Title

"We are waiting for the end": ageing and (im)mobility in the tourist city

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ABSTRACT

Many tourist cities rely on walking as form of slow travel to take in the destination. Venice, the case study for this paper, is a distinct 'walking city', scripted into its cultural landscape along with its visitor crowds. As in other historical cities, however, crowding compromises residents' walking mobility. This particularly affects groups that rely on proximate mobility such as older residents. This paper delves into the effects of tourism on everyday mobilities and realities of coping with change in the tourist city. It thus uncovers repercussions on 'those remaining' and highlights how the privilege of slowness may become a condition of disadvantage. It engages with long-term biographies, walking experiences, and the ageing process itself during an empirical study consisting of walking interviews. The findings show how tourist mobilities collide with access to spaces of social activity, essential services, and neighbourhood life. More importantly, they bring to surface how residents negotiate these hindrances and seek opportunities for mobility and wellbeing, despite older age-related challenges arising from the exclusive uptake of slow mobilities. Eventually, this paper forms a critique that discloses the collateral nature of tourism impacts on ageing in place, stuck between global mobility flows and local tourism management choices.

KEYWORDS

Walking, ageing, tourist mobilities, tourism, Venice

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the material entanglements of bodily prowess with tourist space. The focus is on the negotiations and hindrances faced by older citizens in the historical centre of Venice in northeastern Italy. The case of Venice is used as a metaphor of the ambiguous connotation that is given in the public representation of 'slowness'. Slow-paced urban mobility rhythms are generally associated with a greater capacity of local communities to enjoy and perform their quotidian life, with proximity, physical activity, lower levels of air and noise pollution, and a greater fluidity between domestic and public spaces. In this sense, Venice is a vivid example of a historically constructed city devoid of the pressure of automobility and of the predilection for speed that is part of most urban mobility systems, and which has even penetrated the parameters of slower modes such as walking and cycling (Spinney 2022; Willberg, Fink, and Toivonen 2023). As such, everyday movements in Venice conform to the slow pace of walking and moving by small boats.

Thus, it could be easily maintained that living in this city entails a mobility privilege enjoyed by generations of Venetians. In spite of the obvious hindrances related to slowness and the unreformable character of its built environment, preventing ordinary adaptations to a faster and assisted human movement (such as elevators in buildings or motorised transit besides water transport), Venetians enjoyed for centuries these singular landscape features,

interiorising them in their lifestyle, and continued to do so even after many other historical cities have integrated fundamental elements of modernisation (Simmel 2007).

Venice's distinct slowness is not only enjoyed by residents but also forged in a historical dialogue of global flows of travellers drawn into a peculiar and culturally hegemonic city. For many historical centres of medieval origin, characterised by dense and tortuous street grids that invite walking as the only means of moving around, and where the boundary between 'home' or domesticity and urban space is more tenuous and porous (Blunt and Sheringham, 2019), such landscape quality may have functioned as privilege for residents and attractor for visitors. Today, however, Venetians suffer pervasive effects of slow mobilities on their life conditions: from hindrances to everyday mobility to obliged residential displacement, while others cannot or do not want to give up their conditions as Venetians. Similar trends are detected at lower extents, but in rising dimensions, in other historical cities and city centres, like those of Amsterdam, Barcelona, Lisbon, and other capitals documented by the recent literature on overtourism (Goodwin 2017; Peeters et al. 2021; Amore, Falk, and Adie 2020).

The present work is then an attempt to uncover and narrate a covert form of social exclusion picking up in overtouristed places (Russo and Valente 2022). It is particularly concerned with the intricate turn from the privilege of slowness to a condition of disadvantage and 'stuckness', as tourist mobilities overpower urban space and challenge the residents' options to enjoy it (López-Gay, Cocola-Gant, and Russo 2021). We thus question the social repercussions on those not willing or not able to leave the tourist city, negotiating the nexus of mobility hindrances between the structural features of the city (old houses, no elevators, uneasy access to public transport) and tourism-induced transformations – from the sheer saturation of public space to the dwindling proximity of commercial, healthcare, and civic services and the erosion of solidarity networks. We develop this nexus conceptually and unpack the case of Venice's dwindling and ageing resident community in Section 2 before proposing a qualitative research design to capture older residents' slow mobility practices and performances in the scarcely accessible space of the tourist city, to an extent engaging with the literature on walkability and age-inclusion in urban change.

