

Urban Accessibility of Historical Cities: The Venetian Case Study

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Abstract : The preservation of historical Italian heritage, at the urban and architectural scale, has to consider restrictions and requirements connected with conservation issues and usability needs, which are often at odds with historical heritage preservation. Recent decades have been marked by the search for increased accessibility not only of public and private buildings, but to the whole historical city, also for people with disability. Moreover, in the last years the concepts of Smart City and Healthy City seek to improve accessibility both in terms of mobility (independent or assisted) and fruition of goods and services, also for historical cities. The principles of Inclusive Design have introduced new criteria for the improvement of public urban space, between current regulations and best practices. Moreover, they have contributed to transforming “special needs” into an opportunity of social innovation. These considerations find a field of research and analysis in the historical city of Venice, which is at the same time a site of UNESCO world heritage, a mass tourism destination bringing in visitors from all over the world and a city inhabited by an aging population. Due to its conformation, Venetian urban fabric is only partially accessible: about four thousand bridges divide thousands of islands, making it almost impossible to move independently. These urban characteristics and difficulties were the base, in the last 20 years, for several researches, experimentations and solutions with the aim of eliminating architectural barriers, in particular for the usability of bridges. The Venetian Municipality with the EBA Office and some external consultants realized several devices (e.g. the “stepped ramp” and the new accessible ramps for the Venice Marathon) that should determine an innovation for the city, passing from the use of mechanical replicable devices to specific architectural projects in order to guarantee autonomy in use. This paper intends to present the state-of-the-art in bridges accessibility, through an analysis based on Inclusive Design principles and on the current national and regional regulation. The purpose is to evaluate some possible strategies that could improve performances, between limits and possibilities of interventions. The aim of the research is to lay the foundations for the development of a strategic program for the City of Venice that could successfully bring together both conservation and improvement requirements.

Keywords : accessibility of historical cities, historical heritage preservation, inclusive design, technological and social innovation

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