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Venice between economic development
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The debate on port functions between the XIX and XXI centuries

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Introduction

“Non credo che vi siano altre città di mare nelle quali la simbiosi con le funzioni portuali sia stata così intima come a Venezia: dove porto e città convivono e si intersecano per più di un millennio, all'interno di una densissima compagine urbana che per secoli è stata fra le più popolate d'Europa, che ha ospitato il porto più importante dell'Adriatico ed è diventata il fulcro dei rapporti commerciali e dei collegamenti fra Oriente e Occidente”¹

Beginning with the general definition, we can identify the **port** as “*a body of water, mostly of sea, adjacent to the coast, more or less large and protected, usually equipped with facilities for docking, stopping, repairing ships, embarking and disembarking passengers and goods.*”²

Regardless of whether it is a *natural or artificial port*, throughout human history the domination of the sea—understood as the military ability of a political entity to control a given sea area—has manifested itself from the *control of ports*.³ The ability to manage the port became increasingly important, especially for peoples and nations that wished to impose their political and economic dominance over others. One thinks of the long history of British maritime supremacy that enabled the United Kingdom to dominate the sea and project its military might even at a distance.⁴ Through control of ports, not only was it able to allow or prevent enemy ships from passing through its territorial waters, but it was able to control trade networks and communication routes. Today, the port is one of the most important elements of the national transportation system with regard to imports and exports. Together with road, rail and area infrastructure, port infrastructure facilitates the smooth flow of raw materials and goods, both locally and globally. Currently, the dependence

¹F. Mancuso, *Venezia, la città, il porto*, Focus in PORTUS the online magazine of Rete, 2018.

²Enciclopedia online, Porto, Treccani, 2006.

³F. Zampieri, *Elementi di strategia marittima*, Edizioni Nuova Cultura, Roma, 2020.

⁴F. Lawrence, “*The War of the Falkland Islands, 1982.*” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 61, no. 1, 1982, pp. 196–210.

of states on maritime trade is growing, so it is crucial to possess an efficient and effective port infrastructure. That is, a *port system* that can organize, harmonize and integrate the national port network with the country's production hubs. States must be able to ensure the *strategic security of the port* system because ports can be extremely vulnerable precisely because of their strategic significance. In this sense, the ***port function*** is the ability of the political entity to adapt the port to its political and strategic purposes.⁵ The adaptation that the political entity puts into practice pertains to its core strategic and economic interests. Governing and protecting the port system means safeguarding national interests while respecting the needs and identity of the population. Throughout history, the *port function* has been changeable. Every city and other political entity has adapted ports to its own commercial, economic, and political needs. The most important case of the ability to adapt the *port function* to its history, changing the structure and purpose of the port, is that of the ***city of Venice***. It is a unique city because it is entirely surrounded by water, a city that has never been of roads but of canals, which penetrate and circumscribe it. The element of water is an integral part of the identity of the Venetian people and this has allowed for the most intimate symbiosis between the port and the city. The necessity of navigation to enter, traverse and live in Venice gave rise to the conception of a true *port-city*, arising in a safe and naturally protected marine environment, the lagoon environment. Looking at the history of the city in its entirety reveals how Venice accommodated in its urban structure the most important facilities necessary for the development of port functions. The city was transformed through a process that saw continuous functional and technological refinements in the field of navigation, port design and the conception of the canals, which were seamlessly modified. The transformation process has made St. Mark's Basin the hub of the Venetian port system, that is, the confluence of the lagoon routes connecting Venice to the sea.⁶

⁵F. Zampieri, *Elementi di strategia marittima*, Edizioni Nuova Cultura, Roma, 2020.

⁶F. Mancuso, *Venezia, la città, il porto*, Focus in PORTUS the online magazine fo Rete, 2018.

So, the complex lagoon ecosystem has been modified and shaped in its appearance and hydrogeographical balance by Venetian interventions over the centuries. The symbiosis between the water element and the city of Venice has been so profound that some scholars have identified Venice as one of the first places to enter the *Anthropocene age*. Climatologist Paul Crutzen coined the term in 2000, referring to the current geological era in which human activity has a direct impact on climate, for the first time.⁷ More generally, the term refers to the impact of human activity on the environment, and Venice is identified as the place where humans have exerted a dominant influence on the marine environment. As intuited by historian Massimo Costantini⁸ as early as the early nineteenth century, during Napoleonic rule, the first foundations were laid for the gradual and contemporary development of the lagoon, for the *forma urbis* that gave rise to contemporary Venice. The historian extensively explored the debate that characterized Venetian politics and society at the time. Due to the strong symbiosis between the city and the port, the transformation process was not easy and not always well received by the population. This required the necessary negotiation between the different Venetian urban and social components. Until the eighteenth century, human intervention was based on *commercial revolutions* that required adaptation of ports for the expansion of merchant ships and the volume of maritime traffic. At this time, human transformations on the lagoon and port system of Venice helped build the image of Venice as the queen of *Mediterranean trade*. Later, at the dawn of the 19th century, Venice became part of the strategic plan of Napoleon, who considered it crucial because of its angular position in the Adriatic Sea to meet the economic needs of the Italic Kingdom and the military needs of the French Empire. Defendente Sacchi, a well-known writer and journalist of the Italian Risorgimento, was one of the leading figures in the Venetian debate of the time and a supporter of Napoleonic interventions.⁹

⁷W. Steffen, J. Grinevald, P. Crutzen, & J. McNeill, “*The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives*”, nella sezione Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A, Royal Society publishing, 2011.

⁸M. Costantini, *Porto navi e traffici a Venezia 1700-2000*, Marsilio: Venezia, 2004.

⁹D. Sacchi & G. Sacchi, “*Intorno alle dighe marmoree o murazzi alla Laguna di Venezia ed alla istituzione del porto Franco*, in *Memorie*, Editori degli annali universali delle scienze, 1830.

Indeed, the establishment of the free port and the announcement of public works initiatives to change Venice's port system-especially in the Malamocco district-were considered positive by Sacchi and other supporters of Napoleon. Despite the reticence of the Venetian population, the goal was to transform Venice from a commercial metropolis, with diversified economic activities, into a transit *free port*, similar to the port of Trieste. Napoleon's plan called for the creation of free trade zones in Mediterranean ports, and although his maritime policies had limited success, his plans illustrated how *free ports* could reshape the urban, social and institutional fabric of a city in response to international economic and political pressures. In fact, Napoleon's decree of April 25, 1806,¹⁰ “*granting to the city of Venice a free warehouse of foreign goods,*” by which the free port was established and the Venetian port was reorganized, was fundamental to the creation of modern Venice. In the Austrian era, Venice's status as a *free port* was challenged and with it its own port function. The debate around the city's infrastructural change became more intense, and many economic and social sectors of the Venetian population remained reticent about the transformation process. Alongside the resistance of the artisan class due to the fear of losing the possibility of fishing and their own trading space, support was seen from the local merchant class, which collaborated with the Austrian government to establish new legislation on free ports and take full advantage of infrastructural transformations. The comparison with Trieste was central to the 19th century debate, emphasizing the economic, demographic and cultural expansion attributed to the free port status granted to Trieste by Emperor Charles VI in 1719. While the status of free port was a winner for Trieste, in Venice it was perceived as a threat to the social, urban, and political balances both internally and externally. In fact, the clash of multiple trading traditions had the potential to be disastrous and to upset the centuries-old economic, social, and environmental balance of Venice, which until then had lived in symbiosis with the port system. Discussions during the nineteenth century emphasized the difficulties of reconciling economic recovery with

¹⁰ Decreto 25 aprile 1806 b, Agricoltura, commercio e industria, *Bollettino delle leggi del Regno d'Italia, parte prima*, Saint Cloud, 25 aprile 1806.

the preservation of local customs, environmental sustainability, and Venetian social welfare. The conflicting interests of the many parties, brought attention to the precarious balance needed to manage a *port-city*. During the late 19th century, Venice and all of Italy experienced a time of great social and cultural ferment and economic instability. The process of territorial unification known as the *Risorgimento* was a revolutionary process that led to the subversion of pre-established political regimes in order to proclaim the Kingdom of Italy under Savoy leadership. Venice was strongly affected by the unification process, as were many other Italian port-cities. In fact, the Frankish ports established before Italian unification were dismantled in the unification process because they were seen as imprints of the previous Austrian rule. The fledgling kingdom had the primary need to unify Italy also in the administrative and legislative as well as political and territorial areas, so it attempted to reunite and reorganize the *Italian port system*. The process took a long time and much investment since each geographical area, each Italian region, had different physical, social and political characteristics.¹¹ This necessitated a customized approach to meet the different needs of the whole territory. In general, the process of abolishing free ports facilitated central control over the economy and trade, reduced the influence of foreign nations, and favored the establishment of a unique system of taxation and regulation of trade. The experience of the Venetian free port in the Kingdom of Italy was full of controversy and difficulties. Since its establishment in 1806, the free port status in Venice caused tensions with other ports in the region and concerns about their economic competition. Not only that, Venice's growing attractiveness worried ports in the entire Mediterranean region, especially because of its strategic position as a bridge between west and east. In fact, many rival governments adopted protectionist measures aimed at restricting access to the Venetian free port, partly with a view to limiting Napoleonic expansion. After the fall of Napoleon in 1814, the Venetian free port went into crisis and its port history of permanently changed. The Austro-Hungarian Empire, which succeeded French rule, imposed trade and customs

¹¹D. Celetti, *Il porto di Venezia. Dalla caduta della Repubblica all'annessione al Regno d'Italia*, in S. Collodo, G.L. Fontana (a cura di): *Eredità culturali dell'Adriatico. Il patrimonio industriale*, Viella, pp. 39-58, Roma 2008.

restrictions that reduced the attractiveness of the Venetian port, in favor of the rival port of Trieste. The upheaval of unification contributed to further reducing the economic importance of the Venetian port. The newly formed Italian government initially focused on modernizing and expanding the existing port infrastructure, which included Venice. Significant investments were made to improve port accessibility, the efficiency of loading and unloading services, and the safety of port operations. In addition, the Kingdom of Italy took measures to encourage maritime trade and the development of port operations. Economic strategies were adopted to encourage private investment in the sector, encouraging the construction of new ports and modernizing the entire port infrastructure. Work was done to standardize and rationalize national port processes with the goal of harmonizing regulations and legislation, addressing Italy's complex socioeconomic and geographic dynamics.¹² However, the process of port reorganization was interrupted by the upheaval of the two world wars and was resumed only by the Italian state, which became democratic in 1946. By the mid-20th century, a more decisive approach to the long-term management of the Venetian *port system* was needed because of the environmental effects of growing industrialization and increased maritime traffic. Modernizing fishing methods, embracing renewable resources and implementing marine spatial planning were necessary to preserve the delicate balance between economic development and marine environmental protection. To properly understand the environmental issue of the Venice lagoon, one must analyze it from the perspective of the broader Adriatic Sea basin. In fact, unsustainable management of coastal and marine areas has increased environmental damage in the northern Adriatic Sea, which, due to its unique hydrological and ecological characteristics, is more susceptible to environmental changes than other Mediterranean regions. The climate and oceanic elements of the area play an important role in its biological and morphological configuration, influencing ecological and sedimentological processes. This requires uniformity in the management of both maritime and terrestrial operations through a common vision that includes plans, policies and tools to ensure the protection of the

¹²*Ibidem*

marine environment. An unforeseen environmental consequence of post-World War II industrialization has been the unrestricted flow of by-products into the lagoon. Significant increases in water and sediment pollution have occurred since the 1960s, causing environmental stresses that have affected many marine species and ecosystems. Alterations in animal populations, algal blooms, drastic changes in the environment and serious risks to human health have been just some of the consequences.¹³ In 1987, the site “*Venice and its Lagoon*” was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List for the uniqueness and singularity of its cultural and environmental values. Precisely because of this status, Venice had to develop a comprehensive environmental protection plan that took into account interactions with nearby marine and coastal ecosystems. Indeed, the Mediterranean region has seen great changes in socioeconomic and technological conditions, particularly with the growing industrial activity in Porto Marghera. The purpose of the Marghera industrial initiative, which began in 1917, was to industrialize the region in order to revitalize its economy. However, the decision to place highly polluting businesses along the lagoon's shores, as well as massive construction, had damaging implications. Port expansions, canal excavations and the resulting MOSE project have altered sedimentary processes in the lagoon, negatively affecting the ecology. Groundwater has also been polluted by industrial activities, causing subsidence problems in the center of the Venetian lagoon. In order to support sustainable, coordinated and cooperative management of economic activities, the European Union has implemented marine policies, strategies and regulatory frameworks aimed at conserving marine habitats and the ecosystem services they provide. In 2014, the European Union enacted Directive 2014/89/EU¹⁴ established the Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) framework to promote the sustainable growth of maritime economies, the sustainable development of marine areas, and the wise use of marine resources. Venice adhered to the operational strategy that attempts to balance development needs with the conservation of marine ecosystems, a more logical arrangement of maritime space, and

¹³M. Costantini, *Porto navi e traffici a Venezia 1700-2000*, Marsilio, 2004.

¹⁴ 2014/89/2014, Parlamento europeo, Gazzetta ufficiale dell'Unione europea, 2014.

interactions among its users in order to achieve transparent and planned social and economic objectives. The directive was transposed into Italian law by Legislative Decree No. 201 of October 17, 2016.¹⁵ The competent authority is the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, in collaboration with other ministries with jurisdiction over the sea and maritime and regional economic sectors. This approach seeks to leverage shared resources and workspace in order to maximize synergies.