In the voices of our research participants, we can recognise stories of pride and place attachment, but also of coping, longing for what has been lost over time, and despair for the future, intersecting with the limits of the ageing body. We are not offering a solution or forms of mitigation for Venice's hugely problematic evolution, but a grounded understanding of the consequences that these have on ordinary people in an unordinary place, possibly the less able to freely decide to relocate and eschew the problem altogether. We do so at a time in which tourism levels hastily return to pre-pandemic levels (Gössling and Schweiggart 2022), while older residents still carry the toll of the public health risks and the discriminatory practices in pandemic containment (Buffel et al. 2021). In Section 4, we discuss the findings of this fieldwork, before reconnecting with theoretical contributions on immobilisation and urban transitions in Section 5. Beyond the focus on embodied mobility in Venice and on the exclusionary effects of touristification on those ageing in place, we intend to inform both the academic conversations on resulting (im)mobilisations as privilege or disadvantage and its rooting in global trends and geographies of inequality.

2. FRAMING VENICE: TOURISTIFICATION, AGEING AND (IM)MOBILITY

2.1. The becoming of the tourist city

Venice represents a unique example of a city historically forged by mobilities: political and cultural supremacy, international trade, the transits of artists, explorers and political figures are scripted into its landscape of stone and water (Davis and Marvin 2004). Far from halting its evolution from political superpower until the 17th century to a modern industrial city expanding into its hinterland, the historical core has maintained regional capital functions and a thriving commercial economy well into the 20th century (Benzoni 2001; Goisis 2015). Venetians take pride in such cosmopolitan character of their city of patrician mansions, churches and monumental squares, and even industrial spaces and working-class housing developments from the last 150 years that represent a fixed dimension of the urban landscape that stands in stark contrast with the flows, encounters and histories that originate them (Cosgrove 1982).

In the 20th century, this 'slow' but idiosyncratically dwelled urban landscape has become iconised and represented by the promotion machinery of the tourism sector, which involved a conscious process of 'heritagisation' of the historical city and what some authors describe as its socio-spatial segregation from its productive hinterland (Zannini 2002). After a long history as hub of elite leisure mobilities, tourism became progressively regarded as key source for economic longevity and conservation of Venice's urban form. It was recognised as early as the 1970s that Venice could become subject to what we now widely discuss as overtourism (COSES 1979). In 1974, Henri Lefebvre commented that the corresponding production of space has the capacity to liquidate a city's social and historical fabric: "[M]ass migrations of tourist hordes into rustic or urban areas which their descent only helps to destroy (woe unto Venice and Florence!) are a manifestation of a major spatial contradiction of modernity: here we see space being consumed in both the economic and the literal senses of the word" (Lefebvre 1991, 122). However, possibly the most powerful image of the transition of Venice from an attractive cultural superpower to one of servile surrender to the draw of the tourist economy has been Luchino Visconti's "Death in Venice" movie based on Thomas Mann's novel. It depicts a declining city ravaged by sickness and unable to protect its visiting elite from corruption sustained by commercial practices. Not by chance, John Urry (2004) has metaphorized the novel to uncover the ambivalence we attribute to im/mobility, as the heightened mobilities of some suppress those of others (Sheller 2018).

More recently, an impressive body of scholarship has been concerned with the mass tourist transition of Venice (Van der Borg 1992; Minoia 2017), its drivers and mechanisms (Russo 2002; Cristiano and Gonella 2020), and the relentlessly increasing dimensions of the problem accelerating – if not ultimately determining – a population exodus. Venice is variously described as a worst-case example of the perverse effects of touristification, an (unsuccessful) laboratory of solutions, model of where not to go in tourism promotion and development strategies (Seraphin, Sheeran, and Pilato 2018), and a city doomed to a 'short-term' city destiny which needs revisioning its very social and economic DNA in order to survive as a living community (Salerno and Russo 2022). Indeed, the historical centre (HC) is now reduced to less than 50,000 registered residents, down from 175,000 in the 1950s. The remaining resident population is marked by progressive ageing and the loss of working age adults and

households with children (Zanardi 2020). While this exodus is also mediated by factors such as environmental vulnerability and regional economic and institutional restructuring (Musu 2001; Cristiano and Gonella 2020), several works document and analyse its relation to the growth of tourism or the more pervasive process of touristification or heritagisation of the city (e.g. Salerno 2022; Salerno and Russo 2022; Seraphim et al. 2018).

