THE LIFE IN VENICE

Analysing the mutual support between Venice and local cultural entrepreneurs

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Abstract

The city of Venice is going through a hard period that many consider as "the death of Venice", characterized by aggressive touristic inflows, depopulation, economic struggles and a poor non-tourist-oriented cultural production. Such features clash with the expected vocation and reputation of Venice as the big cultural city par excellence. In this context, cultural entrepreneurs can play a crucial role in shifting the city out of its "death zone", hence a dedicated study is required in order to analyse the case of Venice and raise it as the emblem of many other similar urban realities around the globe. In order to do so, the present research will determine how local cultural entrepreneurs contribute to establish a mutually supportive relationship with Venice. By relying on a holistic approach, this study builds up a theoretical framework based on the concept of the duo place-dwellers, arguing that these two units constitute an organic entity, rather than two separate elements. With a constant eye on the inherent symbiosis of these units, the theory inspects the concept of place-dwellers through three main constitutive dimensions: the city as a network of social interactions, the city as a symbolic system and the city as a local economy. This research avails itself of a qualitative method, collecting data from four still active Venetian cultural entrepreneurs, one entrepreneur whose activity is now ceased and on expert of the field. The outcomes prove the crucial role that cultural entrepreneurs have in supporting the city of Venice, and the influence that the city itself has on their enterprises. Ultimately, the mutual support succeeds in taking place only through some channels. The semiotic dimensions appears particularly influential from both sides, whereas the economic dimension presents the highest degree of problematics. The final suggestions address potential strategies to strengthen this relationships, bringing into play not only local cultural entrepreneurs, but also big cultural institutions like the Biennale, local universities and the municipality. The encouraged prospective is the establishment of an inclusive dialogue among the abovementioned actors with the aim of determining a clear vision for the future of Venice's state of the cultural scene.

Keywords: Venice, mutual support, cultural entrepreneur, place, dwellers.

Acknowledgments

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1 - Introduction

The city of Venice is worldwide renowned for its great cultural and historical heritage, to the extent that it is often perceived nationally and internationally as *the* cultural city par excellence. However, recognizing Venice only by means of its cultural heritage is a reductive misperception of the actual reality. In fact, beneath the most superficial layer of touristic attractiveness and historic recall, Venice presents an underlying unique identity, with its own peculiar characteristics and logics. In other words, Venice is not merely the historic heritage it displays, but also a system of contemporary cultural realities that shape the current social, economic and urban fabric of the city.

However, such hidden facet of Venice does not seem to thrive hardly enough to enable the city to survive, prosper and resist to today's challenges. The superficial splendour does not coincide to an inner prosperous development, since the city suffers from an economic struggle, a lack of cultural production, a constant decrease of population and a hostile increase of touristic inflow. Ferilli et al (2015) undertook in 2005 a thorough analysis of the cultural geography of the Veneto region, whose administrative centre is Venice, and succeeded in unveiling a circumstance where the lagoon city surprisingly "underperforms in terms of its meaningfulness in the semantic of the cultural geography of the region" (p. 119). In fact, in spite of the high concentration of cultural facilities and activities at the regional level, Venice does not coincide with the main regional focus of cultural dynamism, which is instead located in the so-called Pedemontana area in the far mainland. These findings depict Venice as a mere stage of cultural productions originated elsewhere, instead of the expected vital hub of cultural production (Ferilli et al, 2015). Consequently, the scope of influence of Venice is extremely limited and weak, meaning that it has a little cultural impact on the surrounding areas. Ultimately, Venice reveals itself as an obsolete cultural producer, a spectacular, yet not innovative, stage for big tourists-appealing events, afflicted by an exaggerated and threatening inflow of tourists and a relentless destruction of the local social fabric (Ferilli et al, 2015). A vicious circle seems to lead the city towards what many consider as "*the death of Venice*". In today's worldwide economy, many cities are competing with each other claiming a unique attractiveness, but actually resulting in a veiled standardization (Russo & Sans, 2009). Venice is still struggling to get rid of an antiquate image, that has been maintained to preserve a specific historic flavour, useful to market the city but idle in terms of the natural evolution of the human environment (Russo & Sans, 2009).

There is a rich literature dedicated to the role of the cultural industries as crucial elements for urban growth, revitalization and innovation. Many models have been proposed and many cities throughout the world have been analysed based on such models, in order to study the validity of

those theories supporting the relevance of creativity. However, the uniqueness of Venice requires a special and dedicated observation, and the necessity of questioning the applicability of the already existing theories. The city of Venice, in fact, presents a unique urban organization, which affects, directly or indirectly, every kind of human activity there undertaken. The difficult transportation facilities, the high real estate and rental prices, the lack of human capital and the peculiar urban geography can be influent characteristics making Venice a particularly singular reality. Waitt & Gibson (2009) already questioned Florida's (2002) theories about the creative cities, which claim that creatives are strongly attracted by big bustling urban areas. According to Waitt & Gibson (2009), creatives might be attracted also by smaller urban centres for different reasons and locate out of the thriving centre. This may mean that the creatives are not a prerogative of the big bustling metropoles, but also other kinds of urban settlements could represent an appealing location. Florida's (2002) theories are not always applicable, especially for the case of Venice, which lays in between the big international cultural capital and the small vernacular village. Hence, the analysis of this city and its cultural entrepreneurs is expected to yield distinctive outcomes and extreme results, accordingly to its unique nature. However, beside the importance that these results will constitute for the city of Venice itself, this research can provide conclusions useful to compare similar realities from around the world, especially for those urban areas afflicted by over-tourism and where cultural entrepreneurship may play a rejuvenating role. The interpretation of place-dwellers could be applied to every site and the example of Venice is just one of the possible implementations.

Acknowledging the uniqueness of Venice, this research does not intend to consider the lagoon city according to pre-existent models, but it rather aims at observing it as a complex organism, a *place* inhabited by *dwellers*. This approach allows a more in depth overview of the urban reality, with the particular purpose of analysing the issue of the claimed *death* of the city and the role of local cultural entrepreneurs in improving Venice's conditions. The goal is to establish whether local-oriented (rather than tourists-oriented) cultural entrepreneurs may contribute to shifting Venice out of the dead zone and, since it is crucial to determine whether this support can last in time, how Venice can support local cultural entrepreneurs to start, maintain and develop their activities. Ultimately, the final research question that this research will attempt to answer is: *how do local cultural entrepreneurs contribute to establish a mutually supportive relationship with Venice?* In this case, the purpose is to focus on the entrepreneurs' intentions, on whether they perceive Venice to be supportive and plan to benefit (consciously or not) to it.

The following sections are organized into three main steps. Firstly, a solid theoretical framework provides a thorough definition of place by drawing from different disciplines and clarifying its multidimensional nature. Alongside the definition of this complex concept, the case of Venice will gradually be presented as a direct exemplification of the theory. In the same section, there will be an argumentation on the dwellers of the place Venice, namely cultural entrepreneurs, and their relationship with the urban environment. Secondly, a section dedicated to the methodology will provide in depth information about the design of the present research, the ways of sampling and interpreting data. The last section analyses and interprets the outcomes of the data analysis, by examining each respondent and drawing final general conclusion.

2 – Theoretical Framework

The following section aims at providing the definitions of the central concepts used to build a solid theoretical framework. This essential first step reveals at its start the necessity, as observers, of analysing different specific ways of thinking, seeing and conceiving the world, which differ according to the epistemological framework one chooses to adopt. This need stems from the conviction that a holistic and multidisciplinary approach is the best way to deal with complex realities such as the urban environment and the so-called creative industries. Keeping in mind that the main concern for a research is to depict a veritable picture of reality, this study draws upon different languages that, in various ways, are able to address those actualities relevant to our study. This is particularly true for the first part of this section, where the concept of place will be discussed in depth, bringing to light its ambiguity and the urge to start thinking about it not as a single entity but as the match "place-dwellers". The investigation of place through its three main dimensions will reveal the co-existence of three related epistemological frames (sociology, semiotics and economics). Moreover, each of the three dimensions will refer to examples related to the case of Venice, whose peculiarity will be illustrated alongside the whole presentation of the concept of place. The second part will offer a clarification of the concept of cultural entrepreneur and of how this figure seems to relate inherently to the urban environment.

2.1 - What is place?

Being the "place of Venice", and the dynamics taking place within it, one of the main objects of this research, an emblematic epistemological problem is to be considered. In fact, the first thing that comes into mind when addressing the concept of "place" is that this notion does not have only one

and objective definition. One of the first challenges required to undertake this analysis is deciding which approach to adopt. Many fields of research have tried to provide a fulfilling definition of place, but each one did not succeed in depicting the actual multidimensional complexity of such concept.

The first attempts to find a harmony among the several conceptualizations of place can be found already some decades ago. Buttimer (1976) stressed the urge of adopting a more holistic approach, which could encompass the intellectual knowledge from different fields plus the evidence of our lived experience. Buttimer's suggestion is that relying on only one field of knowledge, or language, would be extremely inadequate to understand places, as we should also take into account the ways we live in and relate to them. There seems to be an active relation between men (the cognizing beings) and the world where they are embedded (Buttimer, 1976), so that place is ultimately not seen anymore as a mere "passive stage" (Buttimer, 1976, p. 280), but as a complex reality homogeneously linked to its dwellers. It is for this reason that this research will focus on the mutual support between the place Venice and the cultural entrepreneurs active in it, by considering the city and its dwellers as an organic entity, rather than two separate observable elements. We cannot analyse Venice without analysing the people living it, and vice versa. Consequently, we must consider the cultural entrepreneurs under our lenses as "dwellers", rather than mere occupiers of a location. Buttimer (1976) perfectly summarizes this in her words:

> "To dwell implies more than to inhabit, to cultivate, or to organize space. It means to live in a manner which is attuned to the rhythms of nature, to see one's life as anchored in human history and directed toward a future, to build a home which is the everyday symbol of a dialogue with one's ecological and social milieu." (p. 277)

The many dimensions through which space has to be considered (at least for the purposes of this research) have also been investigated in more contemporary researches, in particular related to cultural entrepreneurs and the creative industries. Konomi, Lavanga & Loots (2017) identified four main determinants of locational decision for cultural entrepreneurs, namely the economic, socio-cultural, physical/spatial and perceptual ones. These dimensions refer to specific related features of the urban environment, such as rent conditions, diversity of lifestyle, visual stimuli and place attachment. Cultural entrepreneurs seem to see the urban location through these main determinants and to make their locational decisions according to them. These outcomes depict the (urban) place as a complex and multidimensional organism, and cultural entrepreneurs as dwellers sensitive to the place's characteristics. Lange (2008) claims that "creative production not only happens in a particular place, but its players constitute place by various forms of social interaction, which in its

turn is constitutive of creative production" (p. 7). This statement interprets place not only as a platform hosting the creatives' activities, but also as the result of the creatives' activities themselves. Firstly, Lange identifies cities as sites, meaning the actual urban spaces where creative productions take place (through individual actors or companies and in specific milieus), and which are locally embedded yet globally connected. Secondly, place can be determined by the communicative practices of the creative actors, who gather and depart from each other building social interactions, which eventually affect the physical location. Thirdly, places can be meant as marketable products; in this concern, creativity seems to be particularly relevant, as it enables entrepreneurs to exploit and brand-ify the uniqueness of a city, identify knowledge and innovation sources, market the city and recognize new business opportunities.

The abovementioned theories already present a well recognizable pattern. A file rouge seems to link these different visions, so that a sort of comprehensive, deductive and recapitulatory scheme emerges. In fact, by inspecting the different definitions of space, three main dimensions happen to recur more often, although under various names: the city as the result of social interactions and networks of communication; the city as a system of symbolic elements conveying meanings to individuals and communities; lastly, the city as a local economy. We will investigate now each dimension by alluding to a dedicated literature.

2.1.1 - The city as a network of social interactions

To start off, place can be considered as the result of a complexity of social interplays. Massey (1999) defines place through three main dimensions. First, as a result of interactions and interrelations. Second, as an arena where a plurality of elements can potentially exist. Thirdly, as an ever-evolving sphere not fixed in time. In other words, Massey (1999) considers place as a product of interactions taking place in time among different individuals. This definition entails necessarily some socio-political considerations, since the collective community is endowed with a creative responsibility. Being the community one of the shaping forces of a place, the dwellers not only manage themselves as a political and civic entity, but they also manipulate and determine the place they live in through their political choices and actions over time. Ultimately, one could consider place as the reflection, or the result, of a community's politics. However, one has also to consider that different communities may coexist and claim a role in the shaping process of a place. Each constituent community might hold different interests, which can converge or contrast with each other, giving birth to political and social clashes. Assumedly, the prevailing community will have the strongest power on place determination.