The evolution of Venice's *port function* over time provides a high example of the intricate interactions between commercial interests, environmental concerns, and political agendas. A complex web of interconnected factors, from strategic ambitions during the Napoleonic era to disputes over duty-free ports during the Austrian era, significantly changed the port and the city. Not only that, Venice's port history exemplifies the importance of comprehensive strategies to maintain the balance between the economic and environmental imperatives of natural history with a cooperative effort involving numerous stakeholders, informed decision-making, and a dedication to maintaining Venice's unique cultural and natural history. The intention of this thesis paper is to explore the strategic significance of port infrastructure in the Adriatic Sea, with a focus on the evolution of the port of Venice from the 19th to the 21st century. The goal is to offer a comprehensive analysis of the variables that have shaped the historical, economic, and geopolitical significance of the port of Venice and changed its *port function*. Beginning with the historical review, the key role of the port in defining the economic environment of Venice and the broader Adriatic region will be highlighted, analyzing its contribution to regional trade and growth, beginning in the 1800s. The first and second chapters will analyze the port function in the Napoleonic and Austrian eras. The third chapter will go on to analyze the port function at the turn of the 20th century between the two world wars. Finally, the fourth chapter will have the task of understanding what the *port function* of Venice is today. In addition to economic and political

¹⁵Gazzetta ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, “*Leggi ed altri atti normativi*”, <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/ita212118.pdf>.

aspects, it will analyze the ecological footprint of the port of Venice and see how the environmental protection legislation introduced by the European Union will change the port function of Venice. By conducting a comparative analysis with other strategically positioned European ports, the paper will broaden its scope to the international dimension, to lay the groundwork for an informed debate on the future prospects and possible paths of the Adriatic region and the city of Venice.

1. Premessa

During the 18th century, Venice was one of the most important trading ports in the Mediterranean. Enjoying political autonomy and being in a strategic position at the crossroads of West and East it could act as a *global crossroads*. However, over the course of the century the decline of the Venetian Republic became increasingly evident, with the loss of territories and increasing internal political tensions. During the 19th century, the Venetian republic was succeeded by French, Austrian, and finally Italian rule. The Venetian Republic finally fell in 1797, when Napoleon took control of the city, marking a turning point in Venetian history. The French emperor immediately understood the importance of Venice's strategic position in the Adriatic and Mediterranean seas and attempted to turn it into an important part of his empire, reforming Venetian institutions and promoting social and economic changes. Changes that were met with reluctance by the city, in fact, the Venetian population did not tolerate being dominated and subjected to external political and economic changes. The establishment of *free port* status, in response to the growing attractiveness of the rival Austrian port of Trieste, was highly controversial. The strategy of reducing taxation for transit and warehousing of goods to facilitate entry into the port and thus its economic inducement was tried before in Italian and world port history, but the Venetian population remained reluctant because it was very attached to its political autonomy and its tradition of craftsmanship and crossroads of cultures. However, during the

Napoleonic era great engineering and infrastructural works were completed for the ports of Venice. Napoleon spent many resources to upgrade and modernize the ports, build new docks, warehouses, and arsenals, and improve the existing infrastructure. This improved the efficiency of the Venetian ports and made them better suited to the commercial and military needs of the time. The entire Veneto region gained prestige during this era as it became an important supply point and logistics base for French military fleets participating in operations in the Mediterranean and Adriatic. The growing involvement of the city of Venice in French military activity led to the development and strengthening of the port infrastructure. Napoleon's trade, economic, and customs reforms propelled Venice's maritime trade and economy. The introduction of new laws and the modernization of port infrastructure led to the development of new businesses related to maritime trade and port logistics, thus increasing employment and economic activity in the city.¹⁶ However, Napoleon's decline brought with it further difficulties for the city of Venice and its port function. In fact, during Austrian rule, Venice was reduced to a second-rate port, that is, an unimportant port compared to the port of Trieste.

Chapter I

The port function of Venice from the 1700s to the Napoleonic era

1.1 A brief mention of the 1700s

In 1517, the Senate of the Maritime Republic of Venice resolved to establish the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*, with the aim of entrusting them with the economic management of the port. After about ten years they became a stable magistracy of the Republic with jurisdiction over

¹⁶G. Delogu, *Venezia "dopo Venezia": funzioni e le immagini delle città porto tra età Napoleonica e austriaca, in Venezia dopo venezia. Città-porto, reti commerciali e circolazione delle notizie nel bacino portuale veneziano tra Settecento e Novecento*, A. Trampus (a cura di), Edizioni Mosetti, 2019.

Venetian trade, navigation and industry. The institution maintained its importance for much of the Venetian Republic's view. In fact, in their function of auditing the Republic's accounts to streamline port management, the Cinque Savi initiated a comprehensive collection of data on Venetian international trade beginning in 1734. Through that collection today we can identify the *port function* of Venice during the 1700s, namely the *merchant function*. The Registri dei Cinque¹⁷ Savi were used for Venetian economic strategies, providing both quantitative and interpretive data. In fact, by providing economic information they helped identify new trade opportunities and new sea routes that led to an increase in the volume of Venetian trade. They provided the basis for tariff decisions, the encouragement of specific industries and the creation of new trade routes. The role of the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia in overseeing the port of Venice was not simply limited to economic management. They played a key role in ensuring that the port remained a vital center for international trade and shipping. In addition to overseeing accounts and financial management, the Cinque Savi were tasked with promoting the development of Venetian industry and trade, ensuring that the port maintained its competitiveness and status as a trading hub in the Adriatic and eastern Mediterranean. A further task was to regulate maritime traffic and ensure that port infrastructure was adequate to meet the needs of merchants and seafarers. This included the maintenance of wharves, warehouses and storage facilities, as well as the supervision of the loading and unloading of goods. So, the Registri were not simply customs compilations but *ad hoc* analyses of economic data for the political purposes of the Venetian Republic. They revealed Venice's enduring importance as a global crossroads for the circulation and consumption of a wide range of goods. While the spice trade, dominated by northern European traders, shifted power away from Venice, the city obtained eastern spices via western routes throughout the Italian peninsula, the Austrian littoral, and Germany, with stopovers in Trieste and Livorno.¹⁸ Sugar was a vital commodity that

¹⁷ASVE, *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*, Scritture, reg. 190, 1764.

¹⁸G. Delogu, "Venezia atlantica: per un'analisi economica e culturale dell'impatto dei generi coloniali nel secondo Settecento", in RIME, rivista dell'Istituto di storia dell'Europa mediterranea, 8(1), p. 129-146, 2021.

was traded for glass products, particularly the popular glass beads known as “*contarie*,” which played an important role in the ports of Atlantic Europe. The classification of sugar species was covered extensively in Venetian publications, particularly encyclopedias. The Registri dei Cinque Savi highlighted Venice's active involvement in the export of books, paper and maps that were still being exported around the world in the 1770s. Venice's involvement in the global market expanded beyond physical goods to the cultural sector. The city not only produced and exported luxury goods such as paintings and glassware, but also actively participated in the translation of foreign works. In 18th-century narrative entertainment, heroes consumed global products, transforming them from mere commodities *into cultured*,¹⁹ culturally significant objects. These items, replicated by literary heroes and heroines, became status symbols and helped transform social customs and identities. Venice's engagement with global raw materials was dynamic, incorporating both material and imaginative components. Venice's ability to transform global raw materials into culturally significant objects, along with its continued engagement in global trade networks, made it a crucial participant in the developing landscape of the 18th century. The entry of coffee through the Levantine and Atlantic routes, as well as the local production of coffee-related items, demonstrate Venice's complex relationship with global trade. The intersection of global goods, cultural developments, and commercial activities in Venice during the eighteenth century, as revealed by the Registri dei Cinque Savi, underscores the importance of Venice as a vital hub for the movement of a wide range of goods from around the world and its active participation in the world trade network, with the city acting as a collector, consumer, and distributor of products.

However, the eighteenth century was not only a time of expansion for maritime trade and for the city indeed Venice remained a *victim* of its own expansion. Especially in the first half of the century, Venice experienced a time of social rather than economic instability precisely because much room was made for international trade and foreign merchants who were sometimes perceived

¹⁹G. Delogu, “*Venezia atlantica: per un’analisi economica e culturale dell’impatto dei generi coloniali nel secondo Settecento*”, in RIME, rivista dell’Istituto di storia dell’Europa mediterranea, 8(1), p. 129-146, 2021.

as *invaders*. This brought with it negative aspects and difficulties related to the management of the port system. In fact, the growing presence of foreign merchants—primarily from the Ottoman Empire, the Jewish world, and other European nations such as the Netherlands and Germany—led to their increasing economic influence on Venice, to the detriment of local merchants. This also put foreign commercial interests at the center of the Venetian Serenissima Republic's legislative system. Although some historians have noted that the Venetian government attempted to treat foreigners residing in the cities pragmatically, others have observed an increasing tendency to marginalize foreign minorities. A better understanding of the status of foreign merchants and their relationship with Venetian authorities can be gained by examining the institutional context of Venice and the activities of merchants in the city's bureaucratic structures. Every aspect of urban life was regulated by a network of magistracies, which included the magistracy of the Five Sages at the Mercanzia. The network often functioned competitively, with magistracies fighting for survival and to win more political power. The Cinque Savi had high political and social status because they were elected by the Serenissima Senate and members often belonged to the oldest noble families. Their work also included mediating with foreign merchants and expanding their power within the Republic.²⁰ In fact, in the unstable social environment for the Republic of Venice during this period, economic power was no longer in the hands of Venetians but in the hands of foreign merchants.²¹ The Venetian bureaucratic system was used by foreign merchants to acquire both economic and residential privileges, managing to establish a direct and institutional relationship with the magistracy of the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia. These merchants often had specialized knowledge of the trade routes, goods, and business practices of their places. The magistrates had a very important political and social role so foreign merchants were able to secure a position of absolute protection and privilege. Several historical analyses refer to the Venetian attitude toward

²⁰T. Prideaux, *Istituzioni e potere: il rapporto fra i mercanti levantini e i Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia a Venezia nel Cinquecento e Seicento*, in *Rivista dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea*, 2023.

²¹F.C. Lane, *Storia di Venezia*, Einaudi, 2015.

foreign merchants residing in the city, pointing to a twofold trend: on the one hand a growing marginalization of foreign minorities and on the other hand a pragmatic inclination toward commercial business. The precarious economic and social context influenced the relationship between Venetians and foreign merchants, who were never really welcomed nor really driven back from the city. As already pointed out the governmental skill of the Serenissima was to strike a balance between different political, economic and social needs. Analysis of economic records and trade routes clearly shows the dynamic function of Venice in the 18th century. The city was not only a center of trade, but was also an important place for consumers and brokers from the New World. Venice positioned itself at the center of a global trade network through its port and trade activities, thus contributing to the growth and spread of knowledge and culture between continents. The Most Serene Republic of Venice, one of the most important maritime powers in the Mediterranean, saw tremendous development and transformation during the 18th century that led to its inevitable decline in the following century.

1.2 Napoleonic era in Venice

As early as the second half of the century, Venice faced a series of both internal and external difficulties that would affect its future and its role on the global stage. On the one hand, the advent of new commercial competitors and the political and territorial pressures of the Austro-Hungarian Empire posed a challenge to the city's centuries-old dominance of maritime trade. On the other, the Napoleonic era caused enormous political and strategic upheavals, which ended with the end of the Republic and the establishment of new ruling classes. During this turbulent period, Venice struggled to adapt to the new circumstances while maintaining its identity and importance. The first aspect to change was military strategy and more generally Venetian foreign policy. The Treaties of Passarowitz, signed in 1718 marked the conclusion of the conflict that had begun in 1714 between the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire, which had been joined in 1716 by

the Habsburg Empire. This agreement initiated *Venice's policy of military disengagement and neutrality*, later reaffirmed by Angelo Emo's Treaty of Perpetual Peace with Sultan Mohamud I in 1733. Emo is remembered primarily for his military exploits during the wars against the Ottoman Empire and for his skill in commanding Venetian fleets. Moreover, he distinguished himself not only as a military commander but also as a diplomat and politician, holding important positions for the Venetian Republic during a period of significant political and economic changes in 18th-century Europe. In addition to this, he was able to negotiate peace with the Ottoman Sultan. Meanwhile, Venice had to deal with the consequences of Habsburg expansion in the Mediterranean, with the establishment of *free ports* in Fiume and Trieste seen as a danger. Venetian responses included tariff reforms, a shift in concentration from the Levant to the mainland, and an expansion of industry.

In 1736, reforms were introduced in the customs system, with reduced tariffs for imports and exports. In addition, the shipbuilding industry was encouraged through public support for the construction of stronger and better equipped ships to defend against privateers, thus promoting maritime security. Despite these efforts, the emergence of Trieste as a trading center endangered the Venetian economy, prompting the elimination of tariff reductions in 1751. The inadequacy of these protections was highlighted in Trieste's rise as a trading center for a wide range of goods that became a real threat. In response, Venice eliminated tariff reductions in 1751 to protect local industry. Opposition to *free ports* stemmed from Venice's distinct urban, social and productive characteristics compared to other Mediterranean cities. Venice, with its thriving industrial sector, was not only a transportation hub but also a producer and consumer. The city changed its tariffs as it sought new ways to expand. Internationally, Venice benefited from neutrality during the Seven Years' War, signing agreements with the *Barbary States* between 1763 and 1765. The term "Barbarians" and expressions such as "Barbary states" or "Barbary pirates" were commonly associated with the people of Barbary, especially during the later medieval and early modern times.