The excess of tourism pressure has de facto transformed a living urban community into a playground for visitors, one in which the fast use of city spaces and functions by mobile populations subtracts from the locals' affordabilities and drives the relentless sclerotisation of its economic and institutional structure (Salerno and Russo 2022; Amore, Falk, and Adie 2020). These processes are only partially mitigated by the rise of temporary residents as second-home owners, digital nomads, and university students, which are central to ongoing debates on the 'repopulation' of Venice (Brollo and Celata 2023; Giuffrida 2022; Russo and Arias-Sanz 2009) but also contested by the rapid transformation of the housing market around the rise of the 'platform hospitality' (Russo and Salerno, 2023). All in all, debates on overtourism rarely miss a quotation of the Venice case. Our aim is not to replicate this debate, but rather to uncover the covert (im)mobility implications that define who can and cannot move in overtouristed places and the resulting paradox between slow and fast mobility rhythms.

2.2. Ageing, (slow) mobilities and urban change in the tourist city

Visitors to Venice are drawn in by millions a year: the most recent estimates from 2019 (pre-COVID) talk about around 23 million, 60% of which approximately consists of overnight stays in Venice's accommodation supply, while the rest is an estimation of day visitor. Cruise passengers in transit, estimated at around 0.5M, are not included (Comune di Venezia 2020). A great majority of visits are short and rapid, highly concentrated in space and time, but also transformative to such landscape precisely because of these fast rhythms, eliciting economic and commercial change, and a progressive erosion of the environmental values. Despite the slow mobilities in situ, residents are driven out of the city by these fast rhythms, unbounded by geographical limits and spurred by a hyper-specialisation of the economy, expelling higher-skilled jobs and traditional residential services together with affordable homes out of the clutch of 'airbnbification'.

In this paper we look more specifically at tourism mobilities as driver of urban change, involving the intertwined workings of physical crowding along marked space-time frames, the loss or unattainability of commercial facilities and public services supporting a stable resident population, and the erosion of community relationships in a context of dwindling and ageing population base and growing visitor numbers and temporary dwellings. Between these structural push factors, increasingly common in other urban centres subject to tourism-driven gentrification (Cocola-Gant 2016; López-Gay, Cocola-Gant, and Russo 2021; Novy and Colomb 2016), we encounter (im)mobilisations as more fluid, ambivalent phenomena in a slow but highly mobilised city. Whereas many recent urban mobility transformations aim to support slow(er) mobility and proximity, tourism-related transformations may cause those staying behind to face declining mobility opportunities. Our focus on urban ageing is a way to approach such immobilisations: the transformative power of the inflow of temporary newcomers and the outflow of long-term residents may challenge the community

experiences of those who stay behind. In fact, they arguably subtract from the socio-spatial necessities for people to age in place as socioeconomic status, physical and mental health or social attachment may impede older adults to relocate, rendering them “stuck in place” Smith, Lehning, and Kim 2018, 27; Buffel and Phillipson 2019).

Although these drivers of change have been postulated as an exclusion risk, they may not manifest as push to move out of the city but rather as a condition of marginalisation through immobilisation and erosion of quality of life (Hjälm 2014; Versey et al. 2019). Arguably, the link between these exclusions and embodied (im)mobility has received less attention, with the exception of pandemic-related mobility risks (Freudendal-Pedersen and Kesselring 2021). Perhaps ironically, walking-oriented cities like Venice are an ideal imprint for optimal mobility opportunities for older adults, given the high density, short distances, and mixed urban functions (Saelens and Handy 2008). Such infrastructural and morphological features may promote outdoor walking and prevent poor health (for an overview, see Akinci et al. 2022). Walking access to commercial and social opportunities, in fact, is a basis for healthy ageing through supporting independence, mental health, and physical capabilities (Van Hoof et al. 2021). Furthermore, the built environment tends to be more important for older adults to walk outdoors than for younger populations, also considering that other travel modes may be more difficult to use in later life (Curl, Tilley, and Van Cauwenberg 2018; Ravensbergen et al. 2022).

Specifically, the orientation of later life mobility towards walking can affect the capacity to be mobile and may create new access constraints and revise neighbourhood boundaries (Alidoust et al. 2017; Stjernborg, Wretstrand, and Tesfahuney 2015). In this light, the historical density and topographical nature of Venice would suggest high walkability, also given the absence of motorised land traffic, offering the kind of ‘village-like’ living in which people and places thrive and traffic flows are secondary or absent (Latham and Layton, 2019; Milano, González-Reverté, and Benet Mòdico 2023). Although critical appraisals of the walkability in such areas are scarce in tourism studies (Anton Clavé 2019), the work by Gorrini and Bertini (2018) highlights that the walkability of Venice is threatened by the lack of basic services and hindrance from tourist crowding. In addition, pavement type, width, and continuity are not always adequate and the use of ramps for people with reduced mobility is limited.

