

Youth on the March to Save Venice

Judith Harris (September 11, 2016)



Even as the ever larger tourist crowds jam its narrow calle, Venice continues to lose almost four local residents every day. What is to be done? Seeking answers, the young Venetians of "Generazione 90" staged a successful march, with shopping carts.

ROME - Even as the ever larger tourist crowds jam into its narrow byways, the calle, Venice continues to lose almost four residents every single day, or 1,500 a year. This migration away from the city means that Venice's population has shrunk from 175,000 permanent residents in 1951, to only 55,000 today. Given the exodus, the local grocery shops are also disappearing in favor of shops offering tourist fare all the way from high fashion to cheap Chinese trinkets.

What is to be done? Young Venetians themselves are demanding answers. On Sept. 10 a committee of Venetians in their twenties and thirties, who call themselves "Generazione 90," staged a remarkably successful demonstration in favor of making Venice more viable. As their symbol, the Generazione 90 organizers chose the trolley shopping cart on wheels, along with baby strollers and shopping bags, which they carried in the march, and occasionally waved in the air,

These carts on wheels typify the lives of Venetian residents. Daily survival means they must sdrag



everything from oranges to toddlers, not to mention the elderly in wheel chairs, up and down dozens of little bridges -- hence the slogan for the march, "Ocio ae gambe che gò el careo," Venetian dialect for "Eyes on your legs, here comes the cart."

The lively crowd began the march at Cannaregio on Saturday morning, and continued walking their carts all the way to the bustling Rialto market. "Our goal is to give a signal of normal living," said one of the organizers. "Life in our city can't be just the luxury of the few, or else a Disneyland. Venice has to be a place where we can continue to live." At the conclusion of the march at the Rialto, no speeches were given because, "This isn't the time for words. It's the time for all the citizens to show themselves united in defense of Venice."

The march was intentionally apolitical, and participants were asked not to bring any political symbols. However, in support of the march were two dozen or so prominent civic associations, including the Venetian branches of Italia Nostra and Slow Food, a local mothers' sodality, church groups and the like.

Tourism is the wealth of the city, "but it must be managed," said Giampietro Gagliardi, 23, coordinator of Generazione '90. "Failing to manage tourism means that it has become a danger to Venice."

As a reminder, UNESCO, no less, has warned Venice that it has only seven months to change course, or it will be canceled from the list of world heritage sites and transferred to endangered monument sites.

In a pamphlet the organizers of Generazione '90 wrote that, "We are furious. Our institutions have been talking about what to do for 30 years, but nothing happens. They just can't go on pretending nothing is happening -- we young people want to go on living here and on the islands, but we must be able to program our future: we have to be able to rent an apartment at a reasonable rate, to find a job that allows us to pay a mortgage and for the cost of daily living. We have to be able to have the services that every normal city offers its residents."

One of the group's demands is to have a more serious management of the tourist influx. Under Luigi Brugnaro a modest beginning was made in June in an experiment that allows residents precedence over tourists on the ever crowded vaporettos that ply the Grand Canal.

But that is not enough. "Now is the time," the young people insist. "We are determined to give everything we can so that this city, our city, does not fall into definitive decay. We don't want to see Venice lose all its residents, we don't want to see its economic, social, cultural and sports activities get ever poorer." (To see photos and their debate on facebook, go to [>>](#) [2])

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