

A research project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation & Agence Nationale de la Recherche

Poster and content by Davide Ceccato

VENICE

Since the XVIIth century Grand Tour, la Serenissima has been a favourite destination among international travellers. Throughout the years, the tourists visiting the historical city centre have grown into millions. Today, the hospitality sector represents the main economic activity of the city. Nonetheless, a perceived excessive number of tourists appears to have ruined the quality of life of his residents and ‘Overtourism’ is recognised as a threat to the city itself.



OVERTOURISM? THE PROBLEMS

DEBATING

COUNTING & MANAGING

Venice overcrowded by tourists during carnival, detail: Piazzetta San Marco/Giardini. Photo by Sebastian Fagarazzi, Venezia Autentica.

Too many tourists?

Venice has become an icon of urban *overtourism*. This phenomenon manifests itself primarily as congestion in public spaces that deteriorates the quality of life of residents and the travel experience of tourists and represents a potential risk for the ancient and fragile infrastructure of the city. The growth of short-term rentals has led to gentrification and, following the tourism demand, the cost of housing has increased to an unbearable level for many residents who had to relocate outside the historical city centre.

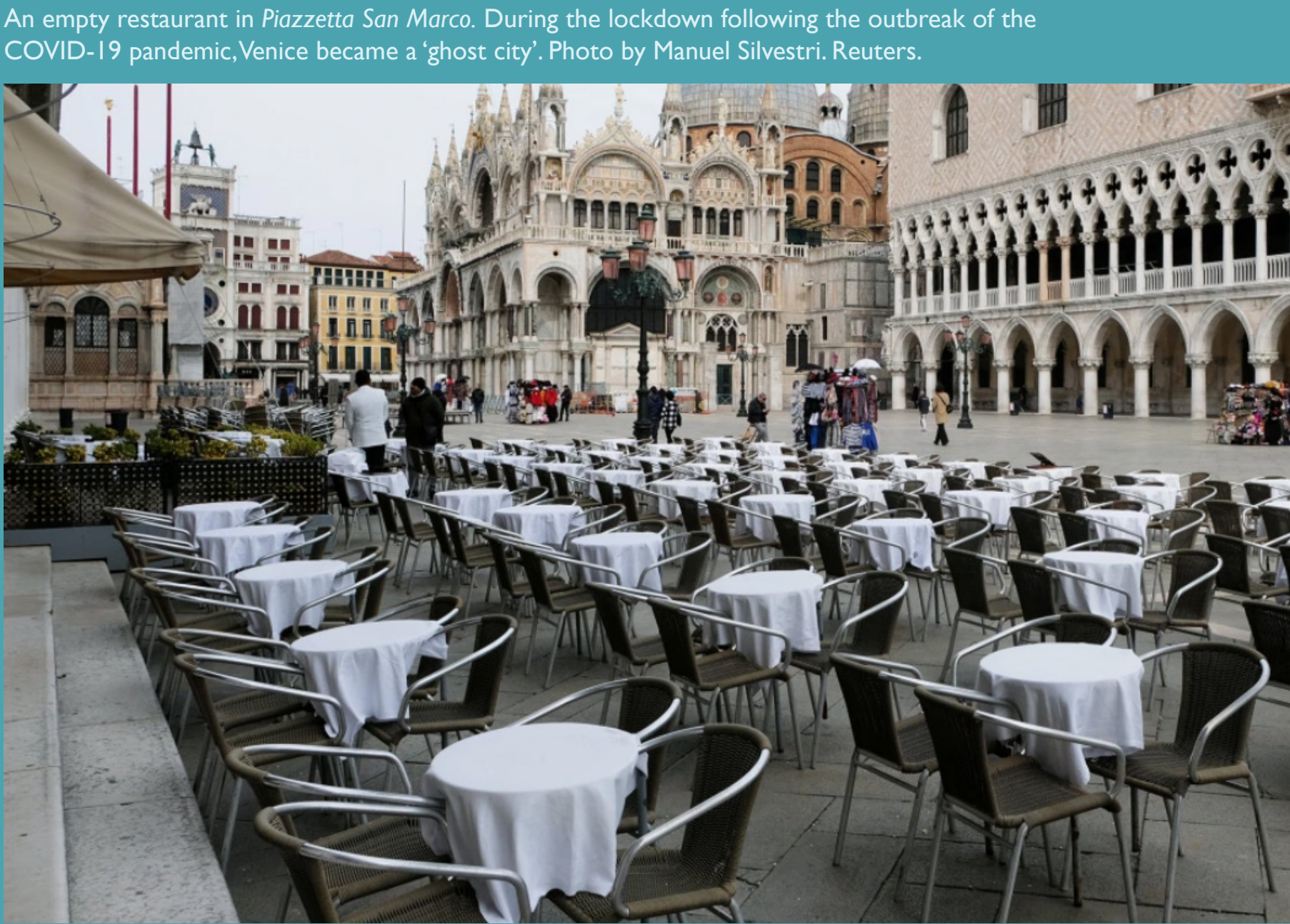
The debate on *overtourism* refers often to the number of tourists. However, an additional problem is represented by the counting of tourists. For the city of Venice, it is still difficult to have a precise number of visitors. Due to their ephemeral nature, the quantity of day-trippers is hard to assess and the presence of unregistered overnight guests produce unobserved tourism. Nonetheless, the effort to properly count visitors has been considered key to understanding the city, as demonstrated for instance by the fact that a tourism carrying capacity model was early proposed by academics.