We thus witness a critical point in which tourism-catered walkability and preservation arguments threaten the precise walkability criteria that underlie healthy ageing opportunities in a strongly ageing city. Albeit with little consideration of older populations, the literature on overtourism has refocused attention on residents’ discontent with tourism growth (Dodds and Butler 2019; Novy and Colomb 2016). Boissevain (1996), in an earlier take on host perceptions, distinguishes six reactive strategies for residents to protect themselves from tourism inconveniences: covert resistance; hiding; fencing; ritual; organised protest; and aggression. Whereas he also observes inventiveness and resilience among host communities, authors such as Quinn (2007) hint to negative emotional and wellbeing impacts and the conscious constructions of places, routes and walking performances. Sharpley (2014), in addition, finds that older residents may be less receptive to tourism in their city while research rarely delves into in-depth understandings of responses rather than perceptions.

However, the specific *immobilising* capacity of tourist mobilities has only recently come to surface (Brandajs and Russo, 2019; López-Gay et al., 2021). We thus propose to analyse the tensions and forms of coping that tourism mobilities may incite. We learn from and interpret the 'negotiation for space' that involves human mobilities and the flows that enable them, structure their dwelling potentials, order their ability to get attuned and shape routines and perceptions (Jensen 2010; Russo 2023), or create the imaginaries that facilitate them (Salazar 2020). Mobilities studies have shed light on stuckness and waiting in the context of labour mobilities and modification of daily rhythms during the pandemic, for instance showing gender and social-relational dimensions and effects on emotional wellbeing (Straughan, Bissell, and Gorman-Murray 2020; Zuev and Hannam 2021). Ageing studies, in turn, have shed light on stuckness beyond physical immobility, in the sense of being unable to escape the burden of urban change (cf. Smith et al., 2018). We mobilise these research advances in mobilities studies, tourism scholarship and ageing research to investigate the lived reality of stuckness, its coping strategies and its negotiated effects in an explicit sociodemographic group at risk of marginalisation vis-à-vis urban change.

We thus mobilise the embodied dimension of walking in the tourist city to study the interstice where the body encounters the material infrastructure of the city. The ensuing link between mental, individual, and social imaginations and the lived (im)mobile reality may thus uncover that the way in which people see and imagine the city depends on real and imagined restrictions on human movement, not just on geographical movement. Against the background of 'hypermobile' urban tourism flows, our focus on residents' everyday activities explores in what ways residents' activity may incrementally precipitate in immobility (Salazar and Smart 2011). This will shed light on the agency of tourismification as a domain of negotiation and contestation with uneven effects across social groups, in which the tourist city operates as ecosystem of socio-economic and cultural constructions and collective meanings, among others, increasingly enmeshed with the dwelling and leisure habits of a temporary population (Russo 2023).

3. CASE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Case study context

In response to the outlined conceptual approach to the mobility practices, performances, and imaginations of 'those who remain' in a tourist city, we adopted a biographical approach that consults the mobility choices, practices, and negotiations over time, into later life, and in relational to the hindrances of being less mobile, the erosion of housing and social networks, proximity services, poor navigability, and tourism mobilities' public space claim. The population exodus of Venice's HC introduced in Section 2.1 is accompanied by number of bed places for tourists surpassed the number of residents in 2023 (Salerno and Russo 2022). Furthermore, Venice's tourism struggles are paired with environmental concerns, following its location in a vulnerable lagoon ecosystem, and with social problems following the visitor-orientation of many old streets and buildings. The floods in 2019 and the COVID-19 crisis are external effects that seriously damaged the tourism sector (Momigliano 2020). While the new MOSE system for protection against the floods seems to be working (and this is thought of providing a new 'resilient ecosystem' to revise the productive future of the city), this cannot

be said about policies to mitigate overtourism. The city has considered charging fees for tourist coaches and overnight stays (tourist tax), freezing new hotel permits, restricting fast food restaurants, and tackling non-certified tourist accommodations, but with no result on post-COVID visitor numbers. Tourist walking flows and use of space have also been at the centre of municipal efforts, although the management of tourism flows based on cameras and heat sensors has mainly aroused ethical and legal concerns (Bubola 2021).