At the same time, Napoleon completed his rise to power and began his policy of transforming French government, changing the borders of Europe and having a lasting impact on revolutionaries and nationalists around the world. Napoleon's military prowess was immediately evident, particularly after his victorious war in Italy in 1796. During his military campaigns and rule in Europe, Napoleon recognized the strategic importance of Venice and its port. In fact, he occupied it in 1797 during the French Revolutionary Wars, ending the Republic of Venice. The French occupation generated the end of Venice's political independence and the end of the Serenissima, Italy's most important maritime republic. Napoleon transformed Venice into an important naval and commercial base for his operations in Europe after realizing how important the port was. He established a strong rule over the Adriatic Sea and further expanded his power by taking control of the port of Venice. The society, economy, and administration of Venice and its surrounding territories underwent radical changes due to Napoleon's policies. Although Napoleon's rule over Venice was brief, it left its mark on the city and the port, influencing the 19th-century history of Venice and Europe. *Free ports* had first been established in the late 16th century in Genoa and Livorno, and from there the model, with different regulations, had spread throughout the Mediterranean basin and on both sides of the Atlantic.²² Napoleon's desire to create a free port in Venice was both strategic and economic. His strategy to consolidate his control over the eastern Mediterranean region included this move. By building a *free port*, Napoleon would be able to control trade in the region and limit the economic influence of the British and promote French commercial interests. In addition, there was a strong rivalry between France and Britain for domination of maritime trade during the Napoleonic Wars. Therefore, the creation of a free port in Venice would benefit French interests because it would reduce British influence in the region. In addition, Napoleon thought that free trade could help the French economy grow. Establishing a free port in Venice to facilitate trade and economic activity would have helped the French economy

²²Dodman, T., & Lignereux, A. (Eds.) (2023), *From the Napoleonic Empire to the Age of Empire: Empire after the Emperor*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 128-139.

grow. In addition, by creating a free port in Venice, Napoleon would have strengthened his political authority over the city and its surrounding territory. This would contribute to his goal of consolidating French rule in northern Italy and the eastern Adriatic. Immediately a heated debate was sparked about the transformation of the port of Venice from a merchant port to a *free port* then a transit port. In the previous century it was the very institution of the Venetian Magistracy that recorded and influenced the debate on the Venetian port system while in the nineteenth century, with the transformation of the entire institutional system, the debate would be channelled among scholars and intellectuals of the time. Melchiorre Gioia, a fervent supporter of Napoleon and French rule, immediately recognized the free port as one of the best tools to return to the balance between the Venetian people and its port.

Therefore, he thoroughly discussed the issue of free ports and cited Sismondi²³ as the authority who supported his positions. The Italian economist reiterated that free ports had a positive impact on domestic markets and international trade. Always attentive to political and institutional issues, Gioia also emphasized the role that free ports played in public health management and epidemic control. The subsequent prosperity of Gioia's work, particularly in the Iberian and Latin American countries, contributed significantly to the recovery of Napoleonic economic policies, which included free ports. In the first half of the 19th century, theoretical and intellectual considerations led to a new active political planning. Many Venetians felt the call of freedom and decided to take active action to oppose French policy, both domestic and international. Boycotts and sabotage toward French troops in the city, toward merchant ships, and toward French institutions made life difficult for the *invaders*. Soon Napoleon capitulated and never carried out the work of the free port in Venice. His descent from the pinnacle of authority was almost as surprising as his rise. In 1812, Napoleon launched a campaign in Russia, winning most of the battles but eventually losing his entire army. Within two years, the coalition against him had successfully conquered Paris.

²³Jean Charles Léonard Simonde de Sismondi was a Swiss economist and historian of Genoese origin, active mainly during the 19th century. His career and works are mainly associated with his work as an economist, historian and writer, with a special interest in economic and social history.

Napoleon, forced into exile on Elba, managed to escape and fight one last battle. However, his defeat at Waterloo in Belgium in 1815 led to his exile to the remote island of St. Helena, where he died in 1821.²⁴ The eagle, signifying his reign, had made its final flight.

1.3 Lo status di *porto franco*

To properly understand the function that was entrusted to the port of Venice during the Napoleonic era, one must grasp the historical, political, and economic meaning of *free port*. The juxtaposition of the adjective *franco* with *porto* identifies a port area exempt from taxes and customs duties. If goods can pass freely through Italian and European ports today, it was thanks to the abolition of customs following the establishment of the Schengen area.²⁵ This area has been one of the foundations of the political and economic structure of the European Union. Since its establishment in 1995, the area has made tangible the freedom to travel within the Union by eliminating border controls and transit limits. This has meant that people can reside, study, work and even retire in any country in the European area without legislative obstacles. It has also provided significant benefits for both tourists and businesses, facilitating travel and facilitating transnational business activities. Very different was the condition of transit in previous centuries, when each imperial political entity also protected its goods and waters by the imposition of increased customs tariffs, depending on imperial political relations. As for Venice, for much of its history, the symbiosis with the port meant that trade was the foundation and pillar of its finance, wealth, and power. The public debt was sustained through taxes on consumption, business and customs fees. The policy of the Venetian Republic focused entirely and consistently on promoting and supporting international trade, which was the main source of tax revenue and prosperity for the entire population. It was not the intention of the merchants and republican authorities to turn Venice into a mere port of passage. The main goal was to attract foreign merchants from all over,

²⁴E. Tarle, 1812: la campagna di Napoleone in Russia, Res Gestae, 2012.

²⁵J.Fürst, Defensive integration through cooperative re-bordering? How member states use internal border controls in Schengen, Journal of European Public Policy, pages 1-23, 2023.

offering them accommodations, warehouses, and intermediaries to facilitate contacts and trade. Imported products were to be sold to the Venetians themselves before being shipped back overseas, using the Republic's transports.²⁶ To exert control over the waters of the Upper Adriatic, known as the Gulf, the Republic of Venice imposed restrictions on the navigation of commercial ships. These restrictions included the obligation for ships loaded with certain goods to stop in Venice, declare their cargo and destination, undergo customs inspections, and pay the relevant fees. Ships also had to obtain a license for transportation and transit, and comply with assigned routes. Those who violated these rules or tried to commit fraud or smuggling risked confiscation of their ships and goods. As already pointed out, the transit through the port and city of many foreign people brought major problems that the republican authorities had to counter. These included a significant increase in piracy and smuggling in the first half of the 1700s. The Republic established the position of Gulf Captain, responsible for a fleet of galleys charged with ensuring security in the Mediterranean. Customs supervision in the port of Venice was entrusted to specialized officers, while in the ports of entry to the lagoon, such as Lido and Malamocco, port officers were responsible for inspecting incoming ships and sealing cargoes. The next period saw the development of free ports in other coastal cities such as Genoa and Livorno. These institutions facilitated the storage and transit of goods without the application of customs duties. Livorno, in particular, after being granted free port status in 1675, became an important international port of call, preferred by European traders to store eastern goods awaiting sale or destination. A flourishing smuggling trade also developed here, so much so that the Genoese authorities had to intervene by decree in 1697 to punish violators with heavy fines. In 1699, further provisions prohibited religious men and women from entering the Genoese free port because of attempted fraud. In general, smuggling remained a widespread phenomenon until the 18th century, fueled by the economic needs of many and heavy customs taxes. Venetian customs duties and free ports represented two sides of the same coin within the

²⁶J.C. Hocquet, *I meccanismi dei traffici*, Storia di Venezia, Treccani, 1997.

Republic of Venice's trade policy. While customs duties were tools used to regulate sea and land trade and ensure substantial tax revenues, free ports offered an alternative for merchants, allowing them to operate without the restrictions and costs associated with duties. Although Venetian customs duties helped to finance the state and protect local industry, they were also perceived as an obstacle to free trade and economic growth. These duties were burdensome for merchants and negatively affected the prices of goods, reducing the competitiveness of Venetian goods in international markets. In addition, the customs system was correlated with increased corruption and favoritism by some analysts of the time. On the other hand, free ports offered a more open and favorable trading environment, allowing merchants to store and transport goods without facing the costs and restrictions associated with duties. However, the absence of customs controls in the free ports also facilitated smuggling and fraud, undermining the enforcement of trade laws and potentially reducing the Republic's tax revenues. Ultimately, both Venetian customs duties and free ports had their advantages and disadvantages, and Venetian trade policy had to balance the need for tax revenue with promoting economic growth and international trade. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, Venice experienced a moment of decline to which it reacted by striking a balance between precisely these needs. Already in the last years of the Venetian Republic, the choice was made to gradually reduce customs tariffs in order to sustain maritime and commercial competition with other Adriatic ports and to revive the city's economy. A process of reforms was initiated in eighteenth-century Venice followed a well-defined procedure. Initially, existing dysfunctions were identified and special bodies with political responsibilities and a technical staff were created. Next, the situation of the structures involved was reconstructed historically and in-depth investigations were conducted to analyze the situations, often exposing the distortions present. External information was recruited and proposals for reform were developed by involving outside experts. These proposals were then discussed in city councils and, if deemed appropriate, reform decrees were issued. Finally, the concrete implementation of the decided reforms was carried out.²⁷ These

²⁷Enciclopedia online, *Storia di Venezia*, Riforme, tentativi di riforme, progetti di forme, Treccani, 1998.

port reforms were both seen as opportunities for development and threats to local practices and identities, highlighting the challenges of reconciling economic aspirations with the preservation of local traditions and communities. With the arrival of French rule Venice acquired the status of a *free port* with the aim of countering the effects of the continental blockade and to assert French dominance in maritime trade. Napoleon, focused on consolidating his positions against the new European coalitions, soon forgot the Venetians, limiting himself to strengthening the military defenses of the lagoon city. Therefore, even Napoleon's strategy failed to halt Venice's decline: trade failed, palaces emptied, and shipowners were forced to destroy their ships. The city suffered a severe cultural and social blow: churches demolished, works of art confiscated or sold, institutions closed. The population began to rebel against the French government, manifesting their dissent even through the symbolic act of attempting to topple the statue of Napoleon, erected as a tribute to the free port, which was in fact never realized. In the definition of the new political and geographical order achieved during the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Venice, which was reduced to a heap of ruins, was ceded to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The attempt to topple the statue of Napoleon failed but the work was demolished anyway, symbolizing the end of the Napoleonic era and the return of Austrian rule.

However, the significance of the political effort to strike a balance between tax revenues and the promotion of economic growth and international trade went beyond the immediate context, influencing discussions on trade reforms well into the late 19th century. A key aspect of understanding the issue of the *free port* in Venice is the dual role of Napoleon, who was both political leader and cultural icon. His image as a charismatic figure played a crucial role in popularizing the idea of trade, even beyond his era. This narrative, perpetuated during the reign of Napoleon III, contributed to the canonization of Napoleon as the "*father of free trade.*"²⁸ Napoleon's proposal in April 1815 to change the regulation of the *free port* of Marseille

²⁸The image of Napoleon as '*father of free trade*' was canonized during Napoleon III's empire (1848–1870) and became popular and globally widespread for commercial reforms in a series of interconnected contexts.

demonstrates his recognition of the institution's importance, albeit with changes to its existing structure. This proposal, although eventually overshadowed by the defeat at Waterloo, reflects Napoleon's broader economic vision, rooted in both the Atlantic and Mediterranean contexts. Today we may see free port status as key to the revival of the Venetian economy, but the perception at the time was not as positive. In fact, the 1806 declaration was a source of conflict and tension among various social and institutional actors. On the one hand, the free port was promoted as an ideal solution to lift the economy and restore the city to a leading role in international trade. On the other, there were concerns among fishermen and some local manufactures about foreign competition and possible negative effects on traditional activities. The debate also reflected divisions between different urban and social constituencies, with some seeing the free port as an opportunity for development and others as a threat to their traditional activities. In addition, a tension emerged between the city's economic aspirations and the preservation of local practices and identities. Napoleon and the Austrian administration both sought to use the *free port* as a tool to consolidate political and economic control over the city, but the reactions of the local population and elite showed that the process of urban and economic transformation was not without tension and resistance. In conclusion, the debate over *free port* status for Venice in the 19th century highlights the complex dynamics between political and economic aspirations, cultural identity and environmental concerns that characterized the French and later the Austrian period.

Chapter II

Conflicts and convergences of the Napoleonic and Austro-Hungarian eras

2.1 The Congress of Vienna

The fall of Napoleon had a significant impact on European economics and politics. With the defeat at Waterloo in 1815, the European powers gathered at the Congress of Vienna to redraw borders and restore the pre-Napoleonic order. This event marked the end of French rule over Venice and its return to Austria. However, the policies and reforms that Napoleon carried out left a lasting impression that continued to influence local dynamics. The establishment of the free port, designed to facilitate trade liberalization and help revitalize the local economy, was one of the most significant elements of Napoleon's economic policy in Venice. Although this policy was intended to promote economic development and reposition Venice as a major trading hub, it was controversial. The process of adaptation to emerging economic dynamics was complex and often confrontational, as evidenced by the mixed reactions of social and institutional actors. These tensions did not ease immediately after the return of Austrian rule. The Austrian administration tried to maintain some of the Napoleonic economic reforms, such as the function of the free port, but also faced resistance from people in the vicinity. Ordinary people and the Venetian elite were divided between those who saw the free port as an opportunity for growth and those who feared that it would have a negative impact on the city's traditional activities and cultural identity. The Austrian authorities were forced to choose between the need to consolidate their power and

adopting economic policies that could truly promote growth and meet the expectations of the population. To put it briefly, the fall of Napoleon and the return of Austria to control Venice marked not only a political change, but also a period of continuity and adaptation of Napoleonic economic policies. During this period, it was emphasized how difficult it was to balance financial goals with local concerns and cultural identities. This problem remained central to the debate on the modernization and economic development of Venice in the 19th century.