Similarly, Buttimer (1976) provides a definition of "social space" (p. 285), which has much to do with Massey's framework. Buttimer forecast the current revolution of social networks and of globalization by describing the contemporary individual as itinerant and unbound to a specific geographical site. Consequently, the individual's social and commercial interactions will be the main determinants of place. The contemporary individual, thus, describes a place according to the social networks related to it, such as family, peers, friends and so on. Ultimately, the social dimension of place can be observed at both the collective and individual levels.
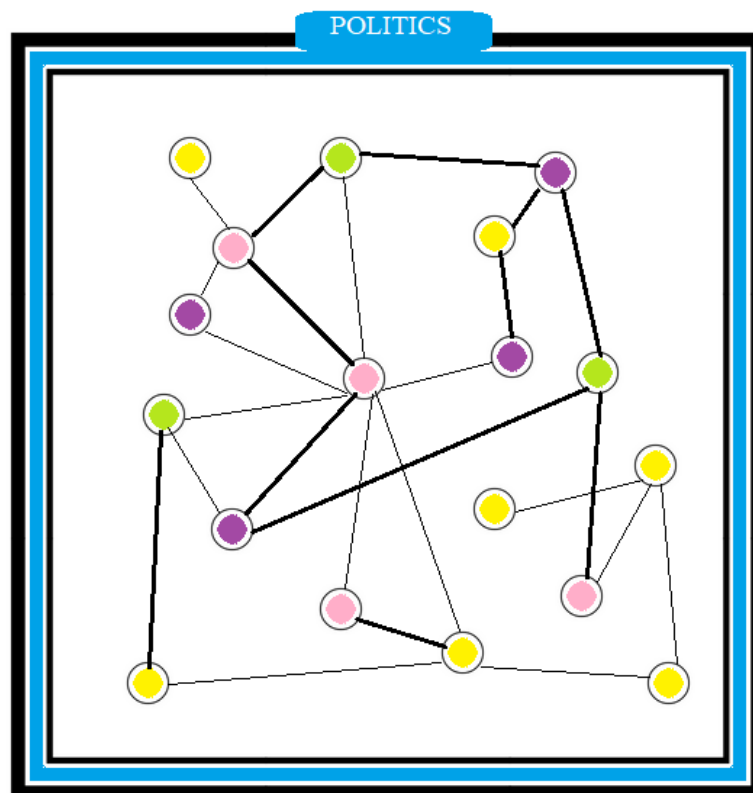
○ Individuals
── Formal bond
── Informal bond
🔵 Political institutions
🟣 Inhabitants
🩷 Students
🟡 Tourists
🟢 Working categories

Questions:
Which decisions are taken over time to establish the network?
Which kind of relationships?

1. *The city as a network of social interactions (personal elaboration).*

Summing up, place consists of an organic intricacy of social interactions (among individuals, institutions, organizations or communities) that shape an open and evolving network, representing a gauge for action. According to this definition, Venice can be looked at not only as a

mere geographical site, but first and foremost as the complexity of social interactions taking place within it. The constituent communities of a city can be various, since different kinds of individuals and groups of individuals dwell permanently or temporarily in the urban place. The main communities taken into account in this study are the inhabitants, the political institutions, the students, the tourists, and the workers. In the last years, Venice has been struggling with an unstoppable decreasing trend of inhabitants, which now correspond to little more than 50.000, among which singles and retired people prevail (https://www.comune.venezia.it/it/archivio/27082). Currently, the city has a centre-right oriented government, represented by the mayor Luigi Brugnaro, elected the 15th June 2015, with more than the 20% of support from the voters. The touristic inflow can touch even 25 millions of visitors per year (Russo & Sans, 2009), which give birth to practical and ethical concerns regarding the preservation of the city. The number of tourists does not seem to reduce, and the local community often expressed a clear opposition against such a threatening incursion. Students form a community of around 25.000 individuals (Russo & Sans, 2009), spread among the five centres of higher education, namely Ca' Foscari (humanities, linguistics, economics and sciences), IUAV (visual and performing arts, fashion and communication design and architecture), the Fine Arts Academy, the private IED (design) and the Venice International University (a consortium of several local and international universities). Many students commute daily from their hometowns, others live in students accommodation in Venice or in the near mainland. Commuting students are part of a larger group of commuters, together with numerous non-resident workers. Different kinds of social networks can be established, in formal or informal manners. Formal interactions are usually represented by official entities such as political parties, professional partnerships, clubs, congregations, and so on. Informal interactions are hardly definable, yet they play an important role in our daily life. They can be observed through the city's street life (in the day or night time), neighbourhood meetings, leisure activities, but also those collective practices that are done secretly from the public institutions, like black markets or forbidden gatherings and so on. The outcomes of this research will identify which kinds of communities the cultural entrepreneurs involve, and which kinds of social interactions they trigger.

2.1.2 - The city as a symbolic system

Semiotics happens to be extremely useful to understand the relevance of the appearance of Venice, since its unique geographical, architectural, urbanistic, infrastructural and natural environment holds a powerful baggage of conveyed meanings. Such feature is to be observed more in depth, as its influence on the city's dwellers is particularly strong. Considering a city as a symbolic system means recognizing it as a complexity of meaningful signs. A sign is normally described in semiotics

as something that stands for something else. Therefore, an urban semiologist acknowledges the various perceivable features of the city as expressions of a significance. The urban perceivable features of a city can range from the most evident visual stimuli of the architecture, the organization of space and the natural and urban landscape, to more dynamic elements such as practices, fashions and languages. Semiotics explains how dwellers associate meanings to the physical and behavioural environment they are embedded in.

As Remm (2011) states, "the space of the city is semiotic – meanings are attributed to it, spatial forms are created to signify something […], the space organises and spatializes structures of urban communities and their symbolic systems". This fundamental statement describes (urban) space as a vehicle and a generator of meanings, which are embedded in the sociocultural fabric. In particular, Remm (2011) considers the urban space as (a) containing various perceivable elements (such as streets, parks, pedestrians, cars, stores…); (b) as an objectively complex of phenomena and behaviours and (c) as an abstract sociocultural concept, such as an idea, an abstract value or even a brand. Taking the case of Venice, it is easy to recognize a well defined environmental pattern of perceivable elements, characterized by a peculiar architecture and urban space. The city is organized through a maze of narrow streets and canals, which form altogether picturesque and evocative views. Great part of the built environment is historical heritage, a still existing evidence of the old Venetian style and aesthetic, with its peculiar modules and paradigms. Overall, a repetitive pattern of stones, bricks, marble, wood, shingles and water represents the main visual stimulus. Few green areas are present in the city, but a characteristic natural landscape frames the city with a big lagoon, whose salty and dirty water releases a sharp smell throughout the city. This extremely peculiar environment of perceivable elements has a direct influence on the dwellers' behaviours and habits, and gives birth to a unique way of living. For instance, the urban conformation of Venice obliges people to move around the city only by foot or by boat, which in turn creates a unique way of interacting with the space and the others. The proximity between the street and the stores allows pedestrian to peek easily through the doors, perceive the smell of the products and hear the voices of the occupants. Remm (2011) refers also to the concept of rhythmanalysis, which consists in the identification of a series of human, social and personal actions, changes in environment and repeating objects observable in the urban landscape. Each element repeating in time and space conveys a meaning only if acknowledged and incorporated in the sociocultural system. Ultimately, the city is the rhythms it chooses to acknowledge. Venice develops its identity through the establishment of several "rhythmic" elements. Some official architectural restrictions control the way buildings have to be constructed or preserved, in order to maintain a specific architectural pattern. Some dwellers can decide to move around only with the

traditional Venetian rowing boats, others not to use the public water transport. Furthermore, several recurrent events scattered throughout the year give birth to a repetitive cycle of occurrences, habits and traditions, like the worldwide renowned Carnival or simply the weekly fish market. Finally, Venice as an abstract cultural concept can have many different connotations, determined by the groups of significant components organized in rhythmical sequences. Depending on which element one wants to focus, Venice can be the city of love, the city of tourism, the city of stones, the city of mess, the heir of the old Serenissima Republic, and so on and so forth.

This brings us to the consideration that every society, according to its specific cultural framing of the reality, observes and identifies different measurable constituents of the urban environment, and each constituent is a carrier of meaning. The communities that constitute the city through their interactions are also the ones creating the symbols, which are the "tangible and communicable entities" (Mueller & Schade, 2012, p. 89) of the identity of a place and its dwellers. As mentioned above, different communities may confer different meanings to different elements. While a tourist may see the Rialto bridge as an example of the monumental beauty of the city, a local citizen can see it as the badge of touristic exploitation, whereas a souvenirs seller a business opportunity. Besides its inherent relativity, another important feature of a symbolic system is that it does not remain unchanged; rather, it varies according to the social interactions of the constituent communities over time (Mueller & Schade, 2012). Hence, the Redentore celebration that takes place yearly was originally an occasion to commemorate the intervention of god to solve the plague afflicting the city; today, it is the biggest day of feast of Venice, where locals (but also many outsiders) celebrate summer and the Venetian lifestyle.

Nevertheless, in order to establish a contact with the meaningful signs of the environment, people must be alert enough and sensitive to the surroundings. As Moore & Scott (2003) noted, individuals could experience the surroundings in a focused or unfocused way; the degree of focus determines the level of place attachment and, thus, the extent of mutual relation between the place and its dwellers. Due to some social, economic and technological changes (globalization, individualism, the ability to produce virtual places, and so on), meanings are more volatile and unstable than ever (Williams & Stewart, 1998).

Many scholars started giving particular attention to the concepts of place attachment or sense of place. These two notions seem to be interchangeable, and Williams & Stewart (1998) provided a definition of sense of place through five main aspects: "Emotional bonds to a site; strongly felt values, meanings and symbols hard to identify, especially as outsiders; valued qualities that an insider recognizes when threatened; the set of place meanings that are continuously

(re)constructed within individual minds, shared cultures and social practices; the awareness of the cultural, historical and spatial context within which meanings, values and social interactions are formed" (p. 19). It is assumable that the higher the degree of sense of place, the more an individual would contribute to the definition of a place as a symbolic system.