Administratively, Venice's HC consists of six *sestieri*, districts with different residential features and socio-cultural histories. The archipelago is unlocked by water bus lines, which have different prices for tourists and residents, water taxis, and, in vicinity of the single land bridge connection, a train station and car parks. The accumulating boat traffic leads to congested waterways and long travel times, which arguably hinder business development, repopulation, and intra-municipal connections (Gorrini and Bertini, 2018; Visentin and Bertocchi, 2019). Accessibility is problematic, as mobility infrastructures (streets, bridges, canal connections) have difficult surfaces, steep inclines, steps limited access for wheelchairs, walkers, etc., and few resting spaces. Elevated walkways in flood-prone areas may form a further obstacle, whereas the many quays are a fall risk and guard rails for boat access are often absent. Historically and topographically, walkability is problematic in the historical centre, whereas efforts and tools for protecting mobility rights were given up with the disappearance of many residents, (public) services, other urban functions (Tatano 2018).

3.2 Biographical interviews on the move

To approach the experience of living and walking in Venice, we employed go-along walking interviews and biographical inquiry. This data collection method is characterised by accompanying interviewees on everyday walking routes while asking about topics such as neighbourhood-based resources, access, health and wellbeing (Carpiano 2009). They originate from the recognition that people's intermittent mobility practices are best studied by being mobile *with* them, especially when those movements contain fleeting interactions with others and with the built environment (Jensen 2010; Manderscheid 2014). Most studies on tourism and resident impacts apply quantitative surveys, document analysis, traditional interviews, or secondary data analysis (Blanco-Romero et al. 2019), leaving the capacities of walking interviews to approach the lived experience and the social and spatial relationality of individual mobility underexplored in relation to tourism. In our case, the interviews had four main topics: biographical questions about residential and mobility trajectories over time, ageing and future mobility, practices, valuations, and sentiments related to walking in Venice, and perspectives on tourism and tourist presence. Although mobile interviews cannot always replace their traditional equivalent and favour the inclusion of participants who can walk independently (Merriman 2014; Parent 2016), they allowed to approach the relationships between mobility experiences and the social and urban environment, particularly using the last two interview topics. Spatially and temporally, this frames the interviews in the interstice where the body encounters the material infrastructure of the city. This allows us to consider how mobilities and place (Venice HC) are reciprocal and co-constitutive (Salazar 2023).

Participants were approached on the basis of the following criteria: aged 60 or older; principal home address in Venice's HC; employment of daily activities and mobilities in this area; and not participating on behalf of an organised collective. The recruitment process strived for a

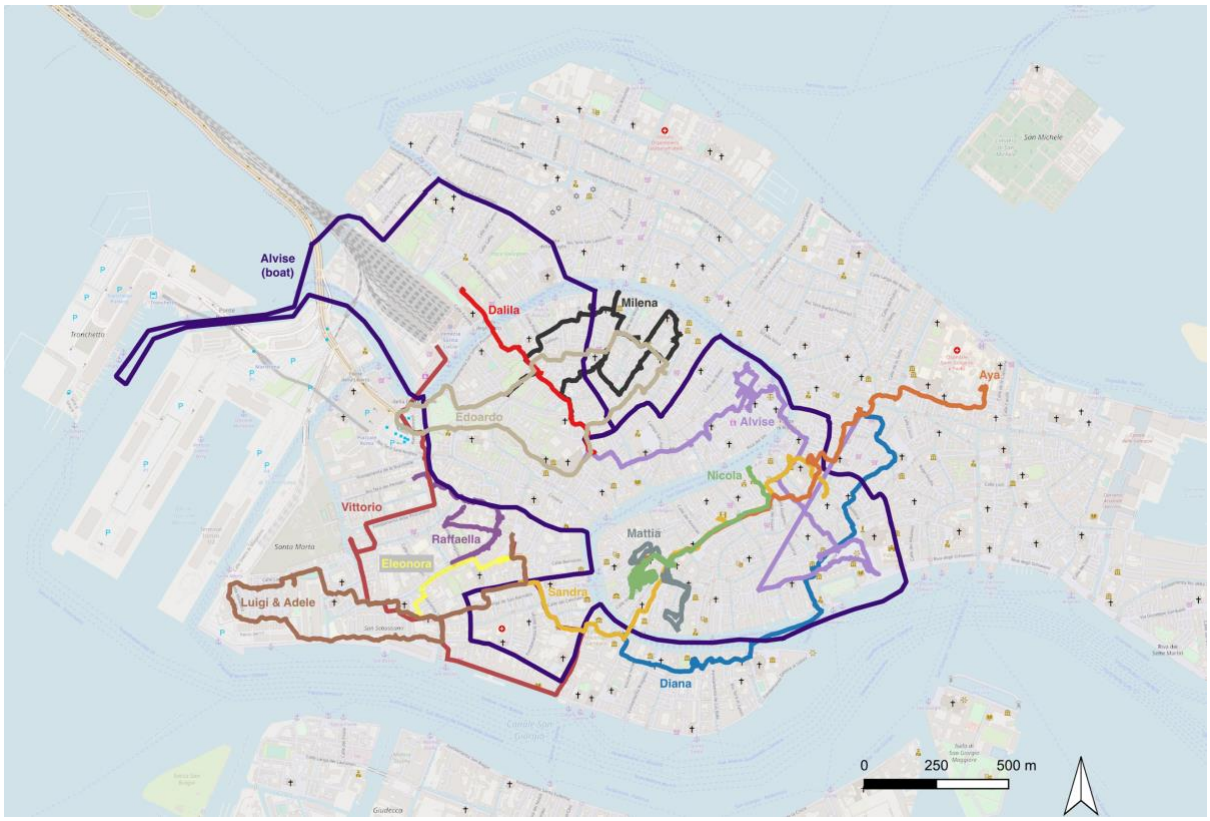
gender balance, the inclusion of a range of 60+ ages, labour histories, lifelong Venetians and other origins, and people living in different *sestieri* of the city. In that sense, it was helpful that one of the researchers is from the region, albeit not Venice itself, and that the researchers invested considerable time in communication, transparency, and trust-building activities at local associations and social hubs, which acted as gatekeepers to access the older Venetian community using chain referral (Palinkas et al. 2015). Following the specific inclusion criteria, the time invested in familiarising and empathising with potential participants, and the time-intensive nature of walking interviews, a total of 15 people were recruited. The interviews were designed to take around 60 minutes; most took between 40 and 75 minutes with two longer exceptions of 118 and 162 minutes. They were undertaken between October and December 2022, a period which the municipality considers to be part of the 11-month peak season (Visentin and Bertocchi 2019). To aid recollection and allow for ex-post reconstruction, the interviews were audio recorded, geo-localised with a mobile tracking application, and photos were taken at key points related to the conversation in situ.

