two proposals to do so have been put forward.

The first is a feasibility study by ENEL, Italy's main power company, to provide 64 MW (the largest such facility in the world) to up to four ships out of the seven that the Maritime Station can host (though soon, as two quays will be freed by moving the ferry terminal to Fusina, there could be up to nine ships at a time). Electricity would come from ENEL's power plant on the inner shore of the Lagoon, which supplies Venice.

The second is a study by VTP Engineering (a company partly owned by VTP), which proposes a 24 MW cogeneration plant with three turbines fired by biodiesel or methane. This could supply only two ships.

Both were assessed by the APICE project,<sup>14</sup> supported by the EU to mitigate the environmental problems of Mediterranean ports. The conclusions are not thrilling. APICE estimates that in 2020, even if the ENEL project is built, emissions will increase due to growing ship traffic: carbon monoxide by 44%, volatile organic compounds (such as benzene and other hydrocarbon compounds) by 32%, nitrogen oxides by 22%, and small and fine particles (PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2,5</sub>) by 21%.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> APICE: Common Mediterranean strategy and local practical Actions for the mitigation of Port, Industries and Cities Emissions, [www.apice-project.eu/](http://www.apice-project.eu/).

<sup>15</sup> [www.apice-project.eu](http://www.apice-project.eu), *i risultati finali > future scenarios > proiezione emissioni porto di venezia*, pp. 5-7.

Even worse – according to APICE – would be the VTP project, which would see an increase in carbon monoxide of 142% and volatile organic compounds by 57%.<sup>16</sup> Both estimates assume a continuation of the “Venice Blue Flag 2” agreement (which instead expired at the end of 2013) and maybe based on this assumption they foresee a drop in sulphur dioxide.

Given that VTP and the Port Authority usually discount the problem of pollution in the debate over the cruise ships, it is interesting to see how VTP Engineering supports its plan for cold ironing: “cruise ships have major energy needs, which can vary from 10 up to 20 MW of electricity supplied at 11,000 volts. A large cruise ship, stopping in port for 10 hours, burns up to 20 tonnes of fuel and emits up to 60 tonnes of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere.”

“In Italy” – the VTP report continues – “emissions from the industrial and energy sectors have been falling for years (almost 50% from 1998 to 2006) but sulphur oxides (SOx) from the maritime sector have almost doubled. National and international maritime traffic is responsible for over 80% of the emissions from the transport and thus is one of the main sources of sulphur oxide pollution at global scale. Clearly” – the VTP report concludes – “this situation is not sustainable over the long term, above all in Italy, where ports are near, if not integrated within, historical city centres.”<sup>17</sup> Well, here VTP admits there is a problem.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> See [www.vtpengineering.it](http://www.vtpengineering.it), *Progetti > Brochure*.

In addition, if we consider not only  $PM_{10}$  and  $PM_{2.5}$  but also ultra-fine particles – those with a diameter so small (less than a billionth of a metre) that they can enter living organisms even via the skin, causing cancer, heart attacks and brain diseases – we discover that Venice is very polluted. In September 2013 and April 2014, NABU (the *Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union*), the prestigious German environmental association, conducted two monitoring campaigns in Venice of these ultra-fine particles, for which neither regulations nor official monitoring exists. They showed that when ships pass, concentrations in cities reach a level of 200,000 ultra-fine particles per cubic metre of air, compared to a safety level of 2000 particles.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, only ships with particulate controls should be allowed to enter the Lagoon. Filters for sulphur dioxide and ultrafine particles could be fitted to any ship and could reduce particle emissions by 90%. NABU is calling on German shipowners to install them. The German shipping company AIDA has installed filters on its ships that call in Hanseatic ports, but not those that arrive in Venice, and Carnival has done so for its ships that operate in the United States.

### 3. Erosion

Ships should not pass through St Mark's Basin – but the alternative should not be the destruction of the Lagoon.

<sup>18</sup> *Ambientalisti: «A Venezia polveri sottili come nel porto di Manhattan»*, [www.ilgazzettino.it](http://www.ilgazzettino.it) › *nordest* › *venezia*, 16 Dec. 2013.