The Congress of Vienna (1814-1815) was an important international meeting organized to restore order in Europe after the fall of Napoleon Bonaparte. The redistribution of territories conquered or influenced by Napoleonic France was one of the most important issues discussed at the Congress. The city of Venice and its territories were formally granted to the Austrian Empire. The decision was made after a long negotiation between Austria, Prussia, Russia and the United Kingdom, who were trying to balance their political and territorial interests. After the signing of the Treaty of Campoformio in 1797, the Republic of Venice had ceased to exist and its territories were divided between France and Austria. Before Napoleon's fall, Venice had been incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy, a political entity founded by Napoleon and closely linked to the French Empire. Austrian Chancellor Klemens von Metternich²⁹ did much to ensure that Venice would return under Austrian control at the Congress of Vienna. The Austrians had already conquered Venice in 1797, but in 1806 they lost it to the Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy. Metternich reclaimed Venice for Austria after Napoleon's defeat, seeing it as an important strategic and commercial bastion, controlling the Adriatic Sea and the Mediterranean by extension. In 1815 the official decision was made to assign Venice to Austria, and the city became part of the Lombardy-Venetia Kingdom, a new political institution of the Austrian crown that included the Lombardy region as well as the Veneto region. This began Austrian rule over Venice, which continued until 1866, when it was

²⁹Klemens von Metternich was an Austrian statesman, minister of foreign affairs (1809–48), and a conservative who helped form the victorious alliance against Napoleon I and restored Austria as a major European power by hosting the Congress of Vienna in 1814–15. He was born on May 15, 1773, in Coblenz (Germany) and he died on June 11, 1859, in Vienna (Austria). K. Otmar & Aretin, Baron von Klemens von Metternich, in Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024.

annexed to the new Kingdom of Italy.³⁰ Despite the European political dynamics of the time, it is interesting to note how modern international law addresses conflict situations with different measures. In modern international law, a naval blockade and a trade blockade represent coercive measures taken by a state, or several states, in order to prevent maritime traffic to and from the coasts of an enemy state, thus exerting economic and military pressure. Specifically, naval blockade consists of controlling and preventing access to the enemy's coasts and ports in order to disrupt the arrival of essential supplies and cripple the adversary's economy. To be legitimate under international law, a naval blockade must be formally declared, effectively and continuously imposed, applied impartially to all ships, and proportionate to military objectives. A trade blockade, on the other hand, includes measures such as embargoes on specific goods, broader economic sanctions affecting financial transactions and investments, and freezing of assets, all of which are designed to economically isolate the enemy state and exert additional pressure to obtain concessions or an end to hostilities.

One historical implementation of such measures is the Continental Blockade. Continental Blockade, is a measure taken by the naval forces of one state to prevent all communication by sea with respect to a stretch of coastline of another state. It may have two objectives: to strike at the enemy's military strength, preventing the opponent's entry and exit from particular forts or plazas, or to damage the enemy's commerce to the point of destruction, without attempting to capture a blockaded port or coastline. International doctrine and practice distinguish three main categories: casual blockade, cruise blockade, and actual blockade. The former is that which a belligerent state wishes to impose on its opponent's ports and coastlines simply by informing neutral powers; cruise blockade consists of having moving ships guard a particular area of the coastline; and finally, royal

³⁰Enciclopedia Treccani, "*Vienna, Congresso di*", Dizionario di Storia, 2011.

blockade is exercised by ships standing stationary in front of a port, close enough to prevent all communication with the high seas.³¹

Established by Napoleon in 1806 as an economic warfare strategy against Britain, it was an ambitious attempt to weaken Britain's economy and force it into peace. However, the Continental Bloc turned out to be a political failure with many complex implications and dynamics, despite Napoleon's efforts to devise and implement this policy. After achieving significant military victories against Prussia and Austria, Napoleon decided to use the Continental Bloc to put more pressure on Britain. This strategy was designed to prevent Britain from accessing trade outlets in Europe, making it difficult for the country to access markets and raw materials. The Berlin Decree of November 1806 imposed trade restrictions on countries that traded with Britain; subsequent decrees extended the restrictions, banning trade with British colonies and establishing licenses for imports and exports. However, the Continental Bloc faced many obstacles in its implementation. The trade restrictions imposed by Napoleon were ignored by many European states, leading to smuggling. In addition, the protectionist measures put in place by France favored French merchants but not the allied states to trade with them. Its failure was caused by corruption and lack of uniform enforcement of the Bloc. Nevertheless, the British economy experienced some problems because of the Continental Bloc. For example, a slowdown in economic growth and industrial investment was evident during this period. However, thanks to the effectiveness of its credit system and the opening of new markets in the colonies, Britain remained on its feet. In addition, the Royal Navy's control over the seas allowed Britain to maintain its trade routes and import vital raw materials. The Continental Bloc failed to convince Britain to give up. This failure demonstrated that Napoleon's mercantilist perspective was extremely limited and that victory in economic warfare alone could not be guaranteed in such a conflict.³² The Napoleonic Wars occurred in Europe after Napoleon established the Continental Blockade with the aim of economically suffocating the

³¹Enciclopedia Treccani, "BLOCCO", Enciclopedia Italiana (1930).

³²Pandora Rivista, "Il Blocco continentale e la guerra e la guerra economica di Napoleone", 2020.

United Kingdom and its allies. These wars involved much of the European continent and caused great changes in politics, societies, and economies. During this period, Napoleon sought to strengthen his rule over Europe through a series of military conquests and strategic agreements. But his passion led him to use too many resources, which eventually led to his downfall. The Russian campaign of 1812 marked the turning point in the Napoleonic Wars, with Napoleon's Grande Armée weakened and decimated by Russian forces and unfavorable weather.³³ After this defeat, Napoleonic rule became more fragile and European nations united against him. A series of military conflicts between French forces and coalitions resulted from the subsequent anti-Napoleonic coalitions. These included the Battle of Leipzig in 1813 and the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, which was the final battle. Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo marked the end of his rule and led to his second and final abdication. He was exiled to the island of St. Helena, located in the South Atlantic, where he died in 1821. The fall of Napoleon and the Napoleonic Wars had a long-term impact on Europe and the world. For the rest of the 19th century, they contributed to the creation of international politics, the promotion of nationalism, and the redefinition of political and territorial borders. Napoleon created the free port of Venice. This port was built to facilitate trade and support the economic revival of the city, which at the time was one of the Mediterranean's major trading centers. But its introduction caused controversy, especially among Venetian elites and the local population. There were people who saw this measure as an opportunity for growth and people who feared it would damage the city's cultural identity and traditional economic activities.³⁴ In terms of contemporary global capitalism, the notion of “free port” identifies a specific type of special economic zone. It is an economic space that uses a spatial abstraction from the administrative and fiscal system that governs the surrounding territory. The free port creates an administrative and physical space separate from the rest of the host territory, which allows businesses to operate under

³³E. Tarle, “1812: *La Campagna Di Napoleone In Russia*”, Res Gestae, 2012.

³⁴Staplebroek, K., & Tazzara, C. (2023). The global history of the free port. *Global Intellectual History*, 8(6), 662-694. [https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2023.2280091**​:contentReference\[oaicite:0\]{index=0}](https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2023.2280091**​:contentReference[oaicite:0]{index=0})

different tax and regulatory regimes. Traditionally, this environment has been used to stimulate the economy and attract investment by providing businesses with a range of tax and administrative benefits. The concept of free port is originally associated with maritime trade and has subsequently evolved to meet the needs of contemporary capitalism. Its ability to establish a distinct regulatory and economic space that promotes economic development and facilitates trade is the basis of its legal-historical definition.³⁵

2.2 The Austrian domination

The economic and political interests of several empires, including the Austro-Hungarian Empire, are intertwined with the long history of the concept of the “free port,” a particular area free of administrative and fiscal constraints with respect to the surrounding territory. Due to its geopolitical position, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was able to exploit free ports as a strategic tool to stimulate the economy and attract investment, facilitating international trade. These special economic zones also played a crucial role in cementing relations with the British Empire, which saw Austro-Hungarian free ports as vital points for expanding its trade routes in a context of growing global capitalism. A significant example is the free port of Trieste, one of the main ports in the Mediterranean during the Austro-Hungarian era, which reduced tariff and bureaucratic barriers through tax and administrative concessions. This made Trieste a strategic hub for British trade, providing privileged access to the Central and Eastern European markets, and further strengthening economic ties between the two empires. These favorable conditions allowed British companies to function more productively and profitably. The alliance between the British Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire was not only economic. Moreover, these free ports strengthened the ties between the two empires by promoting cultural and political influences. The adoption and expansion of free ports in Austria and Hungary showed a broader strategy of economic integration

³⁵*Ibidem.*

and international cooperation, which were crucial elements of global capitalism at that time. In conclusion, the free ports of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with their distinctive regulatory and fiscal system, helped the development of the national economy and became foreign policy instruments that strengthened relations with powers such as the British Empire. The system of international trade and global capitalism as we know it today were shaped by this interaction between political and economic powers.³⁶ Austro-Hungarian free ports, such as Trieste, were a crucial point for international trade and for the Austro-Hungarian Empire's political and economic relations with other powers, particularly the British Empire. These ports allowed goods to enter, be stored and sold without being subject to normal customs tariffs, which promoted free trade and made these ports extremely attractive to merchants from around the world. The free port of Trieste, in particular, enjoyed an advanced infrastructure and strategic location that facilitated trade across the Mediterranean and to Central and Eastern Europe. This configuration allowed British ships to use Trieste as a hub to distribute goods, reducing costs and improving logistical efficiency. Trieste thus became a vital center for British trade, providing quick and inexpensive access to European markets.³⁷ Moreover, the free port concept not only improved economic trade but also strengthened political relations between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the British Empire. The adoption of free trade policies and the creation of these special economic zones demonstrate a broader strategy of economic integration and international cooperation, key elements of global capitalism of the period. In sum, Austro-Hungarian free ports such as Trieste not only boosted the economy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire but also strengthened international ties, particularly with the British Empire, creating a favorable environment for global trade and contributing significantly to the development of the international economic system as we know it today. The United Kingdom's interest in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the free port of Venice in the 1800s was driven by strategic, economic, and political considerations. To prevent the emergence of a dominant power

³⁶J.Komlos, *The Habsburg Monarchy as a Customs Union: Economic Integration and Political Sovereignty*, Princeton Legacy Library, 2016.

³⁷G. Panjek, G.Mellinato, *L'evoluzione delle strutture portuali della Trieste moderna tra '800 e '900*.

that could threaten its global interests, the United Kingdom sought to maintain a balance of power in Europe. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was a huge obstacle to France, as well as to Germany and Russia. Thus, British strategy needed a strong ally in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.³⁸ Venice was an important trading hub in the Mediterranean because it was a free port. This port was a strategic location for British trade routes because it allowed free trade. Britain, which dominated maritime trade worldwide, was very interested in maintaining access to this port so as to facilitate its trade in the Adriatic and eastern Mediterranean. British naval operations depended on the port of Venice and other ports in the Empire, such as Trieste. The British and Austro-Hungarian fleets often worked together to fight the Italian and French fleets during World War I. The presence of advanced port infrastructure capable of supporting large-scale naval operations made this cooperation easier. Britain and Austria-Hungary were interested in preventing Russia from expanding into the Balkans. The two nations were trying to stop Russian influence, which could destabilize the region and threaten their respective interests, so they worked together with tactical interest.³⁹ Advanced port infrastructure such as those at Trieste and Pula supported the Austro-Hungarian Empire's industrial capacity to build and maintain a modern naval fleet. Britain benefited indirectly from these capabilities because Austro-Hungarian ports could logistically support Royal Navy operations in the Mediterranean. To summarize, British strategy used the free port of Venice and the Austro-Hungarian Empire to maintain the balance of power in Europe, facilitate international trade, and hinder the expansion of rival powers such as Russia. Venice was a vital port for Britain because of the close economic and naval cooperation that supported these interests.

³⁸M.S.Schulze, N.Wolf, "*Economic nationalism and economic integration: the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the late nineteenth century*", pp. 652-673, 2012.

³⁹W.Sauer, *Habsburg Colonial: Austria-Hungary's Role in European Overseas Expansion Reconsidered*, pp. 5-23, 2012.

First, while it is true that the UK had geopolitical interests in stopping the expansion of rival powers such as France and Russia, it is important to note that British foreign policy was often driven by economic interests rather than a pure desire to stabilize the continent. In a situation like this, the economic issue may have been more important than just the balance of power. Second, it is important to keep in mind that British support for the Austro-Hungarian Empire may not have been entirely free. While military cooperation between the two countries during World War I is seen as an example of this alliance, it is important to remember that Britain's interests were not always aligned with those of the Habsburg Empire. Although mitigated by the need to maintain a certain balance of power, colonial and trade rivalries persisted. In addition, it is necessary to take into account the internal dynamics of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its instability, which contributed largely to its collapse.

While collaboration with the UK may have brought temporary benefits, the Empire's inability to deal with internal challenges ultimately prevented it from being a lasting ally. Finally, the long-term consequences of this approach must be considered. For example, although British support may have strengthened the influence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in some areas, it may also have triggered ethnic and nationalist conflicts that eventually led to the fall of the Empire and the catastrophic consequences of World War I. Napoleon's imposition of the continental bloc aimed to extend French control over the European economic landscape. This ambitious project included the creation of entrepôts as part of a broader strategy to counter English influence and stimulate international trade. Venice underwent significant urban and infrastructural transformations in the 19th century that profoundly changed its layout and functionality. In 1846, the terminal of the Ferdinandean Milan-Venice railway trunk line was built in the area of the former church of Santa Lucia. San Giuliano was connected to the basement area of the Santa Chiara lockup by a translagoon bridge that connected this terminal to the rest of the city. With this development, the urban orientation shifted toward the western edge of Cannaregio, which was previously considered

a suburb. Hotels, warehouses, docks, and customs offices were added to the area. The reinforcement of the pedestrian axis that connected Cannaregio to Rialto and from there to St. Mark's and St. Vidal was necessary because of the high traffic of travelers in the Santa Lucia area. The “charity” bridge over the Grand Canal was built in 1854, improving the connection between San Marco and Dorsoduro and contributing to the redevelopment of the district by also moving the Academy of Fine Arts. Dorsoduro became an important cultural, commercial, customs and military center after the silting up of the Sant'Agnese canal in 1863 and the construction of the “Charity” bridge. This process of urban transformation, which began with the concentration of parishes from 1807, led to a significant change in the functional organization and viability of the city. Aware of these changes, brothers Bernardo and Gaetano Combatti began topographical survey work in 1847 that was published in 1856. Their map showed the new urban layout with canals, green areas, and buildings. The map emphasized urban recomposition, which included public buildings classified and numbered as civil, military, and educational establishments. Urban transformations, led by different governments, led to a renewal of the city's structure and the integration of new civil and religious functions. The importance of these changes is highlighted on the Combatti map, which shows the results of a process that completely changed Venice over the course of fifty years.⁴⁰ Under the influence of various governments, including the Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy, Venice underwent significant changes. Economic and military policies, such as the establishment of the Guardia Sedentaria, reflected efforts to maintain order and control in a context of social tension and anti-French resistance. The face of the city was profoundly altered by urban and infrastructural transformations, such as the construction of the Ferdinandean Milan-Venice railway line and the building of new bridges. These changes led the city to expand into new areas and contributed to functional and structural renewal.