*[**Table 1**: Participant characteristics]*

NAME	SEX	AGE	DISTRICT	IN VENICE HC SINCE	OCCUPATION	DESTINATION OF WALKING INTV.
Luigi	M	78	Dorsoduro	1970s	Retired (university teacher)	Food market; ferry stop to swimming pool
Nicola	M	82	San Marco	lifelong	Retired (bank clerk, photographer)	Grocery shopping
Mattia	M	78	San Marco	lifelong	Artist	Café and workplace
Aya	F	73	San Marco	1990s	Art studio assistant	Gym
Edoardo	M	74	Santa Croce	lifelong	Retired (bank clerk, unionist)	Car park for going babysitting on the mainland
Dalila	F	60	San Polo	lifelong	Bead stringer (*impiraressa*)	Workplace
Sandra	F	68	Dorsoduro	1980s	Retired (teacher)	Cinema; clothing shops
Alvise	M	68	San Polo	lifelong	Retired (civil servant, driver)	Grocery shopping; former workplace
Diana	F	68	San Marco	1980s	Retired (university management)	Traghetto; former workplace
Giampiero	M	78	Castello	lifelong	Retired (shipyard worker, unionist)	-
Eleonora	F	79	Dorsoduro	youth, returned in 2010s	Retired (social worker, assessor)	Grocery shopping
Milena	F	76	San Polo	lifelong	Retired (teacher)	Grocery shopping; boutique; second-hand shop
Vittorio	M	78	Dorsoduro	youth, returned in 2000s	Retired (researcher)	Train station
Raffaella	F	71	Dorsoduro	1970s	Retired (school technician)	Grocery shopping
Adele	F	77	Dorsoduro	lifelong	Retired (teacher)	Food market; ferry stop to swimming pool

Table 1 shows the sample details including an age range between 60 and 82 (74 on average), with inclusion of seven men and eight women. All participants have the Italian nationality, whereas two also have a foreign nationality. They are lifelong or long-term Venice residents, and some returned or migrated to the city following family, work or educational careers. The interview with Giampiero was a sedentary interview because he felt safer and more comfortable when sitting down to talk. The interview was maintained for this analysis, because it equally engaged with the topics about walking mobility and tourism impacts. All other interviews took place on habitual journeys to everyday activities, such as going to the shop, bank, breakfast place, workplace, etc. (Table 1). The interview with Luigi and Adele was a joint interview, whereas parts of the interviews with Alvise and Diana consisted of boat journeys. The walking routes were based on their routines and preferences at that moment and are shown in Figure 1. All participants joined under informed consent, whereas identifiable details, including start and end points of the walking routes, were anonymised and names were pseudonymised. These measures comply with the regulations, ethics and data management provisions set and approved by the ethics committee of the Universitat Rovira i Virgili (ID CEIPSA-2.021-PR-0037).