The Lagoon of Venice is an environment where, for over a thousand years, the Serene Republic of Venice maintained a fragile ecological equilibrium, guaranteeing the city's survival. The destiny of any lagoon, in fact, is either to be filled in with sediment or become a part of the sea; Venice is still protected by its Lagoon due to the wise conservation policies of its former rulers.<sup>19</sup> When the Republic fell in 1797, its environmental knowledge and care were lost and the Lagoon began a slow transformation to meet modern port requirements, breaking the equilibrium. The mouths between the Lagoon and the sea were widened and deepened and thousands of hectares of salt marshes<sup>20</sup> were filled in, so that today it's almost not possible to speak of a "lagoon" in terms of natural features, biology and currents.

Today, the Canale dei Petroli (Oil Canal) is a cancer that devours the Lagoon by unleashing immense erosive forces: it creates cross-currents, and the ships travelling along it move great masses of water. The sediments of the Lagoon's bed are thus stirred up and become suspended in the water. They are then taken out to sea by tidal currents. One hundred years ago there were 150 square kilometres of salt marshes and today these are reduced to 47; one hundred years ago, the average depth of the Lagoon was 40 centimetres; today, due

<sup>19</sup> See FERSUOCH, *Misreading the Lagoon*, published in this series.

<sup>20</sup> Salt marshes (called *barene* in Venice) are typical lagoon habitats, low-lying areas occasionally covered by tides. They are vital as they host a diversity of animal and plant life, favour water exchange, moderate waves and guarantee the survival of the Lagoon and thus the city. On salt marshes, see L. BONOMETTO, *Il respiro della Laguna (The breath of the Lagoon)* 2014, in this series.



to the loss of 750,000 to 1 million cubic metres of sediment a year, its average depth has reached a metre and a half, and in 50 years, if recovery does not become a true priority, it will fall to two and a half metres. In other words, there will no longer be a Lagoon.<sup>21</sup>

For 40 years, the Special Laws for Venice have called for the exclusion of oil tanker traffic from the Lagoon,<sup>22</sup> but this has not been obeyed and only today – not for environmental reasons but to develop the port for new types of traffic and to alleviate the obstacles and delays that the MoSE system<sup>23</sup> will create for ships entering the Lagoon – the Port Authority has launched a project to build an offshore terminal for oil tankers and container ships.<sup>24</sup>

If cruise ships were excluded as well, for the first time since the fall of the Republic of Venice the conditions would be in place to reverse the deterioration of the Lagoon: the

<sup>21</sup> L. D'ALPAOS, *Fatti e misfatti di idraulica lagunare (Facts and fictions about lagoon hydrology)*, Venice 2010 (Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti). The study is available on line from the site [www.istitutoveneto.it](http://www.istitutoveneto.it).

<sup>22</sup> The first Special Law for Venice was Italy's national Law n° 171 of 16 Apr. 1973.

<sup>23</sup> The acronym 'MoSE' comes from *modulo sperimentale elettromagnetico* (Experimental Electro-magnetic Module), the 1988 prototype that has become the name for the whole project of mobile gates to defend Venice from high waters. The project involves four barriers with a total of 78 gates to divide the Lagoon from the sea. The project, planned to be finished in 2016, has been opposed by wide sectors of the population and by the scientific community, and also in vain by the city government. As long as the gates remain up, ships would not be able to enter the Lagoon except via a set of locks to be built at the Malamocco mouth, entailing extensive delays.

<sup>24</sup> See [www.port.venice.it/it/piattaforma-daltura.html](http://www.port.venice.it/it/piattaforma-daltura.html)

Canale dei Petroli could be closed, thus removing the main cause of erosion, as prescribed by the special legislation for Venice.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. Further problems

There are a series of other reasons for excluding cruise ships from Venice: aside from the risk of accidents, what are the hydrodynamic effects when they pass through this fragile and ancient urban fabric? The ships move thousands of tonnes of water, amounts equivalent to their weight. The studies, even those by the Port Authority, show that when the ships travel through St Mark's Basin and the Giudecca Canal, the water level in the city's small, adjacent canals suddenly drops 20 centimetres or more due to the backwash, creating violent currents.<sup>26</sup> No one knows what this does to the city's embankments and foundations, but the Port Authority has manipulatively continued to talk only about surface waves, avoiding the topic of underwater movements. It is known that Italy's National Research Council has analysed the phenomenon in studies that are only circulated among a restricted circle of specialists, though the press has provided a glimpse in articles about *tsunamis* in the Lagoon.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> In particular, Italy's Law n° 798, 29 Nov. 1984.

