



United Nations  
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pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

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de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
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联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Address by Irina Bokova,  
Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the Cini Foundation International**

**Conference Sustainability of local commons with a global  
value: the case of Venice and its Lagoon.**

**Giorgio Cini Foundation, Venice, 4 November 2016**

Dear Mr Giovanni Bazoli, President of *Fondazione Giorgio Cini*,

Ms Ilaria Borletti Buitoni, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism,

Distinguished Guests,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Attending this International Conference at the *Giorgio Cini Foundation* carries special significance for me, as Director-General of UNESCO.

Firstly, this 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2016 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Venice Flood in 1966.

This rightly drew the attention of the international community in support of the campaign launched by UNESCO to safeguard and manage this unique and fragile place.

This also marked the beginning of long-standing and fruitful cooperation between Italy and UNESCO, and the very special relationship between UNESCO and the people of Venice.

I find it deeply moving to recall the launch and achievements of this campaign at this time when the people of Italy has just been struck by a series of violent earthquakes - the latest one occurring a few days ago, striking at the heritage of this country, in Amatrice, in Norcia, and other medieval villages.

I wish to express my profound solidarity with the Government and people of Italy, and especially to the families and friends of those killed and injured.

Cultural infrastructure has been severely affected, and this highlights once again the need to strengthen conservation efforts and protection strategies.

For decades, Italy has shown unique leadership in the protection of cultural heritage across the globe - today, UNESCO stands ready to assist Italy and help the Italian people recover.

I believe we can take comfort and confidence from the history of Venice, to show what can be achieved when we combine political will, international solidarity and scientific excellence.

UNESCO is deeply grateful for the expertise and commitment of the *Giorgio Cini Foundation*.

It is here that UNESCO and its Italian partners organized an *International Round Table on the Protection of Venice and its Lagoon*, in April 1981.

This was a milestone in the history of scientific cooperation.

And this is precisely the mandate of UNESCO - to foster international scientific and cultural cooperation, to bring people together, to place issues on the table, to facilitate everyone in crafting sustainable solutions.

UNESCO does not bring money specifically - but the Organization has been instrumental in raising hundreds of millions of funds in Venice.

UNESCO does not actually protect palazzos from the Laguna, or provide ready-made solutions - we discuss and work to craft tailored-made approaches with all partners.

I say this, because there are sometimes misconceptions about the role of UNESCO, and I think we must be clear on what we can and do contribute.

In Venice, UNESCO was instrumental in the creation of an international group of experts, which laid the basis for an *International Research Project on the Venice Lagoon*.

This conference is an opportunity to pay tribute to their legacy - Michel Batisse, Bruno Battaglia, Francesco Di Castri, Michel Steyaert, Andreina Zitelli, and many more.

Under every stone of Venetian heritage, there is the story of experts, of curators, of historians... and it is also these stories of care and concern that make up the legend of Venice.

On this basis, Italy approved the *Venice Lagoon System* project, whose final results were presented in 2000.

In the meantime, Venice and its Lagoon were included in the World Heritage List.

It is worth recalling the motivations of this inscription.

These were not only based on the historical value of Venice, but also on the fact that "*Venice and its lagoon landscape is the result of a dynamic process which illustrates the interaction between people and the ecosystem*".

This vision stands at the heart of UNESCO's work to protect and promote "local goods of global values" - from world heritage sites to biosphere reserves and geoparks.

This, I believe, is a living laboratory of sustainable development.

And this means two important things.

First, we need to connect the dots between cultural expertise, and scientific knowledge, water management, for a better understanding of the ocean and the coastal dynamics, and much more.

We need stronger education for sustainable development, to equip young people with the skills they need to protect and make the most of this environment.

I see this as the unique valued added of UNESCO, as the United Nations agency for education, the sciences and culture - we know it is not always easy to bring together ministries from different backgrounds, experts from different disciplines, but this is why we must continue.

Secondly, the very nature of Venice's outstanding universal value means Venice is a living heritage, with a wealth of knowledge, know-how and traditions, which we must foster and support.

Protecting is not freezing.

At the heart of all conservation efforts stands the will to promote the city not only as a museum for tourists of the world, but as a city where people live, create, innovate and work.

This is the spirit of UNESCO's work to promote the diversity of cultural expressions, embodied in the 2005 Convention.

This is the spirit of UNESCO 2015 report on *Re/Shaping Cultural Policies*.

This is the spirit also of our landmark publication on *Culture: Urban Future*, which was prepared with many institutions and universities, including the University IUAV of Venice, host of the *UNESCO Chair on Urban Policies and Urban Regeneration*.

We know too well the threats of unbalanced forms of development.

Much effort has been devoted to protecting Venice and its Lagoon from high waters, and at the same time the high pressure on the city of Venice has resulted in its partial transformation.

Residents' houses have been replaced with tourist accommodations.

Traditional activities and services have been transformed into tourism-related activities.

These were discussed at the World Heritage Committee Meeting in Istanbul.

I will not revisit the debate, but I would like to stress that the decision taken on that occasion must not be seen in any way as criticism of those in charge of the management of the site.

We are all in this together - and this is also what I told the Mayor, Mr Luigi Brugnaro, whom I met this morning: we are all in this together, UNESCO, local institutions, national government and the wider international community.

In this spirit, I wish to make today a new appeal to all - including UNESCO - for a redoubled commitment to the safeguarding of Venice and the definition of new directions for its development.

Much has been done, and still much needs to be accomplished.

UNESCO has contributed so much to this city, in real and symbolic terms.

The *International Campaign for the Safeguarding of Venice*, launched by UNESCO, has raised hundreds of millions of dollars - it has secured expertise at the highest international level - it has ensured global attention to the city of Venice.

UNESCO's participation in the *Venice Lagoon System* project led to the implementation of major scientific programmes, on the *Venice Lagoon Ecosystem (1990-1995)* and the *Venice Inner Canals (1995-1999)*.

Both delivered a considerable amount of knowledge for planning and decision-making in Venice, on hydrodynamics, on boat traffic, on damage to foundations.

Between 2009 and 2012, UNESCO dedicated most of its efforts in Venice to support a sustainable Management Plan, with all responsible institutions.

Today, I know an Action Plan has been agreed to relieve tourist pressure on Venice, by offering alternative options among the municipalities in the boundary area, and UNESCO supports this.

For some 50 years, UNESCO has had an active presence in Venice.

And I wish to recall that UNESCO's regional office *in* Venice is not a bureau *for* Venice only, which would be dedicated to the sole preservation of an urban museum.

From Venice, UNESCO is working to foster cultural and scientific cooperation across South East Europe.

The rebuilding of the old Bridge of Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina was led from here.

UNESCO's action to build peace in the Balkans - the *Culture: A Bridge to Development Initiative*, such initiatives as the travelling exhibition *Imagining the Balkans* - were all led from Venice.

And this is UNESCO's contribution to Venice, as a dynamic diplomatic hub, as the creative and innovative place it has always been.

In this spirit, I wish to encourage all to continue moving together in this same direction and I wish to thank once again the Giorgio Cini Foundation and the Italian Authorities for their trust and support.

Thank you.