The relevance of the semiotic consideration of place is evident when observing how creativity and entrepreneurship are affected by the spatial surroundings. The materiality of the environment has been highlighted by Rantisi & Leslie (2009), who acknowledge the way in which creativity is affected by the surrounding aesthetic stimuli. They clarify what Hutton (2006) mentioned in his article referring to the influence of the spatial and physical urban components on the establishment of creative enterprises in a city centre. They specifically consider as main parameters affecting the conformation of the new creative business in the urban area: (a) the size of the inner city, which can determine a sense of territoriality and identity; (b) the landscape and the urban designs, conceived as arenas that can facilitate intimacy, interaction and the sharing of tacit knowledge among creatives; (c) the adaptability of the buildings type, which should be favourable to the creative business activities; and (d) peculiar landmarks that can constitute powerful and recognizable imaginaries. Furthermore, Rantisi & Leslie (2009) quote Amin (2008) and forecast what we already defined as rhythmanalysis (Remm, 2011), when they describe a vibrant street life as a critical element encouraging social interactions:

> "Spaces with many things circulating with them, many activities that do not form part of an overall plan of totality, many impulses that constantly change the character of the space, many actants who have to constantly jostle for position and influence, many impositions of order (from buildings and designs to conventions and rules" (Amin, 2008, p. 10-11)

According to this quote, the rhythm of practices, habits and aesthetics present in a site has a role in enhancing an inclination towards the others and, therefore, to creativity and the businesses related to it.
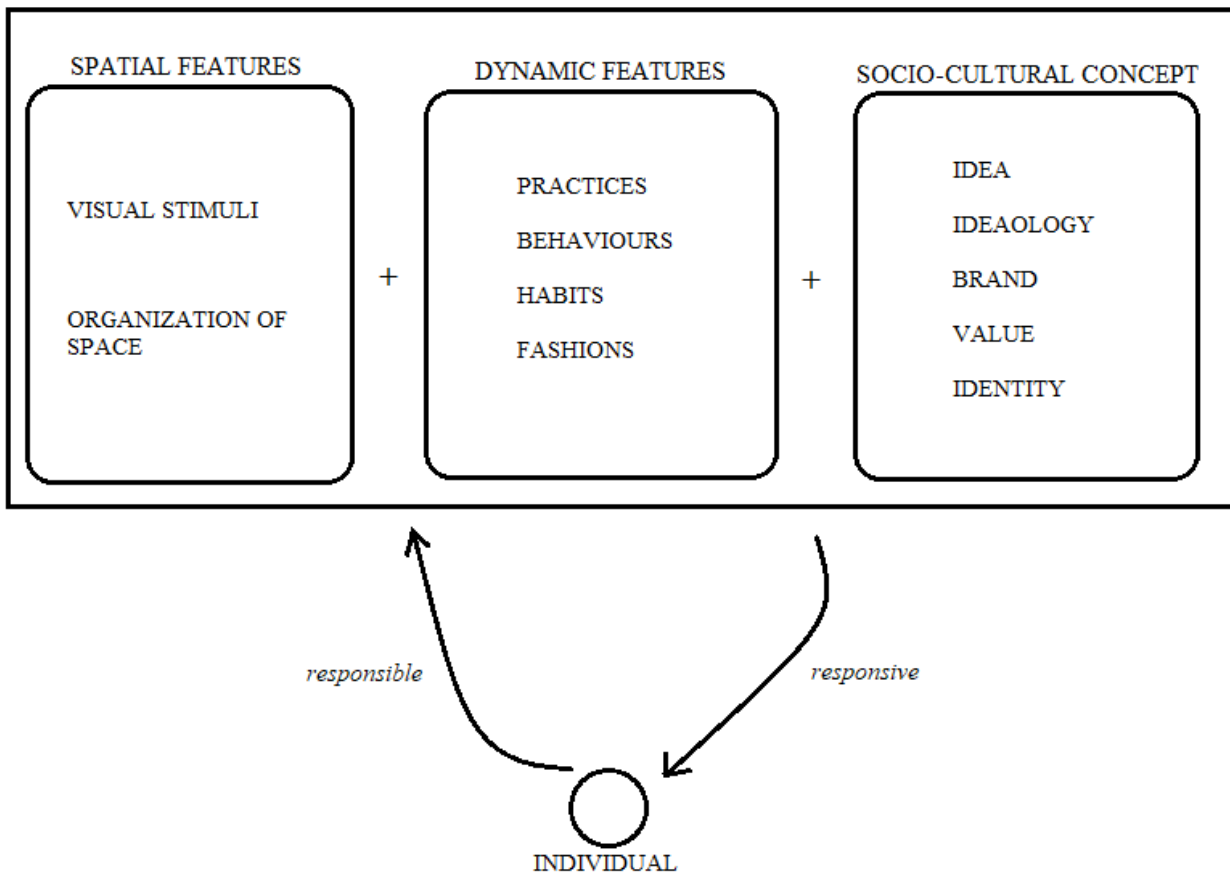
2. *The city as a symbolic system (personal elaboration).*

Summing up, place is composed by a system of perceivable signs that convey meaning. Signs are embedded in the physical reality surrounding the perceiver. Place is an open book of signs constantly telling stories to its dwellers, who, in turn, have an active role in determining this intricacy of symbols through their actions, choices and views. As a consequence, those dwellers identifiable as cultural entrepreneurs will be undeniably *responsible* for place determination and, if sensitive enough to the surrounding, *responsive* to it.

2.1.3 - The city as a local economy

The last dimension constitutive of place is the economic one. This dimension results particularly emblematic, as it could be easily associated to the two previous ones. The nature of a marketplace, in fact, involves necessarily social interactions (deals) and meaningful signs (price) in order to exist. Nevertheless, the framing of place from an economics point of view offers its own peculiarities and logics, which cannot be provided by the other epistemological outlines.

The basic idea of marketplace represents the grounding floor for every economic consideration. The principal generally accepted definition says that a marketplace is:

"An actual or nominal place where forces of demand and supply operate, and where buyers and sellers interact (directly or through intermediaries) to trade goods, services, or contracts or instruments, for money or barter. Markets include mechanisms or means for (1) determining price of the traded item, (2) communicating the price information, (3) facilitating deals and transactions, and (4) effecting distribution. The market for a particular item is made up of existing and potential customers who need it and have the ability and willingness to pay for it." (BusinessDictionary.com)

In this vision, the place Venice would be composed as follows. On one side, buyers (composed by the several communities constituting the city) are willing to buy certain products at a certain price according to certain preferences. On the other side, sellers of specific goods, services or experiences are willing to sell their cultural products. The sellers taken into account in this research are cultural entrepreneurs; henceforth, the distinct marketplace under our lenses is a cultural/creative one, where very specific sets of values determine the nature of the product, its price and the way it is communicated and distributed. In a cultural market, creative industries (and entrepreneurs) provide products with a symbolic, rather than functional, value, making this field particularly sensitive to risk and uncertainty since nobody knows how the buyers side will respond. On the other hand, this industry is knowledge-based, meaning that the success of a firm depends on a complexity of information about consumers' behaviour and tastes, production knowledge and creative labour supply. Therefore, it is not rare to notice in this industry the tendency of clustering. By locating in the same area, in fact, firms might enjoy a series of knowledge spillovers among each other, which foster development and a more efficient management of the assets (Cowen, 2011). A cluster of creative industries might generate a real business ecosystem (Nambisan & Baron, 2012), meaning a group of interacting (cultural) organizations that prompt innovation and that cooperate sharing knowledge, technology, skills and common goals.

During its history, Venice was a centre of cultural production, thus it is not surprising to see nowadays the clustering of several creative industries. Nonetheless, the claimed "death of Venice" originates from the hard conditions for these industries to survive and form a sustainable creative environment/ecosystem. The principal creative firm active in Venice's cultural market is the renowned Biennale, a cultural institution that organizes yearly art, architecture, cinema, theatre, dance and music manifestations, boasting a worldwide scope and an excellent global reputation. Besides several museums and cultural institutions present in the city as a result of its historical tradition, some other entrepreneurial cultural entities established in Venice, but the overall picture

seems far from representing a sustainable cultural hub. The Biennale holds a strong monopoly in the cultural offer and attractiveness, together with few other highbrow institutions, such as big museums, theatres or galleries. A part of them, very few small-scale cultural entities struggle to survive in such an oligopolistic market, suggesting high entry barriers and an understandable difficulty in establishing a proper entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Several scholars attempted to define the concept of entrepreneurial ecosystem under different aspects, but two authors in particular managed to capture the multidimensionality of it. Stam and Spiegel (2016) describe entrepreneurial ecosystem as "a set of interdependent actors and factors coordinated in such a way that they enable productive entrepreneurship within a particular territory" (p. 1). From this statement, two main conclusions can be made. Firstly, the notion of productive entrepreneurship entails a conception of entrepreneurs not simply as "bosses of themselves" but as active seekers of growth and innovation. Secondly, an entrepreneurial ecosystem does not correspond to a mere group of entrepreneurs in the same area, but to a series of interdependent actors and factors, which render such ecosystem sensitive to the context, thus to the internal and external economic, societal and cultural dynamics. This connotation recalls the pairing place-dwellers, for entrepreneurs do not stand alone but interact with the environment and are influenced by it. Stam and Spiegel (2016) group the main determinants of an ecosystem into two categories: framework conditions and systemic conditions. The former represent those social and physical factors that may encourage or discourage interaction among the various actors, and they consist in: formal and informal institutions; culture, physical infrastructure; level of demand. The latter are the staple elements that trigger a virtuous entrepreneurship: networks (among entrepreneurs, professionals and institutions); knowledge (resulting from interactions); talent (skilled professionals); leadership (one or more entrepreneurs manifestly taking the lead); finance (coming from investors with a long-term vision) and intermediaries and supporters (gatekeepers allowing a smooth interaction among the different parties). All the above mentioned conditions foster entrepreneurial activity, which in turn yields some kind of added value to the social, cultural and economic environment where it is embedded (Stam & Spiegel, 2016). The outcomes of the present research will shed more light on, among the other things, whether the local entrepreneurial ecosystem is robust enough and on which conditions are respected.

Considering the city of Venice as a marketplace entails the assumption of the presence of specific assets – supplies, labour force, creativity, infrastructures, and so on. Rantisi & Leslie (2009) describe how the pricing system of the place's assets influences the entrepreneurs' performance as competitors in the market. Concerning the real estate aspect, for instance, low rents

may result in low entry barriers for new comers, making entrepreneurs more willing to take risks when establishing a new business. Furthermore, low rents may mean also more money to invest in content development and experimentation, a crucial element especially for the creative industries. Venice is known for presenting highly priced houses and expensive means of transportation (by water and by foot), which raise also the price of the transported goods. These conditions may hinder the life of an entrepreneurial activity, even though in the cultural sector financial price does not necessarily represent the most incisive factor. Some entrepreneurs may indeed opt for a lower financial standard and commit in the creative or cultural aspect of their activity. When passion and cultural commitment prevail on the expectation of high profit, entrepreneurs find more motivation to persist in their pursuit, in spite of an unfavourable market and a consequent condition of poverty. (Oakley, 2017). Thus, the suppliers of the Venetian cultural market could choose for tight financial circumstances and opt for a "voluntary poverty" (Oakley, 2017, p.153) for the sake of the cultural activity itself. Lastly, it becomes questionable whether a cultural market will ever be in an equilibrium, for the very basic assumption of the centrality of profit is lacking – or, at least, downsized. In fact, it is assumable that in order to make cultural products accessible to a wider pool of cultural consumers, cultural producers may renounce to personal gain (which might lead to unsustainability and, eventually, to stop the cultural production). Vice versa, if cultural producers opted for a higher profit, their products would be less accessible to disfavoured cultural consumers. In both cases, the final result would be a shortage of supply and therefore a market failure.

For this reason, the role of the local government happens to be extremely crucial, as it could provide the necessary financial support to entrepreneurs in need. Social welfare usually intervenes in case of market failure, and relies on four main considerations (Blaug, 2011). Firstly, the assumption that producing or consuming culture yields positive externalities in the whole society. Second, the tendency for cultural goods to be public goods, for whom consumers are usually not willing to pay a (high) price. Third, the fact that cultural consumption often results in being unequal, since only culturally and economically privileged people have easy access to it. Four, the belief that culture deserves support as an inherently worthy element of social life. The validity of these considerations is not to be taken for granted, and the discussion of whether, why and how to support culture is still raging. However, the theory gives to governments the power (or the responsibility) of maintaining the market more efficient, so that its main players (the market's dwellers) would all be better off.
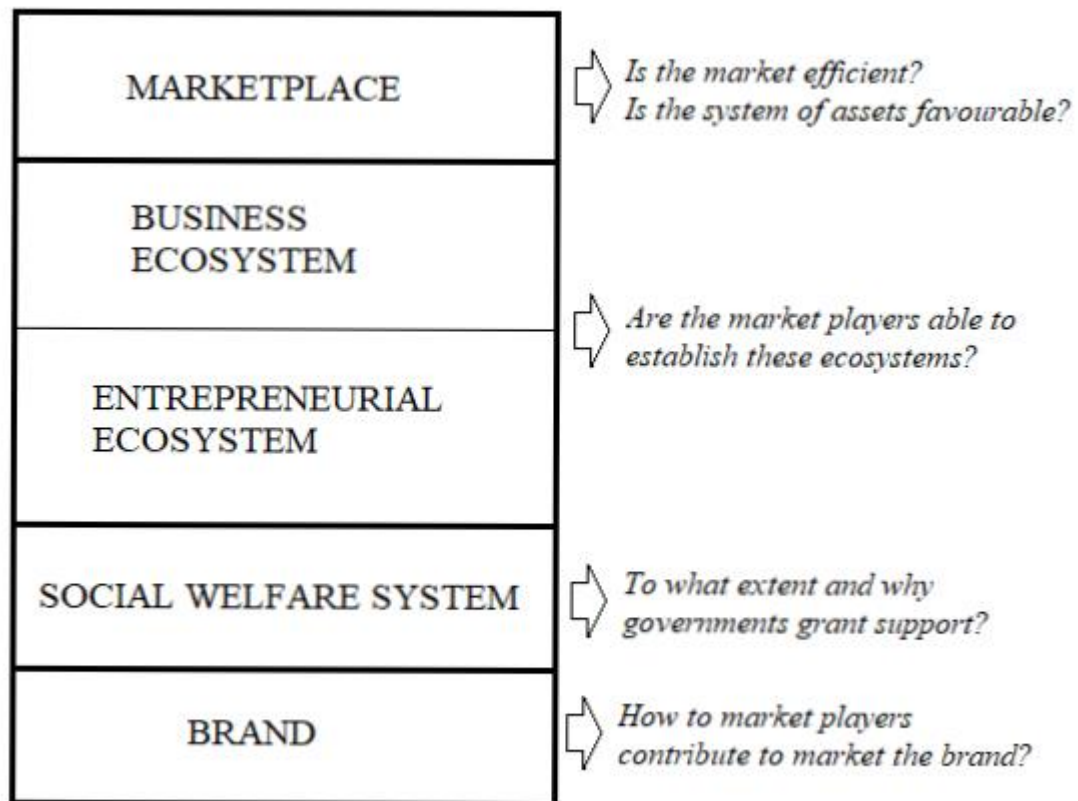
3. *The city as a local economy (personal elaboration).*

In conclusion, the city as a local economy may coincide to three principal realities. First, as an aggregate of valuable goods and services embedded in a market, where the logics of supply and demand stir the actions of producers and consumers. Second, as a system of professional opportunities and career developments. Lastly, the city could be a marketable good itself (as Lange already explained, 2008), holding a specific value, a brand and targeted consumers.