<sup>26</sup> See TESTA, *E le chiamano navi*, p. 21 on.

<sup>27</sup> R. CILLUFFO, *Quei 'micro tsunami' che affliggono Venezia (Those 'micro-tsunamis' that harm Venice)*, in [www.almanacco.cnr.it](http://www.almanacco.cnr.it), Focus, 14 July 2010.

And there is the electromagnetic pollution created by ship's radars, which are always on during the passage through the Lagoon; marine pollution from anti-fouling paints on their hulls; the deafening noise, day and night, of the ships docked not far from homes; and the vibrations that reverberate off the plaster of monuments and houses. These problems too are minimised in the studies commissioned by the Port Authority, but a critical assessment suggests that the studies are hardly convincing.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, the impact of tourism must be assessed: from 20 to 22 September 2013, to provide only one example, 26 cruise ships docked, arrived or left from the Maritime Station: 12 were docked on Saturday the 21<sup>st</sup> alone,<sup>29</sup> and 80,000 passengers arrived or left – without even counting those on ferries, river cruise ships and hydrofoils.

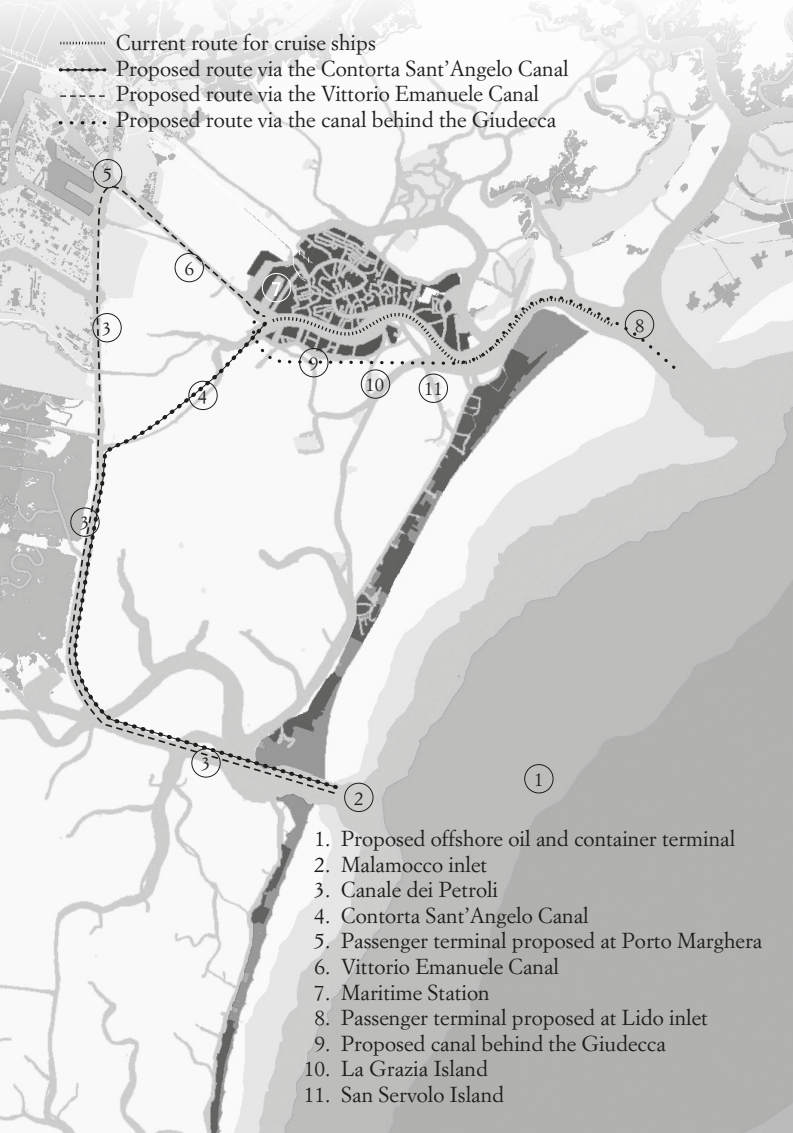
Some may ask why this is a problem. Well, it's been calculated that Venice is visited every day by an average of 83,000 tourists,<sup>30</sup> compared to less than 57,000 residents. The city is inexorably becoming a theme park of hotels, bed and breakfasts and shops selling masks and glass, impoverished of residents and normal stores due to rising real estate prices. Its quality of life is being lost and living in Venice has become a burden paid at luxury prices, due to the profit-seeking of a commercial sector intoxicated by inexhaustible tourist demand.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> See TESTA, *E le chiamano navi*, p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> [www.vtp.it](http://www.vtp.it) › *calendario*.

