

TOURISM IN VENICE DRIVING THE LOCALS OUT OF THE CITY



Tourism in Venice has been a growing problem; the city is overrun by tourists. Many of the local inhabitants have left the center, and are still leaving in droves. Within one generation the population has shrunk by almost a third. Rising costs are driving more and more people out of the city.

This month the number of inhabitants has fallen to under 55,000. In 1951 the population was 175,000. 26 years ago it was still 78,000. Another problem is that almost half of the population is over 60 years old. On the other there are only about 9000 people under 18 years old.

“We held a “funeral” for Venice in 2009, when the number fell below 60,000. Now we are at 55,000. If we go on like this, we will become a ghost town like Pompey,” says Matteo Secchi from the group Venessia.com, which promotes the survival of the city.

During a demonstration, Secchi and other locals held a slogan “#Venexodus”. Symbolically for the “exodus” and mass tourism in Venice, the inhabitants held suitcases in the air. About 500 protesters going through the streets protested against high prices, the inconvenience of moving without a car, inadequate services, but also erosion of residential buildings caused by the humidity. As a result of this “high water phenomenon” many basements and floors in buildings are flooded.

Tourism in Venice is the greatest threat to the local community, but at the same time it is also the main source of income. The number of visitors has almost quadrupled in the past 25 years.

As a result, the city is looking for more and more accommodation possibilities. Just recently, the city signed an agreement with A & O, which will provide the city with a hostel with nearly 1,000 more beds.

The tourist boom also helps hoteliers and gondoliers as well as homeowners who rent or sell their apartments. Others, however, feel threatened, as apartments and supermarkets are transformed into tourist areas. If one wants to eat in an authentic restaurant in the city center, it would take a long time to find one.

“Tourism has made us rich in the short-term, but it is killing us in the long-term,” says Secchi. “Too many people do not want to live in this city anymore, but they take advantage of it like a prostitute.”

But there is also hope. Piero Dri, for example, is one of the young Venetians who have stayed in the city. The 33-year-old manufactures traditional rowing paddles for gondolas and also processes them into decorations. He is one of the four who uphold this tradition in Venice.

At the same time, many require an effective limitation of tourism in Venice. These people also receive support from UNESCO. The UN cultural organization has threatened to put Venice on the list of threatened cultural assets. “The ever-increasing tourism dominates and conceals the traditional urban society of the historic city,” a report said in 2015.

The main obstacle is the huge cruise ships in Venice that endanger not only the ecosystem

of the lagoon, but also bring in many controversial one-day tourists.

Mayor Luigi Brugnaro, however, has given UNESCO a sign of rejection. Options such as higher taxes for one-day tourists and short-term leases as well as barriers to control the number of visitors are long on the table. But they have never been put into practice.

Paolo Lanapoppi from the cultural organization Italia Nostra is skeptical about the future of the city. "My personal opinion is that the politicians are stuck together with the tourism industry, which has no interest at all in reducing the number of visitors."

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