2.1.4 - Multidimensionality

The abovementioned theories about place are to be considered as complementary, rather than mutually excludable, with all the dimensions coexisting with and influencing one another. Rantisi & Leslie (2010) allude to how the semiotic dimension affect the economic one by describing the "industry shaping power of spatiality" (p. 2828). In fact, urban features such as inner city size, building styles or historical landmarks can affect the way a creative firm develops its product or define its identity. The ways in which each dimension interacts with each other can be numerous, and they will be investigated more in depth through the interviews of the Venetian cultural entrepreneurs.

2.2 - Cultural Entrepreneurs

It is time now to focus on the other aspect of the pairing "place-dwellers". So far, an exploration of the concept of place has been dedicated, drawing from different fields of research, with the result of an ultimate multidimensional interpretation of it. In this section, the analysis of different theories will give an impression of the main characteristics of what we consider as cultural entrepreneurs, the targeted group of dwellers of this research.

Lately, many attempts to define cultural entrepreneurship have filled the columns of many journals, for the relevance of this concept appeared clear to many economists, sociologists and beyond. Among the several definitions of cultural entrepreneur, Scott (2012) provides a particularly suitable one. According to him, a cultural entrepreneur creates new cultural products and is oriented towards accessing new opportunities through the identification of innovative ways. A cultural entrepreneur, thus, produces culture innovatively, but his or her creativity is not limited to the production itself; in fact, also the approach towards the surrounding environment is creative, and allows the entrepreneur to identify and exploit opportunities. Nevertheless, even if the environment represents a source of opportunities, it is also true that many risks and uncertainties await within it. Cultural entrepreneurs are often active in turbulent environments (Peterson & Berger, 1971) characterized by unpredictable and ever-evolving dynamics, which may thwart entrepreneurship itself. However, cultural entrepreneurs are said to possess determined behavioural and psychological features that help them cope with such turbulence. Nambisan and Baron (2013) list three self-regulatory resources, namely self-control, grit and metacognition, as known as discipline, determination and self-awareness. Frese and Gielnik (2014) add further cognitive factors, such as knowledge (the ability of interpreting and comprehending new information), practical intelligence (the ability to effectively apply knowledge into action), cognitive bias (mental overconfidence, sometimes misleading but often fuelling), passion and motivation (sources of constant proactivity and energy). All these factors depict cultural entrepreneurs as particularly alert to the environment where they are active, aware of themselves and of the other stakeholders. This resourcefulness is often converted into the entrepreneurs' ability of converting different forms of capitals to their own advantage (Scott, 2012), for example by overcoming a lack of finances investing in fruitful social networks or building a successful reputation. Furthermore, resourcefulness makes cultural entrepreneurs quite independent individuals, usually self-employed (Oakley, 2017) or free-lancers (Scott, 2012), autonomous yet open to contacts and exchanges.

The framing of cultural entrepreneurs cannot leave out the consideration of what is being *produced*. Without neglecting the relevance of the various typologies of cultural products present in the Venetian market, the sample of the present research is focused on event-maker entrepreneurs, a category that clearly evokes the notion of experience goods. At the end of the progression of economic value, after commodities, goods and services, experiences are the most up-to-date valued offerings (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). They represent a more sophisticated output, as they are not tangible, functional or deliverable, but rather they are memorable. Experiences are eventful occurrences that come about in space and time and involve not only the design of the producer but also the participation of consumers. Participation can be active to various degrees, and entails a level of connection to the environment where the experience takes place. Such feature encourages the intertwining between dwellers and place (or consumers and environment), since experiences gather different individuals, make them interact with each other and the space, allow them to attribute meanings to it and, ultimately, constitute a marketable product themselves. Cultural experiences, therefore, seem to be the most appropriate products encouraging the relation between the three dimensions of place and the people dwelling on it. Furthermore, it is not surprising that experience goods are so familiar to cultural entrepreneurs. Experience goods are indeed an innovative and developed way of offering a product, they reflect the consumers' needs and expectations but they also correspond to the cultural entrepreneurs' natural tendency towards innovation and creativity. The bond between experience goods and cultural entrepreneurship seems now tighter than ever.

Since producers and consumers of experience goods present a particular sensitivity to the environment, it is crucial to dedicate some regard to the relevance of the enterprises' *venues*. The spatial location of a cultural enterprise has a weight under various aspects. Firstly, it has a direct consequence towards the organization of the enterprise itself. As Lényi's report (2014) on the architecture of cultural centres explains, the architecture of a site of cultural production affects the cultural production itself, and vice versa. Space is inherently connected to the development of content creation, and it has not to be underestimated. Secondly, venues have a direct impact also on the outside world. The innovative Berlin-based organization named Creative Footprint aims at studying what its title suggests, that is the impact of music venues on the surrounding urban area. For the case of this research, one has to consider venues as a sort of prosthesis of the cultural entrepreneurs themselves, hence the spatial location becomes a manifestation of the cultural enterprise. In the Creative Footprint report published in 2017, they calculate a venue's impact through the analysis of several data organized in three main categories: framework conditions (including administrative and demographic data), content (the nature and frequency of the offered

contents) and space (inner and surrounding space characteristics). They based their strategy on the assumption that venues

> "propel cultural industries to become dynamic sectors of the urban economy, in turn acting as incubators for artistic expression and safe spaces for challenging ideas. But governing bodies, developers and decision-makers often undervalue the crucial role that creative space plays in shaping a city's identity." (Creative Footprint report, 2017, p. 2)

This account portrays venues as fostering social interaction, meaning creation and economic development; in other words, venues (and the entrepreneurs behind them) have a direct connection with the three dimensions of place.

2.2.3 - Cultural entrepreneurs in the urban environment

A cultural entrepreneur presents a series of characteristics that make him or her particularly suitable to a city place. Lange (2008) highlights the intrinsic connection between "culturepreneurs" and the urban environment by stating that

> "Culturepreneur describes an urban protagonist who possesses the ability to mediate between and interpret the areas of culture and service provision. He or she may be characterized as a creative entrepreneur, someone who […] closes gaps in the urban landscape, with new social, entrepreneurial and socio-spatial practices." (p. 539)

A city offers to cultural entrepreneurs the chance to exploit and in the same time develop a dynamic social network, fruitful exchanges of symbolic capitals and business opportunities, which are all crucial elements for cultural production. Florida (2002) considers creatives as carriers of innovation, attractors of newcomers and shapers of the new upcoming labour force. So if on the one hand the urban environment fosters the entrepreneurs' activity, also the city benefits from the entrepreneurs' presence. Florida (2002) claims that cities should attract creatives in order to reach high levels of sustainable growth, and the best way to do so is investing in specific characteristics. In particular, big cities boasting a diverse and friendly social fabric, a feeling of authenticity and a great offer of cultural, leisure and nightlife experiences will be the leading ones in attracting the creatives. Such features correspond to an overall quality of life, which entices creatives and supports their talent by offering the adequate social, semiotic and economic conditions (Rantisi & Leslie, 2009). However, quality of life is not enough to grant the presence of an effective creative class, for the main propeller of creativity corresponds to what Kagan & Hahn identify as

emergence (2011, p. 21). This term refers to the circumstance where a system does not suffice or lacks of something, inducing people to develop new paths, creatively and innovatively. In this respect, Venice could be regarded as a big fallacious system with a high degree of emergence with several factors hindering its solidity but, assumedly, triggering creativity. Kagan & Hahn (2011) criticize again Florida when they state that the model of the Creative City entails also some aspects that cause an unsustainable growth of the urban environment, such as gentrification, segregation, exclusion and displacement. Nevertheless, creatives surely tend to be attracted by and contribute to shape a peculiar working environment, characterized by informal ways of being connected to each other (Kagan & Hahn, 2011). Informal networks, in fact, establish cultural scenes as a reaction to the environment's emergences and that simultaneously contribute to enhance the local quality of life and authenticity. Differently, planned top-down interventions often fail at reacting to emergences in the best manner, missing the establishment of truly thriving realities of creativity and innovation.

The abovementioned scholars referred to an interrelation between cultural entrepreneurs and the city as a place, a condition that here is defined as *mutual support*. Ultimately, the activation of the duo place-dwellers (i.e. city-cultural entrepreneurs) results into what can be considered as a mutually supportive landscape of creativity. Russo and Sans (2009) outline a landscape of creativity as the consequence of meaningful interactions among city users freely expressing themselves, who give birth to practices of creative production of consumption in a specific space. Cultural entrepreneurs have a role as they provide hardware elements (the actual venues where cultural production and consumption happen) and software elements, that is "the fluid supply of intangible experiences such as events, activities, narrations and anything else concerning creative expression and the symbolic representation of place" (Russo & Sans, 2009, p.162). These practices can be ruled in a formal or informal manner, but in either way the end result is a cohesive interrelation between place and its dwellers through all the constituent dimensions.

2.3 - Conclusion

A broad theoretical argumentation has shown the need for an expanded epistemological discussion over the concept of place and its dwellers, meant as a single and organic entity. A holistic approach depicted place according to three distinct, yet complementary, spheres, namely as a network of social interactions, as a symbolic system and as a local economy. The case study of Venice can be observed through these lenses, and its peculiarly extreme

features make it an efficient example to investigate the relationship between space and dwellers. The last part of the theoretical dissertation indulged on the figure of the cultural entrepreneur and his embeddedness within the urban environment.

The outcomes of this research are expected to yield particularly extreme results, due to the exceptional nature of the case. In particular, it is expected to identify a series of factors that benefit or hinder cultural entrepreneurship and urban development, by recognising the causes of emergence that characterise the object of study. The semiotic approach will constitute a particularly relevant part, as the city of Venice possesses an utmost symbolic baggage that is hard to neglect, and it may have a great impact on the other two approaches. Finally, although the presence of the Biennale is undoubtedly prominent and influential, the small enterprises that constitute the sample of this study are likely to have a greater affecting role than one could expect.

3 - Methodology

3.1 - Research design

This research intends to study to what extent the bound between the place Venice and the dwellers cultural entrepreneurs is solid and results into a mutual support. The goal is to explore the entrepreneurs' perception of this relationship through their experiences as professionals and inhabitants in Venice, but also their intention to maintain (if existent) such bond. Therefore, the research question that leads the analysis corresponds to: *how do local cultural entrepreneurs contribute to establish a mutually supportive relationship with Venice?*

The research will be brought about with a qualitative method, focusing on the complex "double-faced" case study of Venice and its dwellers. The analysed case, in fact, is not limited to the place of Venice or the cultural entrepreneurs active in it, but on the complementary coexistence of both sides. This epistemological frame of place-dwellers makes the case of this research particularly original, and raises the urge of an ideographic approach, with the aim of studying the peculiar features of the case under our lenses. The choice for a qualitative method is due to the unique and ungeneralizable nature of the case study. An inductive approach relies on a theoretical frame used to identify the main concepts to be used throughout the observation; however, no theoretical hypothesis has been implied a priori, dedicating the formation of new theories only a posteriori. This is due to the peculiarity of the case, which requires an ad hoc and in depth observation, rather than the application of pre-existing theories.