<sup>30</sup> See LANAPOPI, *Dear Tourist*.

<sup>31</sup> See in this series E. TANTUCCI, *A che ora chiude Venezia? (What time does Venice close)*, 2011.



- ..... Current route for cruise ships
- - - - Proposed route via the Contorta Sant'Angelo Canal
- . - . Proposed route via the Vittorio Emanuele Canal
- ..... Proposed route via the canal behind the Giudecca

1. Proposed offshore oil and container terminal
2. Malamocco inlet
3. Canale dei Petroli
4. Contorta Sant'Angelo Canal
5. Passenger terminal proposed at Porto Marghera
6. Vittorio Emanuele Canal
7. Maritime Station
8. Passenger terminal proposed at Lido inlet
9. Proposed canal behind the Giudecca
10. La Grazia Island
11. San Servolo Island

## 5. The “advantages” of the cruise ships

The concerns and resistance of port workers can be expected. So can the almost ideological defence of cruise ships maintained by the industrial and commercial sectors. But it's worth asking why the national government is so swayed by the Port Authority's plans. Many say it is moved by a concern for the Venetian economy.

The Port Authority, VTP and Cruise Venice have over time given different numbers, none verifiable, about the benefits the ships bring to the local economy: from 4255 jobs<sup>32</sup> to 6800,<sup>33</sup> from 221 million Euros of value added<sup>34</sup> to one billion Euros<sup>35</sup>. In February 2013, at Confindustria (Italy's national industry association), Paolo Costa, President of the Port Authority, affirmed that the cruise industry is worth 435 million Euros a year, 5.4% of local GDP.<sup>36</sup> But then Giuseppe Tattara, a professor of political economy at Venice's Ca' Foscari University, published the first independent study. It silenced the

<sup>32</sup> *L'impatto economico della crocieristica a Venezia (The economic impact of the cruise industry on Venice)*, Venice Feb. 2013, [www.port.venice.it](http://www.port.venice.it), p. 43.

<sup>33</sup> P. L. PENZO (Vice President of Cruise Venice), *Grandi Navi, serve un referendum comunale (Large ships, a referendum is needed)*, “La Nuova Venezia”, 28 June 2013, p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> PENZO, p. 42.

<sup>35</sup> Cruise Venice, *Venezia, senza navi per porto e turismo sarà morte certa (Venice, a certain death without ships for the port and tourism)*, “Il Gazzettino”, 13 June 2013, p. XXVI.

<sup>36</sup> E. TREVISAN, *Gli industriali e Chisso: Grandi Navi in Marittima (Industrialists and Chisso: Large Ships to the Maritime Station)*, “Il Gazzettino”, 16 Feb. 2013, p. 21.

official triumphalism: without any explanation on the part of Costa and his consultants, in their next declarations the impact of the cruise industry on local GDP fell to 3.96%.<sup>37</sup>

Tattara calculates the value added of cruise ships at 86 million Euros per year and indicates that a reasonable estimate of the industry's weight in local GDP is no more than 2%, with fewer than 2000 jobs created, including those generated indirectly in the tourism sector.<sup>38</sup> Tattara values the returns at 185 million Euros a year – but unlike other studies, he also estimates some economic costs: the result is that the cruise industry costs the public 227 million Euros a year,<sup>39</sup> reduced to 194 million with the “Blue Flag 2” programme which, however, has ended. The environmental costs are thus higher than the economic returns, and these costs should be even higher still as Tattara doesn't consider in his calculations pollution from heavy metals, damage to monuments or the alteration of the Lagoon, topics for which the scientific community has not yet elaborated economic parameters.

<sup>37</sup> *L'impatto economico della crocieristica a Venezia (The economic impact of the cruise industry in Venice)*, Venice, Feb. 2013, [www.port.venice.it](http://www.port.venice.it), p. 39.