⁴⁰E. Filippini, “*Città e attrezzature pubbliche nella Venezia di Napoleone e degli Asburgo: le rappresentazioni cartografiche*”, pp. 27-40, 2013.

In the Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy (1805-1814), the Battaglione di Guardia Sedentaria of the city of Venice was established by decree on January 27, 1808, to manage the Venetian territory. This corps, consisting of one company of cannoneers and eight companies of riflemen, was charged with maintaining public order and guarding the lagoon forts and the coastline. However, the corps was used cautiously in repressive operations because of the growing anti-French sentiment in the population. Already enlisted in the army, the Venetian population tried to avoid service in the Guardia Sedentaria by moving to the mainland, invoking “wretchedness” or deserting. Salaries and armaments were the responsibility of the Ministry of War, while the municipality had to provide for the purchase, equipping and supply of the corps. However, municipal coffers had difficulty providing the necessary supplies for barracks and coastal posts. The posts lacked doors and doorsills, and the hospitals had poor conditions, with soldiers forced to lie on the ground without bedding. Many soldiers still lacked coats, shoes and socks a year after the Battalion was founded. The uniforms of the National Guards of the Kingdom of Italy were similar to those of the Sedentary Guard: dark green jacket, vest and white breeches; later, a shakot⁴¹ with the letters “G.D.V.” (Guard of the City of Venice) was replaced by a bicorn. Specimens of these uniforms have not come down to us. The Sedentary Guard never exceeded 2,000 men when it was promoted to a Regiment in 1810. The short existence of the Sedentary Guard ended in 1813 with the arrival of the Austrians. A button with the letters “GVS” (Sedentary Guard of Venice) was recently discovered and has been recognized as the only existing specimen. This button represents a rare historical find of this military corps.⁴²

2.3 The Venetian navy

⁴¹A shakot, also known as a shako, is a military headgear that became popular in the late 18th century.

⁴²L. Di Noia, “*LA GUARDIA SEDENTARIA DI VENEZIA*”, pubblicato da G. Centanni.

The desire to maintain its influence in the Mediterranean despite the approaching end of its glorious history characterized the second half of the eighteenth century as a period of great change for the Republic of Venice. The Venetian war navy played an important organizational and strategic role in this context, contributing to Angelo Emo's⁴³ naval campaigns against the Canton of Tunis⁴⁴ from 1784 to 1786. However, with the fall of the Republic and the French occupation, followed by Austrian rule, the Venetian navy underwent significant changes that led to the creation of the Franco-Venetian Navy and later the Austro-Venetian Navy. When Venice was absorbed by Napoleon in 1797, its navy had to adapt quickly to the new circumstances imposed by the French Revolution. The French united the Venetian naval forces with their own navy. Personnel were recruited into the French armed forces as many of the Venetian ships were needed. This expansion of naval forces was the result of the French urgency to use Venetian resources for their military objectives, particularly for military campaigns in Europe and the Mediterranean. The Venetian navy saw the introduction of new naval technologies and tactics during French rule. The French used their inventions to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the fleet. But strategic priorities changed greatly. France had different geopolitical goals from those of the Serenissima, so the Venetian navy had to adapt to their needs. The war needs of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France outweighed the protection of trade and control of routes in the Mediterranean, which had been central to Venetian concerns.

The Austrian Empire acquired Venice after the fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815. There was a new era for the Venetian navy, which was now part of the Austrian navy. The Austrians took advantage of the available resources and infrastructure to rebuild their fleet. The Venetian fleet was reorganized to join the naval forces of the Austrian Empire, which had different priorities than the French. The Austrian military structure, which valued discipline,

⁴³Beginning his political career in 1752 as a ship's nobleman, in 1755 he distinguished himself as a ship's governor in protecting convoys from pirate assaults.

⁴⁴The canton of Tunis was located within the Kingdom of Tunisia, which was an Ottoman domain administered by a local bey under the nominal control of the Ottoman Empire.

hierarchy, and centralization, had a significant impact on the new organization of the Austro-Venetian navy. The goal of this strategy was to form a cohesive and well-trained naval force capable of meeting the new geopolitical challenges emerging at the time. The arsenals and shipyards, among Venice's naval infrastructure, were expanded to support the Austrian navy, but still maintained strong ties to the Venetian maritime tradition. Strategic priorities changed once again under Austria. The main goal was to ensure the security of trade routes in the Adriatic and maintain control over the Dalmatian coast. The responsibility of the Austro-Venetian navy was not only to ensure the security of maritime trade, but also to protect the imperial territories from possible sea threats. Adapting to the needs of a multinational empire, the navy focused on defending maritime borders and maintaining stability in the Adriatic area.

Each period had a different organizational and strategic mode. The Venetian navy was downsized and integrated to serve Napoleon's military objectives under French rule, with an emphasis on technological innovations and strategic adaptations. To meet the new demands of a diversified empire, the navy was rebuilt and reorganized under the Austrians, with an emphasis on discipline, protection of trade routes, and defense of the Adriatic coast. These changes resulted from the different priorities and needs of the shifting leaders, which had a significant impact on the structure and operation of the Venetian navy during this difficult period. Discipline aboard Venetian ships underwent significant changes during the French period. French military discipline was characterized by rigidity and a highly organized hierarchical structure. This led to greater supervision and control over the daily operations of the ships. The goal of introducing new regulations and procedures was to make sure that crews quickly adapted to the needs of the French navy, although this could cause conflict with Venetian sailors who were used to a different command system.⁴⁵ Discipline aboard ships became even stricter under Austrian control. The Austrians, who had a strong military culture, tried to impose strict discipline on the crews. This

⁴⁵R.Caimmi, *“Spedizioni navali della Repubblica di Venezia alla fine del Settecento”*, Itenera Progetti, 2018.

involved an emphasis on continuous education and training, strict regulations, and a rigid hierarchical system. The goal of Austro-Venetian discipline was to create an effective and well-prepared naval force that could quickly deal with any threat.

Venetian sea fortresses and ships were partially employed in the defense of anti-French coalitions during the occupation. The French, for their part, built new defensive structures and strengthened existing ones to protect ports and coasts from enemy attacks, focusing mainly on using Venetian resources to support Napoleon's military campaigns. Maritime fortresses were strengthened after they came under Austrian control. Realizing the strategic importance of Venetian fortifications, the Austrians invested in their modernization and maintenance. These forts became essential for keeping an eye on the Adriatic and safeguarding trade routes. Venetian ships were modified to meet the commercial and defensive needs of the empire and were incorporated into the Austrian fleet. Between 1784 and 1786, Angelo Emo, the last great admiral of the Venetian Republic, led a series of naval campaigns against the Canton of Tunis. These campaigns were part of Venetian efforts to safeguard its commercial interests and combat piracy in the Mediterranean. To demonstrate the operational capability of the Venetian navy despite the political decline of the Republic, Emo used innovative naval bombardment tactics and caused heavy losses to the Tunisians.⁴⁶ An analysis of the discipline aboard ships, sea fortresses, and bastions after the fall of the Republic, together with Angelo Emo's naval campaigns, provides a more complete view of the transformations that the Venetian navy underwent during the transition from Serenissima to French and Austrian rule. These features highlight how Venetian naval resources were adapted and used to meet the different strategic needs of the new rulers, underscoring the resilience and adaptability of a long and ancient maritime tradition. The management and organization of the Venetian navy after the fall of the Venetian Republic and the passage under French and later Austrian sovereignty show the differences between the Franco-Venetian and Austro-Venetian navies.

⁴⁶*Ibidem.*

2.4 The Italian Risorgimento

From 1748 until the first French invasion in 1796, Italy experienced a period of peace and stability unprecedented since the 16th century. During this period, the Italian peninsula was divided into eleven independent states of considerable size, excluding small principalities and the Republic of San Marino. The largest was the two kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, ruled by a member of the Spanish royal family (a branch of the Bourbons), but separately from Spain. When Charles III of Naples became king of Spain in 1759, he abandoned his Italian kingdoms. Another important state was the Kingdom of Sardinia, which included the island of Sardinia and the territory of Piedmont. Three major ancient republics survived-Venice, Genoa, and Lucca. The Papal States included much of central Italy. Five significant duchies completed the picture: Milan and Tuscany, ruled by the Habsburgs; Parma and Piacenza, under a Spanish Bourbon; and Modena and Massa Carrara, ruled by Italian dynasties. Politically, Italy was fragmented and many rulers had interests outside the peninsula.

Italy had no political unity, unlike Germany, which, although fragmented, found a semblance of unity in the Holy Roman Empire. Geographical barriers, such as the chain of the Apennines, made international communication difficult. Metternich, Austrian chancellor, described Italy as a “geographical expression” because of its internal divisions. Differences in perspective and history contributed to the divisions. Sicilians, for example, opposed the Neapolitans, feeling they were treated as a colony. In Venetia, citizens felt exploited by the Venetian government. Citizens' loyalties often focused on their own city rather than the nation, a phenomenon known as “parochialism.” Cities, rather than the countryside, were the centers of political action, continuing to play a crucial role in the revolutionary crises of the 19th century. By the mid-18th century, Italy

lacked a true Italian nationalism. Although in the 16th century Machiavelli⁴⁷ had denounced the Papacy as an obstacle to political unity and urged a secular prince to work toward that goal, by the 18th century the concept of a united Italy was virtually nonexistent. Educated people were aware of the literary tradition of the Italian language and considered themselves Italian, but the church and universities used Latin. Italy was characterized by “cultural polycentrism,” with several competing cultural centers and no one society or journal covering the entire nation. Universities did not provide a true national hub, and the education of the aristocracy was fragmented. Economically, 18th-century Italy was fragmented and backward compared to previous centuries. Since 1498, the Italian states had failed to compete with the new national monarchies of Western Europe, becoming the battleground between the royal houses of Valois, Habsburg, and Bourbon. Political fragmentation and wars had weakened the once advanced and prosperous Italian economy. Italy had remained relatively populous and urbanized, but not exceptionally wealthy. Industry had been supplanted by British and Dutch industry, and wars had destroyed trade and resources. Spanish rule and the Counter-Reformation had further worsened the economic situation. The decline was evident: population declined, industry shrank, and exports were limited to commodities such as olive oil, wine, wheat, wool, and raw silk.⁴⁸ The period of peace and stability that Italy experienced from 1748 to 1796 was interrupted by the Napoleonic campaigns that marked the beginning of profound changes. The French invasion brought with it the ideas of the Revolution, sowing the seeds of liberalism and nationalism that would characterize the Italian Risorgimento. This movement, which developed during the 19th century, sought to unify the Italian peninsula, fragmented into numerous independent states, under a single flag. The Risorgimento was fueled by a growing desire for independence and unity, inspired by the principles of freedom and self-determination. The inhabitants of the Italian peninsula began to recognize the need to overcome historical, geographical and cultural divisions in order to go on to form a united nation. The ideas

⁴⁷An Italian writer, philosopher, historian, playwright, politician and diplomat, Machiavelli is important because he is considered the inventor of a new science: politics, in that he separates this from religion.

⁴⁸D.Beales, E.F. Biagini, *“The Risorgimento and Unification of Italy”*, Routledge, 2015.

and efforts of Italian patriots led to a series of insurrections, wars of independence and diplomatic negotiations that eventually succeeded in unifying much of the peninsula by 1861. In this context, Venice represents a significant example of the transformations that were taking place throughout the land; the city, which had enjoyed centuries of independence as an influential maritime republic, saw its fate change dramatically with the arrival of Napoleonic troops and, later, with Austrian rule. During the Risorgimento, Venice became a symbol of the struggle for freedom and Italian unification, reflecting the tensions and aspirations common to many other Italian regions. Its course during the Risorgimento, although complex and marked by moments of great tension, reflected the broader movement that swept through all of Italy, culminating in the birth of the Kingdom of Italy and the end of foreign rule over the peninsula. On the eve of the treaties with the Barbarians in 1762, the number of flagships of the Serenissima was reduced to 29. This was due to the obsolescence of ships that had been lost and the lack of new ships. During the peace with the Algerians, Tunisians, and Tripolins in 1764, the fleet recovered to an average of 47-48 until the fall of the Republic. The Venetian merchant navy maintained significant levels and consolidated on a regional scale despite occasional accidents and crises. With an average tonnage of 144 tons per ship, Venice had 418 vessels at the end of 1800, second in the Mediterranean after Naples and tenth worldwide. The tonnage of Venetian ships decreased over the century, probably due to administrative flexibility. From 1718 to 1797, Venice developed a local business called “caravanage” to avoid competing with the great maritime powers during wars. Venetian trade in the last thirty years of the century maintained the average levels of the century, with an obvious consolidation of the region. This stability is confirmed by the extent of the Customs da mar, where trade flows mainly to the domestic market and only a minority go abroad. Venice had now scaled down its international function and was limited to a few conventional routes. Despite the end of any hope of recovery after the Candian⁴⁹ War and the Peace of Passarowitz (1718), Venice

⁴⁹The War of Candia (1645-1669) was a conflict between the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire for control of the island of Crete, then known as Candia. The war lasted 24 years, making it one of the longest conflicts in

continued to maintain its maritime presence. However, with the emergence of major colonial powers and the new maritime imperialism, the Serenissima's room for maneuver diminished considerably, making it difficult for it to compete around the world. Despite this, Venice maintained its autonomy over the sea until the end of its historical period, trying to adapt to international changes.⁵⁰

Chapter III

The port function of Venice in the twentieth century

3.1 The Venetian Unification of Italy

Until the second half of the 19th century, the Arsenal, in the northeast of the city, was the center of Venice's shipbuilding activity, while ships docked at St. Mark's Basin, Venice's

Mediterranean history.