3.2 - Data sampling

The sample includes in total six respondents, among which four are the managers (or individuals holding a similar role) of four different cultural enterprises settled in Venice, one is the former manager of a now-ceased cultural enterprise settled in Venice, and a last one represents an expert of the field who enhanced the reliability of the sample. Excluding the last interviewee, the respondents are cultural entrepreneurs who used to or currently locate their enterprise in one or more fixed or nomadic location(s) in Venice, exhibiting local cultural production or actively creating cultural offer, which is not mainly tourists-oriented. This last feature is to be observed in the enterprise's programming and practices, rather than in official mission statements or the like. The enterprise has to be unbound to pre-existing cultural institutions, and its offer has to be related to events of different kinds. Such criteria provide a sample with the following main features: entrepreneurs who in the last ten years located their activity in or moved away (by purpose or by necessity) from Venice; the eventful nature of the enterprise corresponds to a higher degree of correlation with the local environment, as a cultural event entails a deeper involvement with the surrounding social and spatial dimensions; the presence of one or more physical venues related to the actual enterprise is an additional criterion highlighting the connection with and the presence in the local environment. The presence of both entrepreneurs who stayed and entrepreneurs who left provides a less biased observation of the reality of Venice. Only the historic centre of Venice, with its six Sestieri, will be under our lenses, as it represents the most emblematic social, cultural, economic and environmental reality of the Venetian municipality. Hence, the mainland area of Venice, including the main clusters of Mestre and Marghera, and the other islands of the lagoon will not be included in the observation, although considered influential to the overall condition of the whole municipality. The limited number of event-maker cultural enterprises in Venice did not allow having a big sample. Originally, few other potential respondents were included in the sample, but eventually they have not been included in it. This is due the difficulty of contacting them, time constraints and geographical limitations. However, the final sample can be said to be representative enough of the city, since the included respondents represent themselves a great percentage of the actual Venetian cultural entrepreneurs as defined in this paper. Most of the interviewees have been selected thanks to a personal knowledge of the Venetian scene, some others as a result of snowball effect.

4. Location of the enterprises in Venice (personal elaboration)

Respondent number	Enterprise	Role	Gender	How	Where	When	Duration
Respondent 1	Awai	Cofounder	m	By person	Venue	24/04/2018	1.30
Respondent 2	Libreria Marcopolo	Co-manager	m	By person	Venue	26/04/2018	1.25
Respondent 3	Venice Open Stage (VOS)	Vice president	m	By person	Café	27/04/2018	1.12
Respondent 4	Teatro Fondamenta Nuove (TFN)	Former director	m	written	-	7/05/2018	-
Respondent 5	About	Co-manager	f	skype	-	12/05/2018	1.27
Respondent 6	Biennale	Marketing and sponsoring director	m	skype	-	30/05/2018	1.10

*For a more detailed description of the enterprises, see Appendix 1

3.3 - Data collection

Some of the interviews have been held in an informal atmosphere, preferably the very same venue of the enterprise, to preserve the ease and the authenticity of the interaction. Due to geographical distance, two interviews were held via a Skype call, and one in a written format. In every case, the language of communication was Italian. The time of data collection spans from the 24th April to the 30th May 2018, and the average length corresponds to one hour and twenty minutes.

The respondents have been questioned through semi-structured interviews with the purpose of determining how they contribute to establish a mutually supportive relationship with Venice. The bound between place and the cultural entrepreneurs who dwell it will be observed by addressing the three constituent features of place as a local economy, as a symbolic system and as a network of social interactions. For each of these three dimensions, specific questions investigated whether and how the cultural entrepreneurs witness a support from Venice and whether and how the cultural entrepreneurs themselves support the city. The activity of the entrepreneurs could be observed also through the nature of the events promoted by their enterprises and the impact (creative footprint) on the surroundings of their physical venues. The structure of the interviews was not rigid, but allowed a reasonable adjustment of the questions according to the respondents (for a more detailed overview of the interviews structure, see appendix 2).

3.4 - Data analysis

Every interview was recorded with the respondents' consent, and then transcribed with the same spoken language (Italian). Any further analysis and elaboration was done in English. The data analysis relied on a coding system implemented with no digital support, but rather by hand, allowing a more fluid and elastic scrutiny and breakdown of all the relevant information (see appendix 3). The analysis indulged on each respondent as sorts of cases within the case, which present different ways of establishing a mutual support with the city. After scrutinizing each reality, some patterns, similarities and conclusions have been made.

3.5 - Limitations

In spite of the representativeness of the sample, the number of respondents could have been more robust, allowing an even more in depth observation. However, a further expansion of the sample could not be carried out. Concerning the trustworthiness of the research, the validity of the observation is granted by a sample considered representative of the local population of cultural entrepreneurs currently present in Venice. A credible use of the proper methodology grants an objective observation of the case, and a final triangulation was possible thanks to the inclusion in the sample of an expert in the field, who represented a neutral third party. Lastly, one could critique the very nature of the whole research, as it aims at the observation of a unique case study that can be hardly compared to other realities. Nevertheless, the goal of a qualitative study is not generalization, but rather an in depth observation. The case of Venice was in need of a specific analysis, but it could also serve as a starting point for further studies about similar urban realities around the globe.

4 - Results

In this section, the empirical data from the interviews will be analysed and discussed, with the aim of identifying specific patterns, similarities or differences among all the respondents. The outcome is an in-depth observation of the degree of mutual support perceived by the interviewees, and the concluding part provides suggestions for a further enforcement of the relationship Venice – cultural entrepreneurs. The following chapters are organized according to the three dimensions of place: Venice as a network of social interactions, as a symbolic system and as a local economy.

4.1 - Venice as a network of social interactions

4.1.1 – An overall picture

Venice presents an ambivalent identity, which divides it into an incubator of social relationships on one hand, and a pool of social stagnation on the other. Being it quite a small city, and thanks to the physical conformation of the urban space, the overall network of social interactions maintains a limited size, facilitating contacts among all the components especially within the even smaller cultural network. One of the recurring statements among all the interviews claims that "Venice is like a village", which in fact suggests an easiness for mutual acquaintance and the building of a comprehensive series of contacts. In the cultural scene, this feature results into the presence of many potential opportunities to harness, in terms of professional and artistic projects, acknowledged by the respondents. In confirmation of this vision, the former director of TFN labelled Venice as a "net-city, which yields only to those who trigger a new, virtuous mechanism". Therefore, the utility of such an interconnected network depends on the individual's entrepreneurial ability to harness it.

Nevertheless, three main complications seem to plague the solidity and functionality of Venice's network. Firstly, the weak presence of the government, which fails in providing adequate social services and spaces for social cohesion. Secondly, a discouragement for social gathering, due to political and economic factors. The majority of the respondents considered Venice's nightlife as not particularly thriving and diverse, consisting mainly in the "after-hour" habit, very few venues and a little offer. Four on six respondents denounced the decrease of moments of social gathering, while the president of the association About complained about a lack of non-tourist-oriented activities in the city, besides a threatening erosion of public space by tourist-appealing commercial activities. Thirdly, an overall condition of inertia characterizes the city. The vice president of VOS claims that "Venice sits back, there is no propulsive power […] the city believes it does not need to create or to support who creates". Apparently, this has a validation in the cultural community, as all the interviewees describe the difficulty of establishing solid relationships among cultural realities, in the form of, for instance, shared timetabling, collaborations and so on. Moreover, due to the town-vibe of the city, Venice is described by the respondents as holding a suspicious attitude, with

elderly and conservative people who have hard times in getting familiar with, accept and understand new cultural activities. The consequence of these complications is two-sided. On the one hand, local cultural entrepreneurs are witnessing an exodus of inhabitants (also closely related to the respondents), which in turn leads to depopulation and masses commuting. On the other hand, as the cofounder of Awai states, the absence of the governmental institutions in social affairs and the lack of social gathering pushes small groups of friends or colleagues to combine forces and react by creating those social opportunities that the city is failing in offering (which is exactly the reason why Awai itself was born).

The interviewed cultural entrepreneurs took different decisions as a reaction to the condition of the city's network of interactions. Firstly, most of these enterprises contribute to the creation of open spaces freely accessible to all. Awai represents a successful example of returning to the society a former public space such as an old square now enclosed between a cluster of buildings and for a long time used only as a storage of building materials. Thanks to the proactivity of the entrepreneurs, this space, although formally part of the association, is open to the public all the day long, and whoever is willing can carry on different activities in it, such as taking care of the common vegetable garden or drinking a glass of wine. About opens its doors to the public as well, through open markets or study areas, and Venice Open Stage takes place directly in the streets, thus it possesses an inherent openness to the public.

Secondly, most of the interviewees declared their willingness to enforce the local communities. The former director of TFN described the theatre as a "network-theatre par excellence", with many collaborations and coproductions. The most representative local-oriented enterprise is certainly About, whose intent is "the development of a series of projects […] managing to involve other individuals resulting in other smaller communities, which are able to manage themselves within our offer" (respondent 5). Among other projects, About succeeded in connecting a series of local producers and growers, who now organize regularly a market with their products within About's venue semi-independently. More indirectly, VOS has also a role in connecting different parts of the city, since it is deeply embedded in the neighbourhood but also strongly related to the IUAV university where it originated. The vice president states that its impact is "creating a communication channel between the university and the neighbourhood's inhabitants, as until now the university was perceived as something arrived out of the blue […] there has never been a dialogue between university and neighbourhood […] but the festival was the first contact between them, a tool for dialogue". However, being the festival active only few days in a year, the dialogue it triggers ceases to exist at the end of the event.

Third, besides a strong focus on the relationships among the inner dwellers, a consistent internationality seems to be encouraged by all respondents. Despite the "village vibe" of the city, the cultural entrepreneurs contribute to give Venice a more open and international attitude, through a specific programming with international artists and collaborations. VOS itself consists in an international festival of universities, allowing a greater openness and sharing of skills among their students.

Fourth, great part of the enterprises provides to the city more opportunities for social gathering and leisure time. About, Awai, VOS and TFN all gave their part in enriching Venice's poor nightlife, with a range of different kinds of evening events that inherently hold "a powerful social impact" (respondent 4).

Lastly, some interviewees considered culture itself as a way of social cohesion. For instance, TFN believes that "the performing arts have always encouraged the exchange; their languages require attention and predisposition towards the new" (respondent 4), whereas About states that they "made people meet through art and music".

The one exception corresponds to the Libreria Marcopolo, which declared to be "welcoming but without satisfying everyone". The different attitude of this enterprise relates also to its different nature, if compared to the other respondents. Marcopolo is a for-profit enterprise, thus its goals diverge from the social commitment of some of the other cultural entrepreneurs of the sample. However, its social impact is not irrelevant, since it also undertakes occasional collaborations with local cultural organizations.

4.1.2 – The network

The abovementioned approaches to strengthen Venice as a network of social interactions (namely openness to the public, local orientation, international orientation, nightlife enrichment and culture as a social tool) are made possible by the establishment of an actual network of relationships among the different communities that constitute Venice. The main communities expected to compose the city were the inhabitants, students, tourists, working categories and the political institutions. The interviewees confirmed the relationship with these categories, but they sometimes provided a further sub-categorization of each community.

First of all, students constitute the principal community linked to all the enterprises of the sample. Each interviewee, in fact, recognized a certain degree of engagement with this category, since students are among the main cultural consumers but also the active propelling minds behind

some of the cultural enterprises in the city. Both VOS and About originated indeed from small groups of students who had met each other at university.