<sup>38</sup> G. TATTARA, *Costi e ricavi del crocierismo a Venezia (Costs and returns of the cruise industry in Venice)*, in «Economia e società regionale» (Regional economy and society), xxxi, 3 (2013), p. 135-165.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 159.

## 6. The protests

Venice has been concerned about the issue at least from 2004, after the German Ship *Mona Lisa* ran aground on 12 May, a few metres from the Riva degli Schiavoni on St Mark's Basin. The mayor at the time, Paolo Costa, declared that ships should no longer pass through the basin: "This is the drop that spills out of the jug", he said polemically.<sup>40</sup> The same Costa, today President of the Port Authority and champion of the cruise industry, now refers to the problems as a mere "aesthetic bother".<sup>41</sup>

The first protest against the cruise ships took place on 30 October 2006, organised by the Permanent No-MoSE Assembly (*Assemblea permanente No-MoSE*); in 2007, the association Ambiente Venezia (Venice Environment) launched several initiatives, holding meetings and setting out information stands. In the following years, the theme flowed in and out of public debate, while the press, especially abroad (Sunday Times, New York Times, Herald Tribune), began to give shocked accounts;<sup>42</sup> and Italy's national environmental associations, including Italia Nostra, Legambiente, WWF and FAI, joined the battle.

<sup>40</sup> C. TERRIN, *Nave da crociera s'incaglia nel Bacino di San Marco (Cruise ship runs aground in St Mark's Basin)*, "Corriere della Sera", 13 May 2004, p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> *A Venezia dal Mare, le crociere (To Venice by Sea, cruise ships)*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2012, p. 29.

<sup>42</sup> On 25 September 2011, the Veneto Institute for Sciences, Letters and Arts awarded Fiona Ehlers a journalistic prize for her strong accusations published in *Der Spiegel* in Germany, entitled *Das Leben einer Toten*.

In 2011, the first citizen coordinating organisation took shape with the creation of the Facebook group “*Fuori le maxi-navi dal Bacino di San Marco*” (Huge ships out of St Mark’s Basin) while presentations of the book *E le chiamano navi* (*And they call them ships*) turned into events where Venetians expressed their anger. On 6 January 2012, the Committee No Large Ships – Lagoon a Public Good (*Comitato No Grandi Navi - Laguna bene comune*) was formed, bringing together old and new environment forces in Venice.<sup>43</sup> I was named the spokesperson.

The Committee right away organised actions to raise awareness about the problem and to mobilise the intellectual world, both national and abroad.

At the start, a huge impetus came from the *Costa Concordia* accident, though nobody can say how the Committee would have evolved in its absence. In fact, accidents had occurred before this one and have occurred since, because the gigantic scale of the modern cruise industry has feet of clay,<sup>44</sup> and the profit-seeking logic that cruise companies follow when they select, train, use and pay their on-board personnel doesn’t strengthen emergency management.

“*La Repubblica*”, a leading national newspaper in Italy, opened a new phase with a passionate article denouncing the scandal in Venice by Salvatore Settis, former rector of the Scuola Normale di Pisa, a prominent university, as well

<sup>43</sup> P. NAVARRO DINA, *Grandi Navi, il no diventa Comitato* (*Large ships, the no becomes a Committee*), “*Il Gazzettino*”, 10 Jan. 2012, p. VI.

<sup>44</sup> On this, see the web site of Ross Klein in Canada, consultant to the US Senate, where he analyses all accidents concerning the cruise industry: [www.cruisejunkie.com](http://www.cruisejunkie.com).



as President of Italy's High Council for Cultural Heritage.<sup>45</sup> Since then, there have been many articles, Tv programmes and radio interviews, even as far as Russia, Japan and China. This has made it easier to link up with similar committees active in Canada, Croatia, Germany and the US, as well as other Italian port cities, because wherever the large ships dock, they create problems.

The Port Authority and VTP right away launched a counter-information campaign, buying whole pages in newspapers and creating, in March 2012, a Committee with the name *Cruise Venice*, which has opposed any criticism of cruise ships<sup>46</sup> and has even sought to mobilise the sector's workers.<sup>47</sup>

Two books have been published, backing the thesis that the ships have minimal impacts<sup>48</sup>: the first, *A Venezia dal mare (To Venice by sea)*, presents the studies commissioned by the Port Authority without responding to any of the criticisms that have emerged over the years; in the second, *Venezia, un'invisibile battaglia navale (Venice, an invisible naval battle)*, the authors seek to show that opponents of the cruise ships have orchestrated a systematic disinformation effort

<sup>45</sup> S. SETTIS, *Nuove regole per quei colossi (New rules for those giants)*, "La Repubblica", 16 Jan. 2012, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> [www.cruisevenice.org/it](http://www.cruisevenice.org/it)

<sup>47</sup> M. FULLIN, *In piazza i paladini delle Grandi Navi (The supporters of the large ships in Piazza)*, "Il Gazzettino", 28 Sept. 2013, p. 16.