*[**Figure 1**: Walking interview routes across Venice's historical centre]*



3.3. Data analysis

The 15 walking interviews created an active and conversational setting between researcher and participant that included spatial prompts to stimulate conversations about mobile behaviours, access, and biographical relationships. In this sense, the technique allowed us to

understand peoples' experiences of their local residential context and obtain insights into everyday mobility while recognising their collective socio-relational realities (Manderscheid 2014). Nevertheless, the methodology also conditioned our sample and data to revolve around mobile activities, in this case walking, although we attempted to minimise the practical burden by allowing participants to choose habitual routes, meet at times and places of their choice, or even postpone or refrain from walking in case they felt insecure or during adverse weather conditions.

The interviews were conducted in Italian and the audio files were transcribed using the transcription software *Trint*. The transcriptions were corrected by the interviewer, who also took field notes to describe the most relevant contents and record contextual information such as the atmosphere and crowdedness of the city. Transcriptions and field notes were entered into the thematic analysis software *ATLAS.ti*. Closed coding, following the methodological framework of the wider research project in which this study took place, led to an identification of six coding categories: 'ageing', 'city', 'Covid-effects', 'own leisure', 'tourism effects – city', and 'tourism effects – neighbourhood'. The analysis for this paper concentrated on the categories 'ageing', 'tourism effects – city', and 'tourism effects – neighbourhood'. The different sub-codes were explored, cross-checked and clustered which resulted in three broad themes that the next section will relate to the key questions of this paper: effects of tourism and touristification, experiences of mobility and immobility, and negotiations and coping strategies. In the next section, we will firstly outline the walking practices and place qualities that participants derive from walking in Venice, before detailing these three themes.

4. LIVING WITH TOURISM IN LATER LIFE IN VENICE

The map in Figure 1 shows a cartographic representation of the web of streets, bridges, ramps, stairs, and boat trips that string together everyday mobilities in historic Venice. They are tightly connected to water, as walking routes are bordered or interrupted by canals and lagoon, and water-based travel forms part of most participants' habitual routes. Yet, participants recognise that this urban structure opposes the needs to age in place: "For the older people, Venice is an adversary. It's not good because there are bridges, it's not good because the houses don't have elevators" (Edoardo). The question is thus what keeps these people in Venice, especially given the exodus of permanent residents during the last decades.

The dense, close-knit community that Venice once was still offers the opportunities and infrastructures of a vivid neighbourhood life (Latham and Layton 2019; Van Hoof et al. 2021). Several participants mention a sense of affection, luck or privilege to ageing in place in Venice as if the beauty of the city and its peculiar morphology create a perfect environment to age actively. The beauty of the city can be a walking incentive, while participants also walk to prevent health issues or for keeping social relations. Despite the long-term residence of almost all participants, they speak of discovering new places and continue to find that Venice offers, for instance, social activities, food markets, shops, sports facilities (gym, swimming pool), museums, art studios, or boutiques. Walking is what connects these activities, importantly without interference of motorised land traffic. Mattia (78, San Marco) emphasises that the absence of vehicles, fumes and noise results in more social interactions

so that “you meet people, which you cannot do on the mainland from the confines of your car. So Venice is a city that allows you to socialise”.

In general, most participants derive a sense of belonging from walking in a convenient and familiar environment. Participants take pride in living in Venice, interchangeably related to its history, craftsmanship, culture, and rivalry with the mainland. Besides to place qualities, they attribute value to social relations and local cultures. Mattia demonstrates this in his morning commute to his art studio, in which he frequently stops to greet neighbours and friends and invites the researcher to have a coffee in a café that exposes his works. Participants thus undertake mundane socio-cultural activities at places such as cafés and bars, also including having the *aperitivo*, gatherings at squares (*campi*) where they bring drinks, food, play music, or simply buy the newspaper. Other frequent local activities include cultural offers such as concerts, museums, palaces and cinemas, and artist studios, meetings of neighbourhood or political associations (*circoli*), or going to specialised food stalls[i]. Although several participants find their social life in the city limited, most engage in cultural and civic activities and share a social or cultural concern for the city.