The second most relevant community is the one of the working categories. The respondents reported about occasions of collaborations with other Venetian cultural realities, either big cultural institutions such as museums or the Biennale, or smaller cultural enterprises - included collaborations among the very same members of the sample. Such network of professional collaborations, however, seems to be due to the limited number of local cultural realities, rather than a proper professional network. One of the managers of Marcopolo clarifies in fact that "we work intermittently with who involves us or we involve intermittently someone else", suggesting a low degree of planned and programmed interactions. Nonetheless, some of the respondents possess a higher degree of collaboration. Awai and About in particular present a stronger "social attitude" that brings them close to each other, to the extent that they base their own survival on a series of mutual favours and the "sharing of production means" (respondent 5). This bond stems from a network of personal acquaintances and friendships and the sharing of the same cultural and, most importantly, political values. A sort of political activism lays in the background of many Venetian cultural enterprises. The manager of About was the only one who manifested a clear political context related to the enterprise, considering the fact that her cultural enterprise was born from a group of students who had occupied a university building few years before. However, the same interviewee stated that many of the other members of the sample are part of a sort of political movement that aims at the safeguard of the city with a social connotation. Interestingly enough, the enterprises that are more politically involved in this sense are also the ones that tend more towards a sharing and exchanging approach. This kind of informal relationships can be established also with other working categories, for example suppliers. Informal relationships can result in discounts for specific products useful for the enterprise's activities, or in even greater offerings, like VOS explains: "there are some ladies who, for example, cook for us when we set the shows, sometimes it can happen that we go to their place and they offer us a meal. This kind of collaborations exist". Finally, it is worth mentioning the relationship that many enterprises established with local universities (which is intended here as a working category). Being many entrepreneurs former university students, the bond between them and the educational establishment still exists through economic support, sharing of facilities or possibility of internship within the cultural enterprise.

The cultural entrepreneurs of the sample claimed also quite a certain engagement with the local inhabitants, be they somehow supporters of the enterprises (as the cooking women mentioned before) or simply part of the cultural consumers. Furthermore, the respondents described a rather

diverse range of local inhabitants who take part to their activities, ranging from children with their mothers to retired people and even nuns.

Tourists do not recur very often among the entrepreneur's social network, yet they cannot be completely absent, especially in an overly touristic city like Venice. Most of the respondents showed a sort of relief in claiming their distance from the masses of tourists. Awai and Marcopolo listed regular tourists among their usual buyers (and in fact their main products are commonly tourists-friendly, as craft art and books), whereas TFN and About described only specific kinds of tourists, respectively the "cultured and curious ones" and the "ones who travel with a certain awareness, settle in a place and try to understand its dynamics". The focus on the local dimension often excludes the huge touristic flows from the cultural enterprises' scope of action, and the international vocation makes them still select specific kinds of tourists, namely only the ones who could fit the entrepreneurs' vision.

Lastly, it seems there is a weak relationship between the local political institutions and the cultural entrepreneurs of the sample. VOS is the cultural enterprise with the higher degree of engagement with the political institutions, namely the municipality and other side offices. In this case, political institutions provide support by granting the usage for free of some services, such as the occupation of public space or the free use of electricity. According to VOS, this happens because political institutions have "an interest in the project, in this way they can be part of an international project that has been in Venice for six years and is having more and more recognition with strong partners". In many other cases, however, there is a mutual indifference, which limits the other cultural enterprises to relate with the institutions only for mere bureaucratic affairs. Moreover, TFN and About specify that the change of governments corresponds also to a change of political visions of the values of culture, and a switch of focus towards the mainland of the municipality, where the majority of the voters reside. TFN is the biggest emblem: the former director explains that the enterprise started "because the institutions acknowledged in the activity a potential for the community"; however, with the recent change of government (and political party), the local political institutions stopped supporting culture at the previous degree, so that TFN had to cease its activity.

4.2 - Venice as a symbolic system

4.2.1 – The semiotic features of Venice

All the respondents succeeded in depicting the city of Venice as a symbolic system, through the three dimensions of spatial features, dynamic features and socio-cultural concept. Overall, Venice

was described as a beautiful city, with the spatial elements of water and the streets as the most influential visual components. From the entrepreneurs' point of view, the city presents some logistic problematics, especially transportation wise, and a general difficulty in providing sufficient and functional enough venues suitable for a cultural organization: "the spaces in Venice are small, narrow, and anguishing. But you get used to it" (respondent 1).

Venice's spatial features have a direct impact on the dynamic features of the city. Most of the respondents acknowledged the centrality of the street element, which shapes the way individuals move around the city and relate to each other. The manager of About explains that "Venice has the great plus of the fact that people walk always down the street and they meet each other even if they do not want to. In Venice, you go out and you meet someone, even without planning. This is a very enriching thing, because the very architecture of the city encourages the encounter between people". Such feature suits another prominent habit, the one of drinking in companionship, especially in the streets. Conviviality is a central aspect in the dwellers' leisure time, to the extent that "you need to have food and drinks at your events, otherwise people do not come, especially in Venice!" (respondent 1). Furthermore, Venice's monotony and inertia addressed by the respondents referring to the city as a social network, reflect also on the semiotic dimension. Firstly, some interviewees denounced the fact that the live music scene in Venice is sometimes monotonous, for the logistic limitations of the city allow very few venues and discourage performers from outside to travel around the city with their tools and instruments – thus resulting in a poor offer. Secondly and more generally, the Venetian way of life is described as slow and phlegmatic, which reflects the slowness of the transportation means of the city. As a result, a lethargic attitude characterizes Venice's dwellers and their reaction to the cultural enterprises, so that "people, before interacting with the spaces, before interacting with realities that are very different from what they are used to, need time, a lot of communication, many informative points" (respondent 1). An aversion to change of habits, thus, tends to make people stick to the already existing behavioural and cultural habits, rather than curious to newness. Finally, it is worth mentioning that some respondents, especially the cofounder of Awai, reported a gradual loss of a traditional workforce in craft activities. Therefore, nowadays Venice does not hold anymore that baggage of genius loci and activities that used to determine the city's habits.

This leads us to reflect on Venice as a socio-cultural concept. The whole issue is clearly summarized by the words of the vice president of VOS, who states: "Venice acts as a city of great culture […] but it is losing identity because it is not able to progress". The lack of progress and the consequent loss of identity are caused by a series of threats described by the respondents. To begin

with, the contemporary literature and rhetoric depict Venice with a "decadent" (respondent 2) and "deadly" (respondent 5) connotation, hence the city lives within an aura that recalls the past but never hints at the future. Furthermore, all the respondents touched upon an issue that has been explained particularly sharply by the former director of TFN as a "bipolar vision" of the city, characterized by "a total touristic exploitation on the one hand, and a nostalgic conservatism on the other". This dichotomy nurtures the climactic process of loss of identity and stagnation that afflicts Venice, triggering a vicious circle that is pushing things even more to the extremes. In addition, the bipolarity of the city is at odds with what many respondents consider the true calling of Venice, namely an "international and cultural" (respondent 4) one. Nonetheless, the international and cultural value of the city seems to be acknowledged only by the representatives of the cultural sector; different categories of dwellers attribute to the city different values and do not consider Venice as an abstract concept of international cultural hub, but as something rather close to the dichotomy mentioned above.

4.2.2 - Cultural entrepreneurs' responsiveness

The respondents of the sample resulted generally quite responsive to the visual stimuli of Venice. They described them "constant", "fundamental" (respondent 4) and with an overall "positive impact" (respondent 5). The only notable exception comes from the manager of Marcopolo, who states that Venice's visual stimuli "are there, but lay in the background", since he was born and raised in the lagoon city. However, the fact that also the former director of TFN was born and raised in the city but reported a higher responsiveness to the city's visual stimuli suggests that the degree of responsiveness is determined by the personal sensitiveness and alertness, rather than birth and growth in the city.

Many respondents confirmed a responsiveness to the lack of suitable spaces for their activities, depicting Venice as a sort of hostile ground in this sense. Nevertheless, some interviewees mentioned the favourable location of their venues in the urban area, which appeared to be extremely relevant. Most of the respondents' venues, in fact, are located in the western area of the city (see image 4), where they benefit from a mix of population ranging from tourists to inhabitants, but especially from students – the western Venice is indeed the university district. Since students represent the first category these entrepreneurs engage with, their venues positioning results particularly beneficial. The proximity to the train station and Piazzale Roma (the only spot in the city where buses and cars from the mainland can transit) turns out to be advantageous too: firstly, it avoids logistic issues and long lasting travels around the city; secondly, it positions the venues in a key spot where people continuously enter and leave the city, so that "at the entrance or at the exit, they always pass by to say hi" (respondent 1).

Ultimately, all respondents agreed on the fact that the worldwide recognized value of Venice acts as a guarantee that, not only cultural consumers, but also collaborators of different kinds come to the city. This is of particular importance for those cultural enterprises that aim at establishing relationships also outside the Venetian area. They explained in fact that they have never had troubles with enticing external guests or collaborators to come to Venice and be part of their program.

4.2.3 – Cultural entrepreneurs' responsibility

The outcomes of the interviews depict the respondents as highly responsible of the determination of Venice as a symbolic system. Being they so responsive to the city, they also have a great impact on it. The primary observable intervention from the entrepreneurs' side is urban regeneration. All respondents reported that, thanks to their enterprises, they made the surrounding areas more liveable and under the radar of inattentive dwellers. In this way, they contributed to the livability of Venice. Some entrepreneurs undertook even an actual architectural renovation, as in the case of Awai, that turned a disposal dump into a garden open to the public.

The cultural entrepreneurs are also responsible for the introduction of some new dynamic features to the symbolic system of Venice. They introduced some new habits, like the evening market hosted by About, which takes place in later hours and determines a different rhythm for doing groceries (after all more convenient for those who work during the day). Awai, on the other hand, reinforced an already existing tradition, namely the one of the ancient artisans. These are two examples of how the cultural entrepreneurs of the sample contribute to strengthen or enrich the rhythm of habits of the city. Nevertheless, also the opposite approach is present in the sample. VOS explicitly claimed a willingness to "break a habit and to go against the grain", but in order to reverse some habits that are considered negative. In particular, VOS wants to change the usual habit of thinking and the average mentality of local politicians in order to converge more focus on the citizen and his cultural needs.

The outstanding result, though, is that cultural entrepreneurs are extremely committed in determining Venice as an abstract concept, especially in defence of what has been named as "*venetianity*" (respondent 3). Besides "reaffirming the positive aspect of the Venetian lifestyle within the venue" (respondent 2), such as a relaxed attitude or the conviviality, entrepreneurs intend to subvert the dichotomy tourism/conservatism and to read "positively and proactively" (respondent 5) the contradictions that characterize the city. The final outcome is that cultural entrepreneurs have an active role in offering an unusual, yet authentic, glimpse of Venice's identity, enriching it with the enterprises' values and growing apart from the usual clichés. Ultimately, as the manager of

Marcopolo states, cultural consumers and collaborators "must be happy not only because they come to Venice, but because they come to us".

4.3 - Venice as a local economy

The city of Venice as a local economy is multifaceted and complex, but what clearly stands out from the interviewees' words is that it is not a welcoming filed of action for cultural entrepreneurs.

4.3.1 – The market

Not surprisingly, the Venetian market is saturated with touristic (mainly horeca) businesses. According to the respondents of the sample, this saturation brings some benefits, but the disadvantages undoubtedly prevail. The touristic appeal attracts to the city a huge amount of visitors, which constitute a constant inflow of potential cultural consumers for the cultural entrepreneurs. As a consequence, the respondents did not complain about low levels of demand, since they actually enjoy favourable numbers. However, these high levels of demand are not caused only by the presence of many visitors or by the attractiveness of each cultural supplier, but also by a basic lack of competition within the Venetian cultural sector. The touristic monopoly of the city's market leaves little room to other businesses to take place, causing a poor and not diverse cultural offer, or encouraging the establishment of highly tourists-related cultural businesses that are now numerous but poor in quality. Another crucial threat for cultural entrepreneurs is the high cost of living in Venice: "Venice is expensive at its root, our job is costly, the materials we need are costly, and the required energies are a lot" (respondent 1). High costs for establishing and maintaining a venue, especially for rents and renovation/maintenance, coincide to a more limited freedom in designing a more dynamic cultural program.