<sup>48</sup> Both are published by Marsilio in Venice: the first was published in 2012 and has several authors; the second, published in 2014, was written by two university professors, Bruno Bernardi and Rino Rumiati, and by a lawyer, Antonio Forza.

and are conservationists afflicted by a sort of “Lilliput Syndrome”. Beyond its irritating and conceited style, this book repeats as a mantra the unproven “truths” of the Port Authority and VTP and aggressively dismisses environmentalists’ positions without engaging them on the substance.

## 7. The solution

If we consider all the problems created by the cruise ships, and if we recognise that the Lagoon is a fragile and irreplaceable heritage that contains extraordinary environmental, historical and cultural values, then the solution can only have one course: an assessment of the compatibility between the characteristics of the ships and the recovery of the Lagoon; the exclusion of all those ships whose characteristics are incompatible with the Lagoon; and the creation of a docking point outside the Lagoon, perhaps even in the open sea, for those cruise ships that Venice wishes to host if the economic return from ships that can enter the Lagoon is deemed insufficient. The Maritime Station would continue to be the dock for cruise ships that can be admitted to the Lagoon as well as large yachts, and it could be converted into high value-added activities, such as congresses, offices and residences. This way both environment and employment could be saved, rather than putting them in opposition.

The level of tourism that the city can bear should also be considered, by assigning a strict quota to the cruise industry in order to avoid turning Venice into a “Disneyland”. This is the line that the Comitato No Grandi Navi succeeded in inserting in the Territorial Plan (*Piano di Assetto Territoriale*),

approved by the Venice City Council in December 2012.<sup>49</sup> The Committee also formally presented this position to the Harbour Master's Office in September 2013.

Talking today about moving the cruise ship terminal to other locations within the Lagoon is thus putting the cart before the horse: how can the location for a new port be identified if the number of ships it should serve is not known? The high road, instead, is a solution that responds to all the facts of the problem and that respects procedures: a comparison of possible future scenarios as a basis for the preparation of a new master plan for the port (the current one is from 1965), which should then be subject to a rigorous environmental assessment.

## 8. The proposals

So what is the position of the authorities?

The national and regional governments have to date supported the project of Paolo Costa, President of the Port Authority, who proposes to reduce the transit of cruise ships through St Mark's Basin, allowing the largest ones to reach the Maritime Station via an alternative route, entering the Lagoon at Malamocco rather than Lido.

<sup>49</sup> These are guidelines for urban planning in the upcoming decade. In particular, Art. 35<sup>bis</sup> of the *Norme tecniche (Technical rules)* was proposed by the Committee. See [www.portale.comune.venezia.it](http://www.portale.comune.venezia.it) › *file-browser* › *download* › 451.

After passing through two-thirds of the Canale dei Petroli, ships would head to the Maritime Station via the Contorta Sant'Angelo Canal, a natural canal that is now at most 20 metres wide and only a metre or two deep and which would have to be significantly altered for the new traffic. The current, small canal would be straightened, widened to 200 metres, deepened to 11 metres, and bounded by a series of fake “salt marsh islands” – in reality, embankments – to be created in a place where they never existed naturally. A highway, 5 kilometres long. The work would take five years and require 170 million Euros – without counting collateral costs.

Instead, the recent Mayor of Venice, Giorgio Orsoni, after initially supporting the dredging of the Contorta Sant'Angelo Canal, proposed to create a new maritime station in the industrial area of Porto Marghera, which large cruise ships would reach by entering the Lagoon at Malamocco and following the full length of the Canale dei Petroli. Orsoni's proposal was formally presented in early 2014 by a former city councillor for urban planning, Roberto D'Agostino. The plan foresees an expenditure of 412 million Euros in project financing and construction over several phases, leading to a new terminal that in six years could host all the ships now docking at the Maritime Station, while redeveloping the Marghera waterfront.