⁵⁰M. Costantini, *“Porto navi e traffici a Venezia”*, Marsilio, 1700-2000.

traditional port. The New Maritime Station, a new, more convenient port near the railway station, was built from 1869 to 1880. This station was the city's main naval center until World War I. The Marghera project came about in the early 1900s to allocate this part of the Venetian mainland for heavy industry, along with a proposal for a new port area in the “Bottenighi.”⁵¹ After the war, a port for industry was needed. The project for the industrial port of Venice was presented by Count Giuseppe Volpi of Misurata⁵² in 1917. It was interrupted due to the war and resumed in 1919. The Vittorio Emanuele Canal, which connected the Maritime Station to Marghera, was opened on May 17, 1922, and traffic officially began in 1925. 51 industries were established in Marghera between 1920 and 1928, and the Port of Venice grew significantly, reaching a cargo movement of 2.8 million tons in 1928, returning to pre-war competitive levels. The 1925 Master Plan created Porto Marghera's first industrial zone, which by 1946 had an area of 550 hectares. The plan also called for a second industrial area at 1,000 hectares toward Fusina. The state and local governments worked together to create this zone. Navigation channels, roads and railways were built by local consortia and the Ministry of Public Works. The 1953 project called for a major new canal linking Malamocco to Porto Marghera to move shipping traffic away from the historic center of Venice. To serve Marghera's petrochemical hub, the “oil canal” was built from 1961 to 1969. The 1963 law created a consortium to expand the port and industrial area of Venice-Marghera by using dredged sludge to create new industrial areas near Fusina. 40 hectares of land were redeveloped for logistics purposes after industrial activities declined. Port operations, channel maintenance and management of the maritime domain are managed by the Venice Port Authority (APV). APV has invested 87 million euros in reclamation by implementing sustainable practices. The 2007 Venice Blue Flag initiative significantly reduced sulfur emissions from cruise ships. Stormwater filtration systems,

⁵¹Often referred to as “Botteghe” or “Botteghini,” they refer to an area of the Venetian mainland near Marghera, along the Venice lagoon. In the past, the Bottenighi were located between Fusina and Marghera and had marshy land and canals.

⁵²Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata was a prominent Italian businessman, politician and diplomat who lived from 1877 to 1947. He is best known for supporting the industrialization of the Venetian mainland.

LED lighting to save energy, and a new terminal at Fusina for Ro-Ro and Ro-Pax⁵³ ships, operational since 2014. Future plans include an offshore terminal 8 miles off the coast with advanced container and oil terminals. Innovative ships called “Mama Vessels”⁵⁴ will connect it to onshore terminals.⁵⁵ These many infrastructural and industrial transformations have radically changed the face of the Port of Venice, adapting it to the needs of an era when modernization and economic growth were key imperatives. From the construction of the Maritime Station and the Vittorio Emanuele Canal to the recent implementation of sustainable technologies and new terminals, each phase of development has helped strengthen the port's position as a crucial hub in Italy's commercial and industrial landscape.

The port of Venice underwent profound and complex transformations during the 20th century, reflecting the tumultuous historical events and economic dynamics of a changing Italy. After the fall of the Serenissima Republic in 1797, Venice was still trying to adapt to its new role as a transit port in the early 1800s. In an attempt to modernize and reorient port activities, major infrastructure such as the railway bridge and the Maritime Station were built. The gradual shift of the port away from St. Mark's Basin is a hallmark of Venice's maritime history after the fall of the Serenissima. This shift began in the Giudecca Canal, where the translagunare bridge, opened in 1840, allowed ships to meet the railroad in the late 1800s. Later, the port expanded into other parts of the city. The change occurred during Napoleonic rule, when Venice became a transit port for the hinterland, breaking with the city's traditional emporium function. This process was accelerated by Napoleonic decrees and continued during Austrian rule. In 1830, the franchise was extended to the entire city,

⁵³Ro Ro stands for “Roll on - Roll off,” and refers to a type of cargo ship that carries cargo on wheels, mainly cars or trucks. The term Ro-Pax is used to refer to a ferry that also provides passenger service. (<https://www.dsv.com/it-it/le-nostre-soluzioni/mezzi-di-trasporto/il-trasporto-via-mare/tipi-di-navi-da-carico-trasporto-marittimo#:~:text=Nave%20Ro%20Ro&text=Altrimenti%2C%20questa%20nave%20sarebbe%20un,le%20merci%20salgono%20o%20scendono>).

⁵⁴An innovative ship concept known as the “Mama Vessel” has been developed to facilitate the transfer of cargo between large container ships and onshore port terminals, particularly in ports or coastal areas where direct access for large ships is limited by such elements as depth of seabed or port infrastructure.

⁵⁵N.Torricella, G.Artuso, *Il Porto di Venezia: passato, presente e futuro*, 2016.

and the railway bridge was built and opened in 1846. The reorganization of the port also led the city back to the mainland, particularly to the Santa Lucia station. However, due to the loss of Lombardy and uncertainty over Habsburg rule in the Veneto, progress in the 1850s was hampered. Venice's maritime trade collapsed between 1860 and 1866, highlighting the abandonment of the city after its annexation to the Kingdom of Italy.⁵⁶ This process of modernization was not without its challenges. After the fall of the Serenissima Republic in 1797, Venice was still in search of a new role as a transit port in the early 1800s. However, the advent of major sea route innovations, such as the opening of the Suez Canal, and European industrial and mercantile development in the late 19th century led the city to reconsider its position and increasingly focus on its role as a port and trade hub. In the whole context of the Dalmatian question, Venice emerges as a city with a rich commercial and maritime past, with a thousand-year history of dominance over Adriatic lands. After a period of economic and manufacturing decline under Austrian rule, Venice faced the challenge of Italian unification without leadership capable of planning its future role in the national context. The Venetian business elite, led by figures such as Pietro Foscari,⁵⁷ Giuseppe Volpi⁵⁸ and Vittorio Cini,⁵⁹ saw an opportunity to revive the local economy through the development of its port and the creation of new industrial infrastructure. This group, known as the “Venetian group,” shared an ambition to revive the ancient grandeur of Venice by promoting a vision of an Adriatic and Mediterranean “Grande Venezia.” The idea of developing a new industrial port in Marghera, inland from the lagoon, emerged as one of the key strategies for the economic revitalization of Venice. Through investments in port construction, railways and industrial infrastructure, the “Venetian group” aimed to create a center of trade and production that could compete nationally

⁵⁶M.Costantini, *Porto navi e traffici a Venezia 1700-2000*, Marsilio, 2004.

⁵⁷He soon began working in the church. In 1447 he was appointed primicerius of St. Mark's, thus attaining the highest position in the Venetian ducal chapel when he was very young.

⁵⁸He was a prominent Italian businessman, politician and diplomat in the first half of the 20th century, also known as the “Foxes of Misurata.”

⁵⁹Italian entrepreneur, politician, philanthropist and art collector, known for his significant contributions to 20th-century Italian economics and philanthropy.

and internationally. The Great War accelerated plans to build the industrial hub of Porto Marghera, with Giuseppe Volpi in charge of its development. Fascism, despite its origins with little connection to the city's traditional Adriatic or maritime predisposition, became a central element in the life of Venice.

After turbulent beginnings, Venetian Fascism consolidated, mainly thanks to the support of local business, taking on an original maritime vocation and contributing to port and infrastructure development projects. World War II and the creation of the Governorate of Dalmatia in 1941 gave further impetus to Fascist plans for Venice, seen as an economic-strategic center of growing importance. The war was seen as an opportunity to consolidate Venice's pre-eminence in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, especially based on Axis victories and the prospects for redrawing world balances. The city was seen as a cultural symbol of the nation and its sea, with a civilizing mission in the world in the name of St. Mark. Focusing on the Institute of Adriatic Studies (ISA) and the figure of Mario Nani Mocenigo.⁶⁰ The ISA, founded in 1932, was originally focused on scientific research of the Adriatic but turned into a propaganda tool of the fascist regime. Mario Nani Mocenigo, a key figure in the ISA, was a Venetian nobleman and an expert in Italian maritime history. After the Great War, he devoted himself to promoting Italian seafaring and, in the 1930s, focused on Adriatic history, especially Albania and Dalmatia. The ISA, under Mocenigo's direction, published popular texts and promoted cultural collaboration between Italy, Albania and Yugoslavia. However, these activities were heavily influenced by Fascist propaganda and aimed to glorify Italian expansionism in the Adriatic. Mocenigo's administration transformed the ISA into a political organ, with an emphasis on expansionist politics and racial superiority. The ISA's publications, although historical in nature, were subject to censorship and manipulation to fit the regime's narrative. This section analyzes the historical and ideological connection between Venice, Rome, and Dalmatia during the Fascist period. It shows how the myth of Venice was based on an

⁶⁰Italian admiral, known for his service in the Regia Marina (the navy of the Kingdom of Italy) during World War I and World War II.

ideological reading of its history, linked to its strategic position in the Adriatic and its supposed role as a continuation of Rome. This myth was fueled by the idea that Italy should follow in the footsteps of the Venetian Republic in conquering Dalmatia and controlling the Adriatic. Fascist propaganda emphasized the importance of Venice as a center of power and civilization, equating it with Rome and promoting the idea of an Italian empire that would follow Roman and Venetian models. It was argued that Rome had not fallen completely, but had transferred its culture to the Eastern Roman Empire, thus preserving the Roman legacy in maritime cities such as Venice. Moreover, Venice's role in Italian colonial expansion, described as a model of colonization based on collaboration and promotion of Italian culture resorted to direct exploitation of local resources. This approach was contrasted with that of Western democracies, described as “Carthaginian-demoplutocratic.” The historical and cultural ties between Venice and Dalmatia are also analyzed, emphasizing how the Venetian presence in the region profoundly influenced its culture, toponymy and architecture. The loyalty of the Dalmatian peoples to Serenissima and the perception of Venice as the “spiritual capital” of the region are highlighted. It also describes, the enthusiasm with which the annexation of Dalmatia to Italy was welcomed in Venice during the Fascist period, highlighting the vision of Dalmatia as an integral part of Italian national identity.⁶¹

3.2 The 1920s and 1930s of the 21st century

World War I was a catalyst for change as well as a conflict. Domestic politics was also affected by the war, which caused tensions between the various political factions and turned Venice into an ideological battleground between interventionists⁶² and pacifists.⁶³ After the war, Venice was particularly affected by the expansion of Fascism. It was clear that there were divisions between the socialist, communist and fascist parties. Giuseppe Volpi, who advocated an

⁶¹M.Bona, “*L’ideologizzazione della Memoria*”, Istituto studi Adriatici di Venezia, 1935 - 1945, 2004.

⁶²People who supported Italy's entry into World War I alongside the Entente powers were known as interventionists.

⁶³Pacifists, opposed Italy's entry into the war.

industrialist and urban fascism, opposed figures like Piero Marsich⁶⁴ and Silvio Trentin,⁶⁵ who were democrats and anti-fascists. In the end, the upper middle class, the Catholic world, and fascist forces won. The signing of the convention between the state, the municipality and the Venice Industrial Port Company in July 1917 marked the start of the project, which would transform Marghera into one of Italy's major industrial hubs. Despite the expansion of its borders to Venezia Giulia and the loss of its military function to Pula, Venice maintained its regional and industrial importance.

However, in the years following the World War of 1915-1918, the Adriatic trade suffered a severe blow due to the economic upheaval in the countries that mainly fed it.⁶⁶ Although there were signs of recovery for the *Venetian port*, prewar traffic levels were not reached in 1923. The city faced economic and social problems, such as high unemployment and poverty, caused by the lack of planning of economic relations between the historic center and the industrial mainland. However, the idea of an international port that could have led Italy to imperial destinies on the Adriatic and in the Mediterranean was still predominant. The situation in Venice at the beginning of World War I is described by Filippo Grimani, mayor of Venice, in November 1914. Venice's main economic activities, such as port traffic, tourism, and the arts, were hit within weeks. The port, which is crucial for imports, saw a 75 percent reduction in the tonnage of goods landed, which had a significant impact on employment. More than 1,500 longshoremen were laid off from their jobs. The population has been severely affected by the economic crisis, which has led many families to live in extreme poverty and in unhealthy and overcrowded housing. The situation was further aggravated by the closure of companies such as the Italian Cement Factory on Giudecca, which employed 250 workers, and the suspension of social housing work. Many Venetians, already

⁶⁴Italian painter known for his portraits and landscapes, with a style ranging between Impressionism and Post-Impressionism.

⁶⁵Italian jurist, intellectual, politician and partisan, known for his opposition to fascism and his involvement in the Italian Resistance during World War II.