Conflicts and Reactions

Venetian residents and local associations have been raising their voices to fight against the ongoing touristification of their city and what is perceived to be an excessive number of tourists and the negative impacts on the socio-economic fabric of Venice attributed to their presence. Citizen mobilisations such as the *No Grandi Navi* protest has brought to everyone's attention the feelings of anger and resentment shared among residents who wish to limit and re-think tourism. Eventually, the debate reached the institutional level when in June 2021, the UNESCO warned that Venice might enter the list of endangered heritage.

The number of tourists is not only a matter of discussion in academia, businesses and administrative institutions; residents and citizens have been mobilising numbers as a tool to assert their positions by showing in the most possible objective way the negative impact of tourism in their lives. In Venice, the use of numbers in political activism or *statactivism* pertains to grassroots organisation that, for instance, report the increasing number of short term rentals or compare the numbers of tourist beds to that of residents in order to highlight the imbalances caused by tourism on Venetian citizens.



Dependence

The progressive touristification of Venice has been diverting the urban assets to ease and please the tourist presence. Most of the retail activities, transport and actors in the service sectors have been increasingly focusing on the needs of tourists. Services and businesses conceived for and accessible to residents have been gradually disappearing. Therefore, the economy of the city has eventually become almost entirely dependent on tourism. The tourism monoculture became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the city businesses had to close and the entire economic fabric of Venice, sustained by tourism, was severely hit.

The total revenues deriving from tourism in the city of Venice are not a simple measure to obtain. Nonetheless, to have an idea of the size of the sector, it can be noticed that, in 2019, 1 on 4 employers in the metropolitan city were working in tourism-related services. In 2020 the tourists beds in the historical city centre were almost 60k, in an area with ~53k residents. While the 'informal' accommodations (mainly AirBnB) listed online were more than 3k in the historical city centre, and almost 8k including *Lido* and the mainland. As communicated by official public statistics, in 2019 (pre-COVID19), the historical city centre has welcomed 3.5M arrivals and 8.8M of presences.