The Port Authority and Harbour Master's Office, however, have always declared that this solution is incompatible with the commercial and industrial port at Marghera, with safety requirements and with traffic in the Canale dei Petroli, already today so congested that alternating,

one-way convoys are required.<sup>50</sup> It's not clear, however, why this congestion would impede cruise ships from reaching Porto Marghera but not affect those travelling via the Contorta Canal, which branches off from the Canale dei Petroli.

Both proposals – the Port Authority's like the mayor's – involve building embankments along these major shipping channels using artificial reefs plus fake salt marshes, with the goal of neutralising the devastating impact of the works and the erosion created by the transit of thousands of ships (see Chapter 3). The Lagoon would in effect be divided into two basins, which is unacceptable from environmental and historical points of view and prohibited by the legislation that protects Venice.

The independent scientific community has rejected all of it: Luigi D'Alpaos, former professor of hydraulic engineering at the University of Padua, has declared several times that the large ships should remain outside the Lagoon<sup>51</sup>, and the Veneto Institute of Sciences, Letters and Arts was unequivocal in a document prepared by a commission to study the problems of Venice.<sup>52</sup> Despite this, the national government's path for resolving the problem of cruise ships in

<sup>50</sup> This can be seen in documents such as Port Committee's *delibera* n° 11 of 26 Sept. 2013, available on line at [www.port.venice.it](http://www.port.venice.it)

<sup>51</sup> A. VITUCCI, *Navi in un porto fuori dalla laguna (Ships to a port outside the Lagoon)*, "La Nuova Venezia", 21 Jan. 2014, p. 17.

<sup>52</sup> Commissione di studio sui problemi della città e della laguna di Venezia (Study commission on the problems of the city and the Lagoon of Venice), [www.istitutoveneto.it](http://www.istitutoveneto.it) › *Attività* › *Iniziative culturali* › *Eventi*

Venice since the Clini-Passera Decree of March 2012<sup>53</sup> has focused on dredging the Contorta Canal.

The decree, however, doesn't consider all the options (such as no cruise ships, reduction in the number and size of ships, an offshore terminal, a new terminal in the Lagoon or outside the mouths of the Lagoon). In fact, by referring to "routes" and not "sites" or alternative "scenarios", it confirms that the passenger port is the Maritime Station and it orients the decision towards the Contorta Canal.

Two other solutions could theoretically meet the conditions of the decree: dredging the Vittorio Emanuele Canal, which links Porto Marghera to the Maritime Station; and the "lagoon bypass"<sup>54</sup> proposed by national Parliamentarian Enrico Zanetti and much appreciated by VTP, which prepared a preliminary study for it. The latter idea is to dredge a canal 200 metres wide and 10 metres deep between the islands of San Servolo and La Grazia, as if the Lagoon were but a potato field. It would reach the Maritime Station from behind Giudecca, which would literally become a traffic island.

The alternative options that were not considered include four proposals for a terminal outside the Lagoon, beyond the MoSE's gates. These were submitted to the Harbour Master's Office, and some environmentalists support them,

<sup>53</sup> The decree is named after the two ministers who signed it in the outcry that followed the tragedy of the *Costa Concordia*. It was published in Italy's official journal: "Gazzetta Ufficiale" n° 56, 7 Mar. 2012.

<sup>54</sup> E. ZANETTI, *Grandi navi, tante sono le soluzioni prospettate ma tutte poco soddisfacenti* (Large ships, many solutions are proposed but all are unsatisfying), "Il Gazzettino", 10 July 2013, p. 27.

as they would keep cruise ships outside the Lagoon. The first, presented back in 2004 by former Vice Mayor Cesare De Piccoli, proposes a prefabricated, moveable steel dock that could be built in 24 months at a cost of 250 million Euros. Small ferries would connect it to Venice and the airport, and a bridge would link it to the MoSE's new shelter harbour at Cavallino. The three others are variations on this idea: one was presented by Luciano Claut, councillor responsible for urban planning in the town of Mira; another by Stefano Boato, Carlo Giacomini and Maria Rosa Vittadini, professors of urban studies; and the third by former professor of design Giovanni Battista Fabbri.

In sum, the context remains uncertain. A host of environmental, health and cultural risks need to be considered. So how did Italy's national government take decisions without the necessary analysis?