⁶⁶A.Gallo, “*Il mare Adriatico nella Prima Guerra Mondiale: scenari di guerra e confronto geopolitico in un'area nodale*”, 2020.

affected by the crisis, saw their situation worsen with the arrival of returnees from Austria and Germany, increasing social tension. The municipality tried to combat unemployment by creating the Venetian Municipal Laboratories and distributing food subsidies. But people were dissatisfied because they thought these measures were insufficient and uneducational. Violent protests occurred in September in which the unemployed refused food stamps and protested the lack of work and the need to turn to charity. The situation in Venice remained serious, despite some tentative signs of recovery toward the end of 1914. Even a small increase in port movement and the start of some public works did not solve employment problems. While socialists criticized the “handout policy” and called for more substantial interventions, such as the construction of social housing and a bridge to connect the mainland, city authorities were increasingly concerned about public order.⁶⁷

The employment situation in Venice worsened following the construction of Porto Marghera. The number of unemployed rose to 10,000 as a result of the demobilization of the army, the interruption of work by the Army Corps of Engineers, and the slow reconversion of the refugee industries in 1920. The situation became even more difficult because of the crisis in shipbuilding and mechanical engineering. Work at the Arsenal, which had employed more than 3,000 workers during the conflict, was almost completely suspended with the end of the war. This marked the beginning of the rapid decline of the industry, which saw a significant reduction in workers from over 6,000 in 1911 to about 3,000 in 1921 and just over a thousand in 1931. With the decline of the Arsenal, one of the city's most skilled people was also lost, who only partially found employment at the Breda shipyard in Porto Marghera. The textile industry also suffered a severe blow along with the decline of shipbuilding. After a brief recovery, the Cotonificio Veneziano, the city's largest factory, closed for good in 1927. The craft sector and small businesses, which had been struggling for many years, did not compensate for this negative change. Only traditional manufacturing, which was predominantly occupied by women, managed to produce rapidly: Until 1926, the glass, clothing, lace, silk, and art cloth industries took advantage of the devaluation of

⁶⁷B.Bianchi, *“Venezia nella Grande Guerra, Storia di Venezia”*, Enciclopedia Treccani, 2002.

money and concentrated their production on the U.S. and British markets. By 1921, there were 11,000 workers in trade, at least 5,000 of whom belonged to the urban proletariat, and employment in services far exceeded that in industry. This economic structure failed to reduce unemployment, which remained high for a decade. The new factories in the Marghera industrial hub chose to hire workers from the rural countryside, who were considered more disciplined, resistant to fatigue and with lower wage demands than city workers. Industrialists were firmly opposed to pressure from fascist political organizations to increase the employment of Venetian labor in Marghera. The goal of “nuova Venezia” was not to support “vecchia Venezia” or solve the problem of unemployment in the historic center. Expectations that industrialization of the mainland would solve the problems of the old town with production and employment were in vain. The idea that new industries would help the city overcome the problems it encountered during the war years turned out to be an illusion. For many years, the mainstays of the city's production structure were tourism and art because of their unstable markets.⁶⁸ The industrialization project initiated with the construction of Porto Marghera, instead of solving the employment and production problems of the historic center of Venice, ended up exacerbating them. The hopes placed in the creation of an industrial hub that was supposed to revitalize the Venetian economy turned out to be illusory. The choice to favor rural labor and industrial policies disconnected from the urban context exacerbated unemployment and the decline of traditional city industries. The “nuova Venezia” did not complement or support the “vecchia Venezia,” leaving the latter at the mercy of an economic and social crisis that made the city increasingly dependent on seasonal tourism and crafts with a volatile market. This development model, dictated more by short-term profit interests than by a long-term vision for the city, has failed to build a sustainable future for Venice and its inhabitants. Failure to plan and pay attention to the links between the industrial mainland and the historic center have produced a rift that, rather than healing, has helped perpetuate inequality and social tensions.

⁶⁸*Ibidem.*

3.3 Venice between the two world wars

World War II almost completely disrupted maritime traffic by damaging the ports. It was not until 1952, thanks mainly to the oil sector, that the port was able to return to its prewar levels of activity. However, trade, which included valuable products such as hides, wool, and colonial products, remained at a standstill. Local authorities attributed this situation to a disproportionate distribution of liner services among Italian ports, with a greater focus on Tyrrhenian ports than Adriatic ports. In the postwar period, Venetian economist Gino Luzzatto and other academics pointed out that Venice's difficulties were also related to economic factors, such as a lower incidence of sea freight⁶⁹ and lower relative cost of railways, making the port of Genoa more convenient for northern Italian industries. During the Italian economic miracle,⁷⁰ Venice saw a sustained recovery despite these problems, with a significant increase in traffic volume, including oil. The construction of a second industrial zone for large petrochemical industry in the 1950s and 1960s signaled a further step toward industrialization. However, in the late 1960s, opposition movements began to discuss capitalist land use and the damage that manufacturing concentration had on the environment. Toward the end of the 1900s, the crisis of basic chemistry and declining government investment caused a significant decrease in employment in the Marghera industrial zone. Meanwhile, the Port of Venice began to focus on commercial and passenger traffic, and the cruise industry, despite environmental concerns, became a significant source of revenue. The Port of Venice is currently going through a transition phase. It is trying to find a way to maintain its traditional industrial activities while adapting to new economic and environmental challenges. To maintain Venice as an important node in the international maritime landscape, revitalization and innovation efforts are underway, such as collaboration with the port of Trieste and the development

⁶⁹Enciclopedia Treccani, “*Nòlo*” Prezzo del trasporto di merce per nave (n. marittimo) o con un mezzo aereo (n. aereo): fissare, pagare, riscuotere il nolo.

⁷⁰Period of strong economic growth that Venice, like many other parts of Italy, experienced between the 1950s and 1960s, coinciding with the Italian economic miracle.

of a multimodal and logistics approach.⁷¹ Venetians had to make an important choice in the late 19th century: stay away or adapt and recreate. Filippo Grimani⁷² and Piero Foscari played an important role in the reinvention of the city. Innovations such as the municipalization of lagoon transportation and the partial publicization of services were carried out by Grimani, mayor since 1895, who was an example of pragmatism. In contrast, Foscari supported ambitious projects such as the new port of Marghera, considered a solution for the city's future and industrial development, and advocated an idealization of Venetian history. The debate over port expansion highlighted the division between two perspectives: maintaining the lagoon identity or moving to a more industrial, land-based approach. In particular, Foscari thought that the port of Marghera would help Venice prosper by shifting industry to the mainland and improving living conditions. Meanwhile, the city was a focal point for Italian nationalism, with writers such as Gabriele D'Annunzio influencing cultural and political philosophy. As a result, the transformation of Venice was a complex web of economic, cultural and ideological transformations that reflected the changes and challenges of history. The city's economic growth, accompanied by the growing interest in Marghera as a port and industrial area, showed social change among the technical and clerical middle classes. Port construction was advancing, and in July 1917 a convention⁷³ was signed between the state, the City of Venice and entrepreneurs to formalize the expansion.⁷⁴

The goal of the project the “grande Venezia,” led mainly by Giuseppe Volpi, was to transform the city with a major tourist, cultural and industrial vocation. During the fascist period, Volpi's plan called for the expansion of Venice with the addition of Porto Marghera as an industrial zone and the expansion of the municipality of Venice to incorporate nearby hamlets such as Mestre. The

⁷¹M.Costantini, *Porto navi e traffici a Venezia 1700-2000*, Marsilio: Venezia, 2004.

⁷²Belonging to one of the most emblazoned families of the Serenissima (three doges, dozens of procurators, ambassadors, patriarchs), he had had to deal with Venice's institutional and economic decline.

⁷³ClicLavoroVeneto.it, Online Services for Employment, Training and Education, Veneto Region, 2018.

The history of Porto Marghera began on July 23, 1917, when the then prime minister, Paolo Boselli, signed in the presence of the mayor of Venice, Filippo Grimani, and Giuseppe Volpi, president of Sade, a convention (made executive on July 26) for the construction of the port and a new residential neighborhood.

⁷⁴G.Paladini, *Politica e società a Venezia nel '900*, 1997.

regime's authority overcame local opposition and allowed for rapid implementation of the plan. "Greater Venice" was to unite tourist and historic Venice with the new industrial Venice, which would be connected by a translagoon bridge. In addition, the plan included incentives to attract new entrepreneurs and help heavy industry grow. However, with the onset of World War II and Italy's entry into the conflict in 1940, the project was thwarted due to wartime difficulties and the fascist regime adopting racial laws and moving closer to Germany. After the war, Venice experienced a period of change and uncertainty, with efforts to rebuild and fight against fascism. The city faced a difficult phase of political and social reorganization. New administrators and political parties had to deal with the fascist past and manage economic recovery. After the war, industry and tourism were the priorities of the "Greater Venice" project. The first industrial zone was completed and a second one was established by the Consortium for the Development of the Port and Industrial Zone, founded in 1953. The city succeeded by integrating industries and promoting tourism. Venice's cultural sector has remained vital despite the economic crisis. Cultural institutions such as the Biennale, the Giorgio Cini Foundation, and Ca' Foscari University and the Institute of Architecture grew in the city. However, the 1966 flood⁷⁵ marked a turning point, showing the city's vulnerability and the need to address environmental problems. Venice's post-flood management did not always meet the city's needs, and some actions were taken only after the disaster. Although Giuseppe Mazzariol⁷⁶ and other intellectuals attempted to spread the idea of a reformist Venice,⁷⁷ successes were limited by the cultural and political difficulties of the 1970s. During the 1980s and 1990s, efforts were made to revitalize Venice while maintaining its cultural and historical identity.⁷⁸

⁷⁵Comune di Venezia, "La cronaca dell'Aqua "granda", 2017.

⁷⁶A professor of contemporary art history at Ca' Foscari, he founded the Department of History and Criticism of the Arts in 1984.

⁷⁷In political science, reformism is a political methodology that opposes both revolution and conservatism and operates in institutions with the aim of introducing organic but gradual reforms to change the current political, economic and social order.

⁷⁸G.Paladini, *Politica e società a Venezia nel '900*, 1997.

Chapter IV

Venice between reconstruction and rebirth

Venice, with its waterways serving as vital arteries for commerce and tourism, is a city steeped in history, culture, and charm. However, its beauty and uniqueness are accompanied by unique challenges related to its geographical location and historical heritage. At a time when sustainability is at the center of global discussions, Venice faces the problem of maintaining the balance between preserving its thousand-year-old identity and adopting modern and sustainable practices in the port sector. The path taken by the regional capital of the Veneto region is aimed at securing its port function not only out of respect for the city's rich cultural heritage, witness to centuries of history and tradition, but also to carry forward the needs of the present without compromising the future for generations to come. The sustainable approach is one of the key goals of technological advances as well as innovative environmental policies and responsible port practices. This commitment by the city of Venice aims to promote a renaissance that is equitable,

prosperous and environmentally friendly, reflecting on the urgent need to take concrete steps to address global environmental challenges.

4.1 The Modern Venice

Venice, with its complex history of interaction between humans and the lagoon environment, provides an emblematic example of how human actions and institutional changes have shaped not only the physical landscape, but also the political, social, and cultural fabric of the lagoon region. In particular, the evolution of the Venetian port system plays a significant role in the analysis of human impact on lagoon and marine ecosystems. From its earliest days, Venice has been at the center of an early debate on awareness of environmental problems resulting from human action, positioning itself among the forerunners of the Anthropocene concept, in which human activity has a preponderant influence on the surrounding environment. The Venetian context fits significantly into the global landscape of the debate on the regeneration of port areas, emphasizing the strategic role of waterfronts⁷⁹ as potential areas for urban development. Venetian history offers important evidence of the crucial role of political decisions and urban and social dynamics in the economic, social and cultural development of the lagoon area. The gradual shift of the port from St. Mark's basin to the mainland affected Venetian maritime history already after the fall of the Serenissima Republic, due to the Napoleonic conquest in 1806. This change was caused by the adoption of the role of transit port during the Napoleonic era, which ended the city's traditional emporium vocation. While the Venetian republican government sought to maintain local navy and trade, Napoleon accelerated the conversion process, turning Venice into a transit point for the regional hinterland. This direction was reinforced during Austrian rule, during which the Maritime Station at Santa Marta was built in 1880. The new infrastructure, located at the western

⁷⁹It refers to an urban area located along the shoreline of a body of water, such as a river, lake or the sea. "Waterfront" may include harbors, piers, waterfront promenades, parks, commercial and residential buildings, restaurants, stores, and other facilities.

end of the city, served as a meeting point between the port and the railroad. Over time, the Maritime Station proved unable to meet the needs of Venetian traffic, which led to discussions about the station's future development. Two opposing perspectives emerged: one section of Venetian public and political opinion was in favor of keeping the port in Venice, while another preferred to move it to the sandy margins of the lagoon.⁸⁰ Eventually, the expansion option prevailed and the port was assigned to the Bottenighi. This change launched Venice into a new phase of industrial and commercial growth, marking an important turning point in its maritime history. Although the maritime station helped develop local manufacturing, it did not work for long. This led to further infrastructural developments to adapt the city to modern trade needs. After the establishment of the free port during the Napoleonic period and the development of the Venetian port during Austrian rule with the construction of the railway bridge and the Maritime Station, the idea of a new settlement on the mainland was a significant change. This idea was proposed by port captain Luciano Petit.⁸¹ This new approach was the natural result of the functional and logistical transformation of the Venetian port, which was evolving from an emporium center to a transit point for the hinterland. Although the Maritime Station had provided a brief solution to the problems of connecting with the mainland, other plans to expand the port to Giudecca were not feasible. The most ambitious project, spearheaded by Giuseppe Volpi, was to build an industrial port at Porto Marghera with the goal of developing an industrial hub in addition to the transfer of cargo traffic. The company “Industrial Port of Venice” received major concessions and privileges financed in part by the community. As a result, Porto Marghera became an important facility that had a significant impact on the social, economic, environmental and cultural balances of the Venetian region. Between 1925 and 1939, traffic at the Port of Venice increased significantly, with industrial traffic becoming more important than commercial traffic.

⁸⁰UNIVERSITY OF THE STUDIES OF TRIESTE Department of Mathematics & Geosciences (DMG), Collaboration agreement with ARPA FVG for a research project and sedimentological-geochemical study of the barenic areas of the Marano and Grado lagoons d.d. April 20, 2012.

⁸¹Petit was a key figure in the context of the transformation and development of the port of Venice, especially during the period of Austrian rule and after the establishment of the free port during the Napoleonic period.