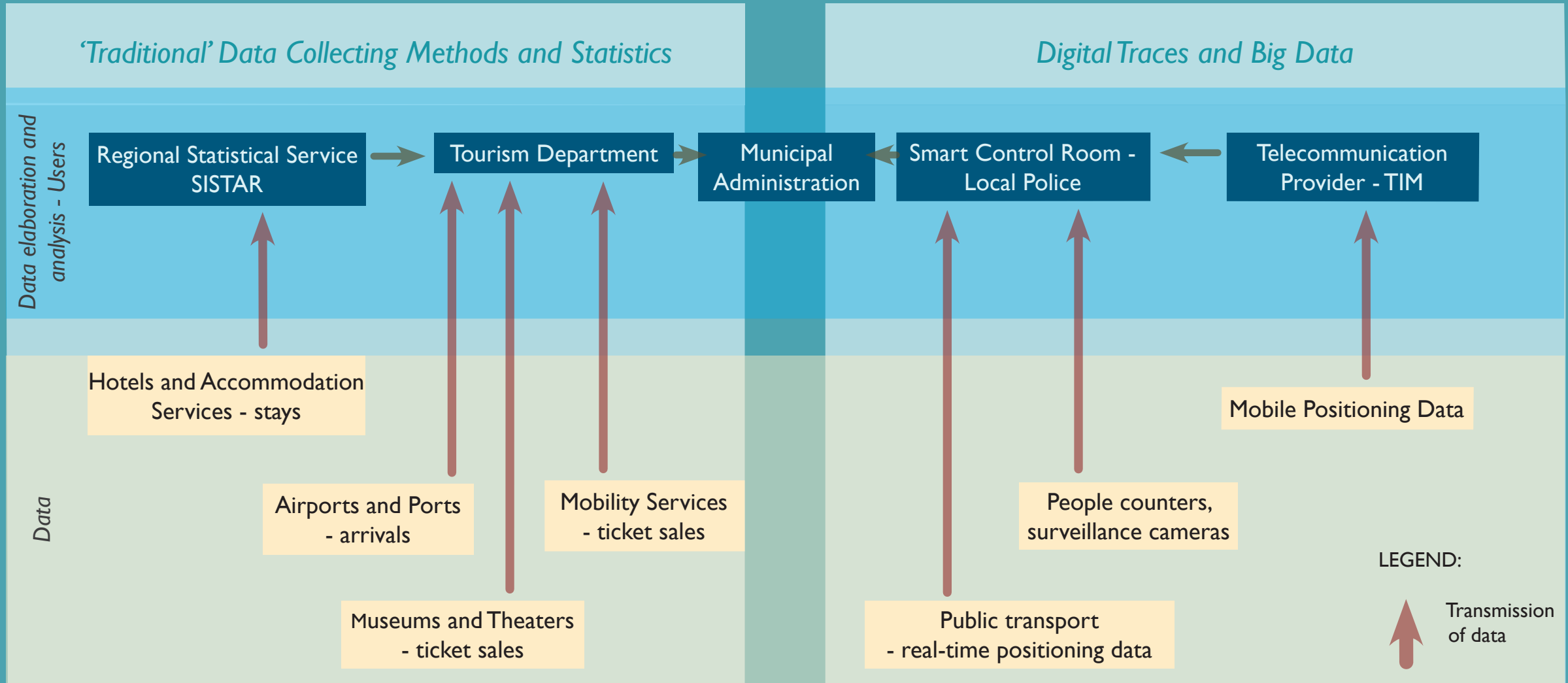
PUBLIC TOURISM MANAGEMENT TOOLS / EVENTS - TIMELINE



LEGEND:

- Introduction of tourism management tool
- Major event related to tourism activity
- UNESCO action

CAPTURED TOURISM AND REAL-TIME COUNTING. A NEW WAY OF OBSERVING TOURISM?



Smart Control Room

The *Smart Control Room*, located in the headquarters of the Venice Local Police, brings together the monitoring and control equipment of the city's critical mobility and urban governance systems. The transport data are collected from the local multimodal public transport network. As for pedestrian traffic, data are collected from the video surveillance apparatus (600 cameras), people counters and mobile positioning data. In addition to quantitative data, qualitative data are aggregated from social media, in order to build a barometer of the people's sentiments about the city. The system was envisioned to help the management of mobility and public safety by receiving real time information and reacting promptly in precarious situations, such as in the case of excessive pedestrian congestion. The implementation of the system has been welcomed with general enthusiasm. Nonetheless, there are still many critical points related to the SCR, first among them the transparency, openness and quality of the data, notably the mobile positioning data.

References

Araya López, A. (2021). Saint Mark's Square as Contested Political Space: Protesting Cruise Tourism in Venice. *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures*, 15(1).
Città di Venezia, (2020). *Annuario del Turismo*, dati 2019 (2020, 2021).
Nolan, E. & Séraphin, H. (2019). 10 Venice: capacity and tourism. In R. Dodds & R. Butler (Ed.), *Overtourism: Issues, realities and solutions* 139-151. De Gruyter Oldenbourg.
Trovò, F. (2020). THE UNESCO SITE "VENICE AND ITS LAGOON": CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION POLICIES. *The International Archives of the Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Spatial Information Sciences*, XLIV-M-1–2020, 559–564.
Vianello, M. (2016). The No Grandi Navi campaign: Protests against cruise tourism in Venice. In *Protest and Resistance in the Tourist City*. Routledge