This is what happened in the autumn of 2013, at an inter-ministerial meeting presided by the premier at the time, Enrico Letta. The statement after the meeting is closely wedded to the position of the Port Authority and rejects that of the city<sup>55</sup>: it reiterates that the Maritime Station is the port for cruise ships and that the alternative to St Mark's Basin is the Contorta Canal. Other proposals were not even taken into account.

The summit indicated a few measures to reduce traffic in St Mark's Basin, ahead of the dredging of the Contorta Canal. Among these would be a prohibition, from 1 November

<sup>55</sup> [www.governo.it › Presidente › Comunicati › dettaglio.asp?d=73538](http://www.governo.it/Presidente/Comunicati/dettaglio.asp?d=73538)

2014, of ships greater than 96,000 tonnes. This provision made newspaper headlines around the world – the giants of the sea have been stopped! – as if a ship twice the size of the Titanic, which weighted 46,000 tonnes, were small! Once the Contorta is dredged, then everything can return the way it was before, with ships of 130,000 tonnes and more arriving again at the Maritime Station, but via this new route plus the Canale dei Petroli.

The implementing provisions adopted by the Harbour Master's Office then became the subject of a complex legal battle involving environmentalists, VTP and the City Council. But at the beginning of the summer of 2014, Venice was hit by a much greater legal storm, the MoSE investigation, which had begun in 2013 with the arrests of the top management of the New Venice Consortium and the companies that form it.<sup>56</sup> At this writing (June 2014), over 30 people have been arrested, now including: the Mayor of Venice Orsoni (who has recently resigned); the former President of the Veneto Region and former national minister, Giancarlo Galan; the regional minister for infrastructure, Renato Chisso; and the former presidents of the Venice Water Authority (in charge of safeguarding the city), Patrizio Cuccioletta e Maria Giovanna Piva.<sup>57</sup> Local, regional and national politicians, including

<sup>56</sup> On 28 February 2013, Piergiorgio Baita, the CEO of Mantovani, one of the principal companies of the New Venice Consortium (Consorzio Venezia Nuova), was arrested with the charge of criminal association for tax evasion. The chairman, Giovanni Mazzacurati, was in turn arrested on 14 July 2013.

<sup>57</sup> See the many articles in “Il Gazzettino” on 5 June 2014 and in the main Italian and foreign newspapers.



other former ministers, have been informed that they are under investigation.

A world of scandals and kick-backs has thus come to light, one that for years shaped the choices made for the city. The organisations hit by this earthquake – the New Venice Consortium, Venice Water Authority and various consultancies – are also the ones behind the project to dredge the Contorta Sant’Angelo Canal.

In the meantime, it was discovered that this project – and that of the former mayor (the terminal at Marghera) – were both reviewed and rejected in September 2013 by Italy’s National Environmental Impact Assessment Commission without either opinion being publically released; De Piccoli’s proposal to build a terminal at the Lido outlet was also assessed, and it received a positive opinion.

As they say in Venice, the regatta is still long, and we can hope that Italy’s new premier, Matteo Renzi, recognises the too many contentious issues and steers the process back to a course of proper and transparent procedures.

Whatever the decisions the government will take, the great ships will end up out of the Lagoon – because of their ever growing size and because the rising sea level, plus the MoSE barriers that will be able to temporarily close the Lagoon against high waters, will sooner or later create a crisis for port traffic.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup> See in this series P. PIRAZZOLI, *La misura dell’acqua (The measure of the water)*, Venice, 2011; in the scenarios described, hundreds of closures a year of the MoSE gates will be required.

The Lagoon has physical limits that today have been exceeded. The Port Authority knows this full well, and so has proposed (as we saw in Chapter 3) an offshore terminal for oil tankers and container ships. Wouldn't it be best, then, that the responsible powers consider the facts and exclude also the great cruise ships from the Lagoon of Venice – to protect nature, the port and jobs – instead of throwing resources at environmentally unsustainable approaches that are already failing?

Silvio Testa

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*Silvio Testa*

## Reversing course

The path to protecting Venice from cruise ships

*Three years since his book *E le chiamano navi* (And they call them ships) rallied protests in Venice against the cruise ships that are overwhelming Venice and its Lagoon, journalist Silvio Testa brings the story up to date, describing the citizen movement, the government “solution” that is anything but – and the way forward.*

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