The group, led by Giovanni Volpi, consisted mainly of industrialists and bankers with interests in the electrical industry. In 1926, the Industrial Harbor Society received state-owned land. This group had a significant impact on the administration and allocation of land, preferring to allocate it to large industries, particularly those that used a lot of electricity. However, due to post-war economic difficulties, investors did not initially invest much. Large companies such as Società alluminio veneto anonima and Industria nazionale dell'allumina, affiliated with Montecatini, came into being only in the second half of the 1920s, thanks to a favorable customs policy and the strengthening of the Italian aluminum industry. This change led to a sharper shift toward energy-intensive industries. The Marghera industry grew rapidly during the autarkic period (1935-1942) with the introduction of autarkic plans, becoming the center of the Italian aluminum industry. The growing demand for fertilizers and autarkic industrial policy supported the chemical industry. Marghera produced a wide range of items, from aluminum to zinc, ammonia to ethylene. As a result, Marghera became one of the largest and most concentrated industrial ports in Europe, with a high level of technical integration among the various industries that surrounded the city.⁸²

4.2 The impact of international regulations

Between 1922 and 1936, the Fascist government invested large sums of money to strengthen the ports of the Kingdom of Italy so that they could adapt to advances in the shipping industry and changes in maritime traffic. The goal of these investments, amounting to some 2,300 million liras, was to improve and expand port infrastructure throughout the nation, including the three main ports in the Upper Adriatic: Venice, Trieste and Rijeka. Seventy-eight percent of these expenditures went to the eight major ports, which underwent major upgrades such as the new Genoa-Sampierdarena docks, the ports of Livorno, Venice and Bari, and the Transatlantic Maritime Station in Naples. Although Venice and Trieste were the most important ports in the Upper

⁸²F.Mancuso, “*Portus, the online magazine of rete*”, 2021.

Adriatic, only 16 percent of the total investment went to these two cities. Compared to other port works more exposed to the sea, the expenditures on furnishing the Venetian Maritime Station and port works in Marghera, along with the excavation of wider navigable channels in the Venice lagoon, were considered less costly. Although the interventions in Rijeka seemed smaller, they did not indicate a lack of attention to the Upper Adriatic ports. By 1930, Venice, Trieste and Rijeka had similar technical capabilities. However, Venice surpassed Rijeka and brought traffic closer to Trieste. Although Trieste and Rijeka seemed to have larger facilities than actual traffic, these cities were able to quickly restore port activities after the great crisis. The three Upper Adriatic ports had independent port management, a rare occurrence in Italy. The goal of management autonomy was to compete with the Atlantic and Baltic ports for trade in lower, middle, and central Europe. Venice had an autonomous Proveditorate, Trieste had a General Warehousing and Free Points Company, and Fiume had a General Warehousing Company. The goal of all these forms of autonomous management was to improve the port economy of the Upper Adriatic, although there were different traditions and goals. Epicarmo Corbino provided in his 1938 study a detailed description of the evolution of the Italian port system along the Adriatic from Pescara to Zadar. This description provides a comprehensive overview of the dynamics affecting the region's major ports during the period under consideration, from 1922 to 1935-1937. Although the focus is mainly on commercial maritime traffic, the author also provides sporadic information on the relationship between the ports and their surrounding land region. The change in the organization of middle and upper Adriatic ports in the 1930s is one of the most important elements of Corbino's analysis. The merger with the Kingdom of Italy in 1866 and the expansion of industry in Marghera made Venice the leading Italian Adriatic port. Marghera, in particular, surpassed the Venice Maritime Station in trade and industry. The diversification of traffic to and from Venice underscored the growing importance of industry in managing trade flows. On the other hand, with the annexation to the Kingdom of Italy and the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Trieste and Rijeka lost their

commercial role. Although Trieste had maintained a strong presence in trade, its loss of primacy to Venice was the result of its lesser ability to adapt to economic and industrial developments. In contrast, the river suffered a more significant decline, with a decrease in maritime traffic and a loss of inland connections to the Yugoslav port of Susak.⁸³ In contrast, other ports such as Ravenna and Pula have benefited from the economic growth associated with industry and agriculture in their hinterlands. But smaller ports, such as Chioggia and Ancona, have suffered a small decline, mainly due to competition from larger and better-equipped ports. Overall, Corbino's analysis shows the complexity of economic and geopolitical circumstances that influenced the evolution of Adriatic ports during the period in question. Diversification of trade and increased industrialization influenced the successes and failures of individual ports. In addition, elements such as geographic location, infrastructure investment, and trade policies contributed to the region's new port hierarchy.⁸⁴

4.3 The ecological perspective

Article 16 of Law No. 84/1994 classifies port services as “specialized services, which are complementary and ancillary to the cycle of port operations.” According to Ministerial Decree No. 132 of February 6, 2001, the responsibility for establishing such services lies with the port authority. In fact, Article 2 (3) and (4) of the decree in question lists the reasons for conferring the characteristics of specialty, complementarity and ancillary to these services. In the first case, the quality is constituted by “the special technical competence of the provider, also represented by the availability of equipment and/or machinery specifically dedicated to the provision of the service.” In the second and third cases, on the other hand, the “complementary and ancillary character of the services to be admitted as port services is constituted by the circumstance that, although they are

⁸³While Fiume was under Italian control, Susak remained under Yugoslav control, and the port of Susak grew in importance as a seaport for Yugoslavia.

⁸⁴L.Cerasi, R.Petri, S.Petrungaro, “*Porti di Frontiera*”, *Industria e commercio a Trieste, Fiume e Pola tra le guerre mondiali*, Edizioni Viella, 2008.

distinct activities from those forming part of the cycle of port operations, they are functional to the profitable performance of the same and contribute to improving the quality of the same in terms of productivity, celerity and streamlining, and are necessary for the elimination or undesirable consequences of the activities of the cycle. To better understand the services in question, it is useful to look at the Venice Port Authority's Ordinance No. 248 of Dec. 19, 2006, which defines the services of “filling/emptying containers; counting, separating, marking, sampling, measuring, weighing goods.”

Point 5 of Article 2 of Ministerial Decree 132/01 points out that the “competent authority” is empowered to choose which services are authorized “on the basis of the operational needs of the port, the authorized and operating enterprises and the specific needs resulting from the local organization of port work.” In Italy, the port system has undergone significant reforms to improve its competitiveness. This includes the replacement of port authorities with 15 new Port System Authorities, in line with the National Strategic Plan for Ports and Logistics. A law regulating the responsibility of pilots in ports was also passed. The Recreational Boating Code was revised in the area of nautical recreation, with new rules on boat classification, facilities for nautical licenses, and administrative simplifications. In addition, European regulations for recreational boats and watercraft were approved, and a new central telematics system was built. The annual recreational boat tax was eliminated. The delegation of authority in the 2015 European Law reorganized tax, social security and contribution incentives for maritime enterprises. Finally, the legislative process for some parliamentary initiatives related to river and inland navigation has not yet been completed. These include bills to amend the Navigation Code, create a National Inland Navigation Committee, and establish rules for inland ports and logistics platforms.⁸⁵

⁸⁵Camera dei deputati, *“Il sistema portuale e il trasporto marittimo e su vie navigabili interne”*, Temi dell’attività parlamentare, XVII legislatura, 2001.

4.4 The contemporary Venice

In order to protect the lagoon environment from erosion and loss of biodiversity and reduce the effects of tides, the city of Venice and its precious Lagoon require continuous routine and extraordinary maintenance efforts. Such interventions not only preserve the lagoon ecosystem, but also improve people's quality of life and generate local jobs. Restoring navigable channels, improving hydraulic defense of the smaller islands, reducing erosion in peripheral areas of the lagoon, and creating a digital platform for integrated water service management are all necessary interventions. In addition, the completion of the Mose project for tidal containment and the development of sophisticated technologies for the recovery of debris and non-biodegradable materials was essential. The Port ADS, Eni, Edison, Snam and the Venice Municipality⁸⁶ are working on major projects in the Porto Marghera and Fusina areas. These include increasing biodiesel production, building a logistics chain for LNG, building waste treatment plants of up to 150 kton per year, and reducing industrial CO2 emissions. In addition, efforts are planned to increase energy efficiency, such as the construction of a very high-efficiency combined-cycle power plant that could be the most efficient in Europe. With the goal of preserving and enhancing the region's natural heritage, these efforts focus on environmental and economic sustainability. The complex interaction between the port and the environment of Venice involves the preservation of the lagoon city's natural and cultural heritage and economic and industrial growth. On the one hand, the opening of ports and the growth of industrial activities in Marghera have stimulated the region's economy and created jobs; on the other hand, this development has had a negative impact on the lagoon environment and the quality of life of the people living there. Port expansion in

⁸⁶They are key players involved in various development and sustainability projects in the city of Venice, particularly related to the port area and energy and environmental activities.

Marghera has led to significant changes in the lagoon ecosystem by removing natural areas and building port and industrial infrastructure. Local biodiversity and water quality have been damaged by this, increasing the risk of pollution and compromising the ecological balance of the lagoon. In addition, industrialization in the region has increased industrial waste and pollutants, exacerbating the region's environmental problems. In contrast, the preservation of Venice's conventional port activities has led to difficulties in sustainably managing existing infrastructure and reducing environmental effects. In addition, ship traffic has raised water levels and contributed to bank erosion, increasing the risk of flooding and damaging the city's historic structures.⁸⁷ The debate in Venice between port development advocates and environmental defenders shows how complicated the challenges the city faces in achieving sustainable economic development are. While the port contributes significantly to the local economy, effective actions must be taken to safeguard the lagoon environment and ensure the well-being of future generations. Reconciling economic interests with the preservation of Venice's natural and cultural environment requires responsible port practices, innovative environmental policies, and investment in sustainable technologies.

⁸⁷Autorità Portuale di Venezia, *“Piano per la Gestione dei rifiuti dalle navi e dei residui del carico del Porto di Venezia – D.lgs. n. 182/2003”*, 2016.

Conclusioni

One of the most hotly debated issues nowadays is the tourism issue affecting the historic center of Venice. In order to more sustainably manage the influx of visitors to the lagoon city, the municipality has experimented with an innovative method of establishing a ticket system for tourists. This ticket, also called the *Venetian ticket*,⁸⁸ is an important step in managing tourism and the preservation of Venice's cultural heritage. The goal of its implementation is to secure financial resources for conservation, maintenance and sustainable development projects while balancing the need to preserve the uniqueness and integrity of the city and welcome visitors. The importance and effects of this entrance ticket system for Venice and possible benefits for environmental sustainability, tourist flow management, and preservation of historical and cultural heritage are analyzed. The ticket is designed to reduce the negative impact that mass tourism has on the city and fund maintenance and preservation operations. The cost of the ticket and how it is applied may vary depending on the season, length of visit, and other factors. Residents, merchants, and visitors have expressed different opinions about this initiative. While some think it can help maintain the uniqueness of Venice and better manage the influx of tourists, others worry about how it could affect tourism and accessibility to the city. Additional opinions were expressed by citizens based on several factors, including the direct impact this measure has on their daily lives, their thoughts on the tourism industry, and their desire to preserve the city's historical and cultural identity. Some residents might be sympathetic to the idea that entrance fees are a necessary solution to address the problems associated with mass tourism, such as encroachment on local infrastructure, road congestion, and environmental deterioration. They would see the ticket system as a way to protect Venice's unique heritage and manage the flow of visitors.

⁸⁸Il Post, "Come funzionerà il biglietto per visitare Venezia", 2023.

Other residents might worry about the negative effects of the ticketing system on the accessibility of the city and the local economy, particularly for businesses that depend on tourism. They might worry that the additional costs for visitors could reduce the number of visitors, which could have a negative impact on their earnings or job opportunities. In addition, there may be divergent opinions within the local community about how admission ticket money should be used and how the system could be improved so that residents find the maximum benefit. Tourism in Venice is a significant source of welfare, wealth and employment, with the city hosting about 12 million visitors a year. However, this tourist presence also presents significant costs and inconveniences. One particularly significant effect is the displacement of traditional urban activities due to competition with the tourism industry, undermining the vitality of the historic center and penalizing activities not directly related to tourism, such as local crafts and trade. Managing tourism development appropriately is crucial to preserving the identity and vitality of the historic city, considering its role as a complete urban community. The concept of sustainable tourism development has become crucial in the global tourism industry, understanding the need to develop tourism in harmony with the needs of local society and available resources. Planned action is needed to ensure the sustainability of tourism, considering the positive and negative effects. Tourism policy should adapt to the life cycle of the destination, avoiding excessive overload and regulating tourist flows to preserve the city's vitality. Currently, Venice is in the maturing stage of the tourism cycle, with the risk of decline if not managed properly. A sustainable approach to tourism involves judicious management of local resources and careful consideration of the needs of the local community. To make it sustainable, a number of targeted strategies must be adopted. First of all, the number of visitors must be kept below the reception capacity of the historic center by encouraging overnight tourism and discouraging commuter tourism. In addition, it is essential to eliminate peak demand and better distribute tourist activities over time and space, involving not only lesser-known parts of the historic center, but also the Mestre and Marghera areas. The city must actively engage in

tourism management, not just at the municipal level, taking action to avoid being passively subjected to it. This can include actions such as redesigning the accessibility system to the historic center, more prudent management of the historic-cultural heritage, taxing tourist transportation, and implementing initiatives to raise tourists' awareness of the fragility of the urban fabric. The transformation of Venice from a city inhabited and lived in by its residents to a tourist destination has resulted in the latter moving to suburbs such as Mestre and Marghera. This transformation has led to the marginalization of residents, with a decline in the quality of life in the historic city and an increase in the cost of living. Despite attempts at modernization over time, the city remains largely intact in its historic urban structure. However, the focus on the tourist industry led to a kind of museification of the city and a gradual decentralization of productive functions to the mainland, with the construction of Porto Marghera and the first industrial zone. This caused an exodus of population from the historic city to the mainland, contributing to population decline. Despite efforts to maintain and renovate the Venetian built environment, the lack of attention to social sustainability further fueled emigration. In sum, Venice has turned into a kind of periphery of itself, while Mestre and Marghera have developed as a diffuse metropolis, with paradoxical consequences and unlikely alliances.

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