4.3.2 – The ecosystem of Venice

The level of collaboration among the various cultural realities in Venice is quite limited, but not entirely absent. The small size of the city and the inner network makes cultural entrepreneurs closer to each other, so that it is hardly impossible to avoid common projects and collaborations. All the respondents, in fact, listed other Venetian cultural realities they worked with, and many of them correspond to the very same members of the sample. However, these collaborations are not consistent in time but rather irregular and not programmed. Nevertheless, a sort of spontaneous cultural cluster raised in the western part of the city, the one that resulted as the most advantageous in terms of closeness to main infrastructures, reach of different kinds of cultural consumers and embeddedness within an authentic students and locals environment. The majority of the cultural enterprises is located there, but the ones that hold a particularly strong communion are Awai and

About. The manager of About explains: "we constitute a network, but we also share production means, so it happened many times that we would make common purchases, like a mixer or a music box, we exchange them and we support each other". And the co-founder of Awai adds: "we created automatically a mutual help with the other associations in the neighbourhood, we got to know each other and found common projects". It is worth noticing that this tendency of sharing means, knowledge and goals is observable especially in those enterprises of the sample with a higher degree of socio-political commitment. A proper business ecosystem, thus, is hard to distinguish, even though a rudimental collaborative connection among different players exists.

As for the entrepreneurial ecosystem, the framework conditions are not particularly favourable, since spaces suitable for cultural activities are not affordable and numerous enough and the socio-cultural environment is not inclined to innovative cultural projects. The systemic factors, on the other hand, seem to be more solid, as the various entrepreneurs are part of an inner network and are keepers of a specific knowledge. In fact, all the cultural entrepreneurs of the sample claim they foster the development of a specialized labour force in their different sectors, and some respondents affirmed that former collaborators have been introduced as professionals in other bigger cultural institutions. Moreover, some enterprises welcome interns from different Italian or foreign universities and are responsible for the conveyance of a specific know-how. However, in spite of the detention of knowledge and expertise by the cultural enterprises, students have a hard time with undertaking a real professional path in Venice: "if you want to find a job in the horeca you are fine, all the rest is missing. We have universities that deal with economics and informatics like Ca' Foscari, but also design subjects at IUAV, but there is no chance to find a job. So people go away" (respondent 5). There is no encouragement for the cultural labour force to settle in Venice, despite some cultural entrepreneurs attempting to share their professional knowledge. The ecosystem is also lacking a real leading figure, an entrepreneur able to take the lead and stimulate the others. A part of the example of About and Awai, most of the entrepreneurs seem to stand "on their own" rather than constituting a mutually stimulating and inspiring connection. Only the Biennale could be seen as a leader in the Venetian cultural scene, for it constitutes a driving force and an attractor of outstanding numbers of visitors. Respondent 6 claims that the presence of the Biennale is a source of inspiration for other cultural enterprises, besides providing a broad pool of cultural consumers who appreciate exploring the Venetian cultural scene outside the Biennale boarders. However, the respondents did not mention the influence of the Biennale. Finally, the ultimate threat that hinders the establishment of a proper entrepreneurial ecosystem is the lack of consistent private or public investments in culture. Respondent 3 claims that "in Venice there are investments only for huge events with masses of tourists" and thus it is hard to find appropriate

sources of finance. A lack of long-term vision on culture causes a lack of entrepreneurship. Sponsor are usually avoided by the respondents, since they opt for methods of self-financing like the organization of events that collect money to reinvest, or project-based crowd-funding. A part of Marcopolo, the only for-profit enterprise, the other respondents stated that running their activity does not yield a conspicuous economic income, so that all of them hold other professional activities in order to sustain themselves. These harsh economic conditions do not allow an easy and smooth management of the enterprises, but the manager of About highlighted the advantages of this situation: "we come from a situation of self-governance [the occupation of the university building, e.n.], and we wanted to keep it like that, because it assures you some margin of freedom, you have no money but you are much more operative and you can do things that, if you had economic responsibility towards third parties, you could not do. So at the moment it is functional for what we do". Once again, a socio-political background happens to be a source of alternative ways of managing a cultural enterprise.

4.3.3 – The welfare system

Surprisingly enough, the current municipal government decided to remove the culture department and to assimilate it to the duties of the mayor himself. As a consequence, the interviewees denounced an even weaker political vision for culture and, most importantly, the lack of a political spokesperson. Hence, there is little acknowledgement of the impact cultural enterprises can have on the city, resulting in little or no support by the institutions.

Moreover, the system of rules of Venice was described as "infernal" (respondent 3) or "like Dante's hell" (respondent 1). All respondents addressed the institutional normative system as confusing, extremely complex and hard to follow, so that looking after all the bureaucratic procedures to obtain licenses and permits becomes a barely impossible challenge. In addition to that, taxes were described as heavy and undistinguished between different professions, which bothers some of the respondents: "between me and the Chinese retailer of fabrics there is no difference taxes wise, and that is not ok, because they are completely different jobs, if you are an artist the state takes you anyway the 25%" (respondent 1).

4.3.4 – The brand of Venice

Lastly, most of the respondents showed a rejection of the idea of being responsible of enhancing the brand of Venice. However, this holds true only for the touristic and mainstream image that the city keeps on boasting, but that goes against the vision that the cultural entrepreneurs have for the city. Marcopolo is proud to say that they contributed to make a reputation of Venice in the books publishing field, which departs from the usual image of Venice as the picturesque destination. All

the other enterprises intend to offer a different image of the city and resonate its cultural relevance. Nevertheless, Venice does not think it needs a development of its brand, to the extent that it is "engulfed by itself, because the administrators never invested in the cultural field in order to improve the brand's quality" (respondent 4).

4.4 - Discussion

In terms of mutual support, the relationship between Venice and the local cultural entrepreneurs is ambivalent. As a network of social interactions, the city happens to be favourable for its convenient limited size, but several obstacles hinder its well-being, like the weak presence of the government, the discouragement for social cohesion and an overarching inertia. As a reaction, though, cultural entrepreneurs undertake several actions to strengthen the network, categorized as: opening of public spaces, enforcement of local communities, international orientation, opportunities for social gathering and culture as a social tool. A social-oriented and political background seems to encourage a specific kind of supportive network of sharing, whereas a more for-profit attitude leads to different strategies. However, the Venetian system is lacking a systematic network, a platform of coordination and joint programming. In addition, despite the small size of the city and the closeness of the various cultural realities, there is little communication between the big cultural institutions and smaller enterprises. As respondent 6 states: "there is more ferment and dialogue among the small enterprises, and less ferment not only between small and big, but also among the big ones".

The interviews confirmed the relevance and influence of the semiotic dimension. The cultural entrepreneurs resulted highly sensitive to the symbolic features of the city, which are partly supportive and partly not. The entrepreneurs suffer from inadequate spaces, an overall slowness of the city and its decadent connotation. On the other hand, they enjoy constant inspiring visual stimuli, a thriving street life and the city's attractive image. Cultural entrepreneurs, in turn, are responsible for the maintenance and the creation of positive habits, plus the attempt of the development of a more innovative image of the city.

Venice as a local economy is not particularly supportive. The assets result extraordinarily expensive, there is a lack of private or public investments in culture, the normative system comes across as "infernal" and there is no proper political spokesperson. Rather than the expected shortage of supply, the interviews reported a more relevant lack of diversity in the cultural offer, strictly related to a lack of competition. There seems to be no clear common vision about Venice as a cultural brand, besides as a touristic one, and the entrepreneurial ecosystem is lacking of some

crucial elements. It requires a more thorough general organization able to include political institutions and cultural producers, and it is in need for a clearer leader in the field.

The ultimate picture offered by the empirical data of this research describes a general lack of a communal strategy for an efficient development of the Venetian cultural sector that could be of benefit for the city. In order to invert this trend, it is necessary to acknowledge more the impact that cultural enterprises and their venues can have on the city, and establish a tighter mutual support. Respondent 6 confirms and explains the vision of all the other members of the sample: "in Venice very little is left. Part of this very little are cultural productions, which today give to Venice and its inhabitants a little bit of jobs, economy, life, the chance to do something and to do it for Venice, which in turn does not provide room anymore to a series of other productions that were once part of the city". This important statement reaffirms what the interviewed entrepreneurs defined as the true vocation of Venice, which is the contemporary hub of culture. Being virtually all the other commercial activities extinguished (a part of the touristic one), culture can represent the key element to grant Venice a sustainable growth. Respondent 6 also supports the fact that cultural enterprises encourage cultural tourism, which in turn yields employment and economy. Moreover, as the only main activity left in the city, culture has a considerable impact on "the expressions of use of time and space, daily life and life styles" (respondent 6). This means that cultural production has the power of determining the rhythms and the habits of the city, and that it could potentially define a specific vibrant and appealing Venetian brand for those creative minds carrier of innovation and development.

One more significant finding is that smaller cultural entrepreneurs struggle to obtain a sufficient degree of consideration and acknowledgment from the institutions. Here is where the Biennale could come into play. The outcomes of the interviews show that the Biennale is not the expected monopolist of the cultural market, but rather a driving leader of the Venetian cultural scene. In fact, the Biennale possesses such a prominent role that it attracts high numbers of cultural consumers to the city, providing a certain degree of consumers also to other cultural suppliers like the entrepreneurs of the sample. Besides inducing demand for a cultural offer, the Biennale also stimulates cultural production, acting as an attractive leading force for other entrepreneurs. After all, without Biennale Venice would be only a display of historical heritage rather than the contemporary arts destination it is now (even if just sketched). The Biennale is also able to determine the rhythms of cultural consumptions, since cultural consumers are more active during the months of the Biennale manifestations. Ultimately, the Biennale is responsible for the regeneration of different

urban areas, and holds an undeniable support and acknowledgment form the Venetian and Italian institutions.

In order to reinforce a relationship of mutual support with the city, local cultural entrepreneurs can operate through different strategies. Firstly, being the Biennale such a strong entity, smaller cultural entrepreneurs could exploit its presence to their advantage. A tighter partnership with the Biennale could represent an opportunity to receive more consideration and attract attention from institutions and investors. Besides the Biennale, other realities could represent leading figures, such as other big Venetian cultural institutions, but especially the universities. A joint collaboration between university and Biennale, for instance, could give birth to incubating projects for young cultural enterprises, which would initially have the patronage of well-established cultural entities in order to reach, in a longer term, the ability to run independently. For the big institutions to acknowledge their own potential stirring power, though, it is necessary that all the players in the Venetian cultural market are willing to establish a more structured network. In this way, they would have the chance to open a discussion about a real future vision of the cultural state of the city and, eventually, design appropriate projects. Another action that cultural entrepreneurs could undertake is adopting a more entrepreneurial attitude. All the interviewees of this research presented entrepreneurial traits, well demonstrated by their actions as managers or founders of their cultural enterprises. All respondents proved to be driven by a strong passion for their activity, to the extent that they accepted an economically disadvantageous situation for the sake of the enterprise. And this holds true even for the for-profit enterprise of the sample: "we decided to open the second store in Giudecca, a place where there has never been a book store […] It was a symbolic action, to do something for the city, not merely thinking about an economically advantageous location, but a place through which you can *give* something to the area where you open your activity" (respondent 2). Besides passion as a driving force, the respondents showed also a great ability of converting different kinds of capitals to their advantage, in order to cover the lack of economic capital. However, some interviewees did not express a clear vision for the long term of their activity, lacking of a proper entrepreneurial and strategic outlook. The developments of these traits would surely improve the entrepreneurs' performance.

The entrepreneurs' proactivity, though, would not be sufficient to maintain an enterprise, as the case of TFN exemplifies, having it ceased its activity due to a lack of institutional support. The support between Venice and local cultural entrepreneurs needs indeed to be mutual, and political institutions are a big missing element in this sense. First and foremost, political institutions are required to take part to the collective discussion about the future vision of the cultural scene of

Venice. In fact, the government could have a leading role in this process. In order to do so, though, it is necessary to offer an adequate spokesperson to address and a dedicated cultural department in the council. The government could also allow less restrictive norms for the nightlife, in order to allow more thriving occasions of social gathering and exchange of ideas, which are crucial elements for cultural entrepreneurs. Finally, the Venetian population (and the people governing the city included) needs to be informed and educated more concerning the positive impact of the cultural enterprises. Once again, big institutions like the Biennale and the universities hold a sufficient authority to divulgate the appropriate information, in order to prove the government that a dedicated action is needed, and to change the citizens' sceptical attitude towards cultural newness.

