

MOSE and Arsenale Projects

VENICE,
ITALY

Venice is a unique city, built entirely on water, with its famous lagoon the foundation of the city's key tourism and port activities. Although the city continues to perform well in economic terms, it faces significant challenges as it looks to diversify its economy whilst reducing increasing tension between mass tourism and the local population. Environmental degradation also remains a concern, exacerbated by rising sea levels that continue to require large-scale intervention to protect the city.

Project overview

Venice's Water Authority's (part of the Italian Ministry for Infrastructure and Transport) 'General Plan of Intervention' focuses on activities aimed at safeguarding the city and its lagoon against flooding and includes a number of innovative and ambitious initiatives. The MOSE project is an innovative sea defence system that has been designed to close the lagoon via mobile gates in the three inlets that provide access to the Adriatic Sea. Another project, Arsenale, is a navy complex and former shipyard in the Eastern part of the city (dating back to the 12th century) that has been converted to house new urban functions, including offices, cultural spaces and research facilities whilst serving as the control and maintenance location for the MOSE project. Both projects highlight the challenges faced by Venice in balancing its competitive sustainable development whilst protecting its cultural heritage and famed lagoon.

Results and impact

Despite continuous debate between various stakeholders concerning issues such as costs, bureaucracy, conflicts of interest, and doubts whether the MOSE system is the right solution to protect the city and the lagoon;

the General Plan of Intervention shows positive effects that increases Venice's competitiveness, including diversification and upgrading of the economy (e.g. maritime engineering/water management and business tourism as a new growth sectors); new international networks and image improvement. The MOSE system also has the potential to become a major demonstration project that helps to further develop business tourism and support education and business in new fields. The Arsenale project has also been applauded as a key asset, bringing new functions in the historical centre. It already has many new users in the fields of culture and maritime technology and water management, including production as well as R&D functions. Finally, the 'General Plan of Intervention' has stimulated a 'discussion platform' (or 'arena of conflict'), bringing economic, environmental and societal stakeholders together, stimulating new forms of governance across initiatives such as in the Arsenale and the UNESCO Management Plan.

Enablers

The flood of 1966 and rising sea levels prompted the sense of urgency that stimulated the implementation plan and required financial resources to make the 'General Plan of Intervention' happen. Given the importance attached to flooding concerns, the MOSE project has been fully funded, even during the recent economic crisis, with financial resources a key enabling factor for the plan. The Arsenale project (due to its integration in the General Plan of Intervention and Strategic Plan of the city) has been funded by the State, the City and other sources, demonstrating cross government commitment to the project. The City has been the key driving force behind the project, functioning as the initiator, key planner and coordinator of the project, aside from providing funding. The city's strong role was undoubtedly enabled by a new governance structure facilitated by a law that enabled citizens to directly elect a mayor and give more power to the City Government. Under the first elected Mayor, Massimo Cacciari, many projects were initiated during his five year regime.