5 - Conclusions

5.1 - The mutual support between Venice and local cultural entrepreneurs

The present research provided an original theoretical tool to observe complex urban realities. Drawing from an interdisciplinary background, the theoretical framework highlighted the importance of considering place and its dwellers as an organic entity, rather than two separate elements. The concept of mutual support stems from this conviction and is articulated through three main dimensions. Firstly, place is a network of social interactions among different communities and individuals who interact via several kinds of relationships. Secondly, place is a symbolic system of signs that hold a meaning shared by communities of individuals, who, in turn, have the ability of shaping such system. Thirdly, place is a local economy, meaning a marketplace where different actors deal products according to specific norms and dynamics. The theoretical framework argued also the inherent connection between cultural entrepreneurs and the urban environment, as they are able to interact with all of its three dimensions.

By applying this theoretical lens to the case of Venice, this research intended to determine how local cultural entrepreneurs contribute to establish a mutually supportive relationship with the city of Venice. The choice of Venice resulted of particular relevance because of the need of shifting the lagoon city out of a dead zone that nurtures the rhetoric of the "death in Venice". Moreover, the extreme features of this city make this case emblematic and comparable to the many other urban realities afflicted by similar problematics. The framework of the mutual support, composed by the pairing place-dwellers and the three dimensions of place, is not an ad hoc theoretical argumentation for the Venetian case, but it is in fact applicable to every urban reality.

By means of a qualitative method, an empirical observation of different cultural entrepreneurs proved that Venice is indeed not dying. Several cultural realities are actively supporting the city through its three dimensions. Nonetheless, many obstacles to an effective mutual support have been identified. Cultural entrepreneurs attempt to enforce the local communities, to enhance the city's international twist and to offer spaces and occasions for social gathering, but on the other hand, there is not a proper professional systemic network in the field. Cultural entrepreneurs are responsible for the creation and maintenance of positive habits in the city, besides developing an innovative image of Venice. In turn, the symbolic system of Venice is half supportive (thanks to constant inspiring visual stimuli, a captive street life and the city's attractiveness) and half discouraging (due to inadequate spaces, an overall slowness of the way of living and a deadly connotation attributed to the city). Finally the Venetian local economy appeared rather hostile for cultural entrepreneurs, who suffer from costly assets, lack of public or private investments, an intimidating normative system and the absence of a political spokesperson. In turn, however, cultural entrepreneurs have not been able to establish a proper entrepreneurial ecosystem, due to an inability to organize systematically and establish a common vision for the future of the Venetian cultural scene.

Holding the conviction that culture, as one of the very few activities left in the city, can represent a key for a sustainable development of Venice, cultural entrepreneurs, together with other cultural and political institutions, can take some actions to strengthen the relationship of mutual support. Cultural entrepreneurs would benefit from an enhanced entrepreneurial attitude, whereas big cultural institutions like the Biennale or local universities can act as incubators and certifiers of new cultural enterprises. Most importantly, the local government needs to provide a spokesperson and to participate actively, together with the cultural actors of the city, to a collective discussion about the future vision of Venice as a cultural hub.

5.2 - Limitations and further research

The theory elaborated by this study appears effective for the purpose of the research, but it does not escape from potential further refinements and adjustments. According to the object of study, the place-dweller model can be developed with new or different constituting dimensions, and new ways of articulating them with each other. The current three spheres have been taken into account as the most relevant to the case of Venice, but different realities may call for different dimensions.

The sample of the research included five cultural entrepreneurs plus one expert of the field. The number of event-maker cultural entrepreneurs in Venice is particularly limited; however, time and geographical constraints did not allow including some potential additional respondents. In

particular, the presence of members of the municipality and representatives of the main other communities of Venice (students, inhabitants, tourists and working categories) would have been particularly precious. In fact, they could have represented a further source of validity, considering that the present study relies on the entrepreneurs' perception of mutual support.

For this reason, further studies could expand the current research including the abovementioned communities, and the theoretical model does not even exclude a quantitative approach that could generate a more general overview. This, complemented by the current research, would represent a more exhaustive impression on the topic. Nevertheless, the present research paves the way towards other urban realities, which could benefit from such a holistic analysis. Many cities around the globe present similar features to the Venetian case, such as over-tourism, lack of governmental support and unappropriated entrepreneurial strategies. Thus, adjusting the place-dweller model to their circumstances would offer useful strategies to develop a more sustainable development.

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Appendix 1

Awai

Origins: 2015. Three initial members invested their money to start renting the current venue.

Mission: To use on a joint basis a space open to the public, where artists/artisans can work and experiment.

Activities: Co-working space for artists and artisans, workshops of craft arts, festive events open to the public.

Venue: Indoor area for working, big garden on the rear with chilling area, vegetable garden, bar and area for performances. All the areas are open to the public on a daily basis.

Libreria Marcopolo

Origins: the current venues were established in 2015 (Campo Santa Margherita) and 2017 (Giudecca). The very first venue dates back to 2002.

Mission: Independent book store with a selected offer.

Activities: books sale, meetings with the authors, photography and writing workshops.

Venues: two similar regular venues.

Venice Open Stage (VOS)

Origins: 2013. It was developed during a theatre workshop at IUAV University, and it gained more independence throughout the years.

Mission: To give the chance to different international theatre schools to exhibit the talents of their students, and allow a fruitful exchange among the different institutions.

Activities: Annual festival with performance, meetings and workshops, plus parties for self-financing.

Venue: Open air stage in a typical Venetian square.

Teatro Fondamenta Nuove (TFN)

Origins: The initial association was born in the second half of the '90s from within the IUAV University. In 2003 the association settled in the venue. In 2016 the activity ceased.

Mission: To provide a contemporary and stimulating cultural vision through music and performing arts.

Activities: Different kinds of artistic performances.

Venue: A regular small-scale theatre.

About

Origins: In 2015, form a group of friends looking for a working area.

Mission: To offer projects that reflect on the ways of inhabiting and that experiment with new practices of co-living.

Activities: Production of several artistic projects, dinners, markets, live music events and other cultural initiatives.

Venue: Small space at the ground floor with a chill-out area, a study area and a cooking area.

Appendix 2

General information:

- Can you describe your enterprise and its history?
- What is the vision for the future?
- Why in Venice?
- What is your bond with Venice? (family, studying, working…)

Network of social interactions:

- In which way does your enterprise interact with the constituent communities of Venice?
- In which way does your enterprise encourage the encounter of different communities?
- To what extent do you consider your enterprise responsible for social cohesion or development of new communities?
- In which way do you contribute to the interests of each community?
- How much more or less attractive do you consider Venice (or the neighbourhood) with the presence of your enterprise?
- How much do you think your enterprise bothers or pushes away some individuals or communities?
- How supportive are the Venetian communities with your enterprise?
- How would you describe a network of professionals in this sector in Venice?
- How would you describe the Venetian nightlife and leisure time?
- How important have nightlife and leisure time been to develop professional networks and/or inspirations for your activity?

Symbolic system:

- How would you describe the identity and lifestyle of Venice?
- To what extent did your enterprise contribute to strengthen, develop or change this identity/lifestyle?
- To what extent are the visual stimuli of Venice favourable for your enterprise?
- How would you describe the size, adaptability and functionality of the Venetian spaces?
- What role did your enterprise have in the regeneration of an urban area?
- To what extent do you think your enterprise provided cultural contents to the city?

Local economy:

- To what extent is it easy to start, develop and maintain a cultural enterprise in Venice?
- How would you describe the costs of living and of maintaining your enterprise in Venice?
- How profitable is having a cultural enterprise in Venice?
- How would you describe the economic conditions you live in thanks to your enterprise?
- Would you move your enterprise to another city, if it were more profitable?
- To what extent is it necessary having an initial economic capital in order to start a cultural enterprise in Venice?
- How easy or difficult is it having a professional career in this field in Venice?
- How would you describe the Venetian normative system?
- Do you receive subsidies or other supports form institutions or sponsors?
- How would you describe the levels of demand for your offer?
- How would you describe the situation of competitiveness in this sector in Venice?
- To what extent is your enterprise innovative and competitive?
- To what extent do you consider your enterprise responsible for the development of a specific labour force in this sector?
- To what extent do you think your enterprise stimulates side markets?
- How do you think your enterprise contributes to the promotion of Venice as a brand?

Questions for respondent 6:

- Could you introduce yourself and explain your connection with Venice and the Biennale?
- How do you think Venice could benefit from the presence of cultural enterprises?
- How would you describe the cultural scene in Venice?
- Do you think it is more difficult or easier to start, develop and maintain a cultural enterprise in Venice?
- What is the difference between big and small cultural enterprises in Venice?
- How would you describe the network of professionals in this sector in Venice?
- Are there opportunities for formal or informal meeting among the various cultural entrepreneurs in Venice?
- What is the level of demand for the cultural offer in Venice?
- How would you describe the levels of competitiveness among the various cultural enterprises in Venice?

- To what extent do the visual stimuli and the spaces of Venice have a role in the birth or development of a cultural enterprise?
- To what extent do you think the various cultural enterprises have a role in defining the Venetian identity and lifestyle?
- How is the Biennale supported by the institutions?
- How would you describe the Venetian normative system?
- How profitable is the Biennale to Venice?
- How is the Biennale perceived by the communities of Venice?
- In which way did the Biennale manipulated (positively or not) the Venetian urban space?

Appendix 3

Social interactions – symbolci system – local economy – entrepreneurial features.

Che cos'è awai, com'è nato e di cosa si occupa?

Awai è nata come una realtà di coworking, quindi dalla necessità di uno spazio a Venezia, che è molto difficile da trovare per i costi e per come è formulata la città. Ci siamo messi amici e conoscenti, più o meno con gli stessi interessi, quindi uno spazio che sia grande, ci sia la possibilità di lavorare, vivere, stare in compagnia, usufruire in ogni modo la sua esperienza, e abbiamo trovato questo spazio qui. Questo spazio ha anche un giardino molto grande, che è un vecchio campo veneziano, e decidemmo all'epoca di rimetterlo a posto, perché era abbandonato, tre anni fa circa, e di riutilizzarlo, cercare di riaprirlo al pubblico, chiaramente cercando di rimanere nell'ambito dell'arte, dell'artigianato, dello scambio solidale, del circo dell'orto, i bambini…

Quindi avete una sorta di mission?

Diciamo una volontà, più che una mission, che penso sia quella di riuscire a lavorare qui. L'associazione, quello che avviene fuori in giardino cerchiamo semplicemente di riaprire lo spazio, però per fare questa cosa in questo momento stiamo cercando di delegare molte posizioni, per esempio i bambini sono nel programma delle educatrici, tutta la parte circense se ne occupano le circensi, tutta la parte dell'orto se ne occupano gli agronomi, in modo tale da non spendere tutte le nostre energie per mantenere attiva l'associazione, bensì cercare di usufruire di questo spazio in maniera condivisa anche con altre associazioni.

Di che tipo di associazione si tratta?

Questa è una onlus senza scopo di lucro ed è un'associazione culturale. Noi siamo molto legati alla parte artigianale, come puoi sentire e vedere, e cerchiamo di raggruppare in questo spazio artigiani di adesso, posso anche comprendere quelli che utilizzano tecnologie, ma soprattutto artigiani di una volta, perché bene o male noi nel nostro lavoro abbiamo ripreso il loro mestiere e lo abbiamo portato nella contemporaneità, e quindi abbiamo una necessità di parlare con loro e allo stesso tempo bisogno delle loro esperienze per rifarci nel nostro lavoro.

Sono artigiani locali?

Sono soprattutto locali anche se noi comunque veniamo da una realtà… le nostre esperienze vengono da una formazione all'estero, quindi i nostri maestri vengono spesso dall'estero e quindi abbiamo una certa componente internazionale, che aiuta.

Quale visione avete per il futuro?

Per il futuro i lavori di recupero del giardino, verso giugno, creare una rete di associazioni che sia un po' più stabile e trovare una maniera di utilizzare questo spazio anche per una relazione più proficua con le istituzioni di artisti, artigiani. Non proficuo a livello economico, proficuo a livello di scambi. A livello economico tutti noi facciamo un lavoro diverso da quello che stai vedendo qui. Questo spazio serve solo per sperimentare.

E questa rete di associazioni, puoi spiegare di cosa si tratta?

A Venezia come ben sai, ma forse anche nel resto d'Italia, in assenza di aiuti istituzionali si sono create diverse realtà, sono quasi sempre gruppi di amici o gruppi di lavoro, che creano delle associazioni per riportare nel contesto cittadino una serie di servizi che il comune, le istituzioni non offrono. Per esempio noi per il comune facciamo un lavoro di recupero per i ragazzi che non riescono a finire la scuola, e quindi