4.1. Tourism impacts on living circumstances and everyday mobility

While people tie together these activities with carefully crafted walking mobilities, seemingly open to social encounter, the interviews also show the surreal context in which participants make their way between multitudes of tourists and tourist shops and recognise the few familiar faces of fellow residents. Unsurprisingly, the strongest analytical theme is the impact of tourism on walking mobility, the neighbourhood, and the entire historical city. We divide the most numerous expressions into four types: social and cultural, environmental, housing and commerce, and physical effects. The physical effects are most prominent, particularly the overcrowding and the queues, crowds, and occupation of public spaces and terraces. The second most numerous code relates to changes to housing and commerce, in particular consisting of the tourist housing stock and occupation and the quality of shops and product offerings. For instance, (good quality) products or appliances are no longer available in the HC and now require travelling to the mainland or purchasing online. Participants particularly highlight the growing and excessive presence of hostels, bars, bed and breakfasts, and Airbnb apartments, while cheap and fresh essential products become scarcer. Dalila (60, San Polo) describes the changes in her neighbourhood:

> “All the neighbourhood shops and various services… There used to be haberdasheries, now there’s practically nothing. You live on masks and junk. We can fill the fridge with magnets because they sell those everywhere. This used to be a butcher, now it is a bar. (…) In the 2010s, it was really an explosion of shops, b&b’s and bars like we have never seen.”

Thirdly, the social and cultural impacts of tourism relate to a decrease of sociability and cultural offer on the streets and at cultural venues. At times, participants are fully occupied with crossing crowded spaces, impeding to see familiar faces and stopping for a talk. As potential meeting places often fulfil tourist demands, many participants undertake their social lives in small, closed circles or at local associations. Interestingly, relative newcomers such as Sandra comment that they do not usually mix with long-term Venetians. Family life,

in addition, has reduced over time because younger generations no longer can or want to live in Venice due to the limited availability of affordable housing, education, and social life. Similarly, cultural traditions such as rowing techniques and crafts are decreasingly passed on to new generations. Intergenerational contacts reduce, clearly impacted by structural and tourism-driven changes as Nicola (82, San Marco) explains in two instances:

> "All this, what you see from ground to sky, these are all second homes. Everything! And families I remember that lived here left or died. I knew many of them very well, (…) the only one still dwelling here is a lady with a little girl. We are in an absolute desert."

> "Look, there are kids playing here. These are the last of those who live here and play. This is a spot which, let's say, resembles a place of residence, as it used to be. The squares used to be full of children. (…) But now, playing ball while these [tourists] are [eating at the table] is very difficult. So you restrict the space for children, who may be playing ball, because otherwise they'd end up fighting."

Lastly, participants share environmental concerns about the impacts of the city's tourism-oriented ecosystem, even though the interviews did not explicitly enquire this topic. The pollution and noise from cruise liners is a recurrent notion, as well as the wave damage caused by boats, noise levels when mooring, the lacking investment in their electrification, and the general increase in water traffic for instance due to web shop deliveries and tourist taxis.

The changes to structural components of the city, such as its spaces for social, cultural and commercial offer and the housing stock, can be extended to a wider loss of public and private services. Hospitals, education, food shops, DIY stores, and services for domestic work, healthcare and legal aid have either closed or moved to the mainland. Participants mention that, simultaneously, building owners turn their properties into hotels, bars, etc. to maximise profits. A particular service under pressure is that of domestic assistance, a common way for older Venetians to support ageing in place due following difficulties to navigate the city, carry goods, climb the stairs, etc. Domestic workers can no longer afford housing in Venice and have long travel times to access the city. As families and younger friends have often moved away too, both formal and informal care networks are becoming extinct, and people depend on private expenses to cover for basic health needs, such as medical transport.

The impacts of tourism and tourist mobilities on residents' everyday lives do not come separately but are lived in conjunction. When service levels decrease, for example, walking routes become longer and demands for formal and informal care networks become more time consuming or costly. In spatial terms, crucial connections between parts of the city (e.g. foot bridges accessed by stairs) are also the most crowded streets and beaten-track tourist routes. During the walking interviews, participants traverse these spaces at their own pace – some go considerably faster than the gazing tourists, whereas others take their time to get up the steps or use mobility aids such as a cane. Crossing the bridges with such aids is a relational effort, as Alvise (68) explains, "it can be impossible when you're in a wheelchair and the person assisting you is also 80 years old". Another instance where important connections and tourist accumulations intersect is at bridges and boat stops which, besides their

connecting functions, are also a “perfect photo spot where tourists stop to take pictures” (Sandra, 68).

4.2. Negotiations and coping mechanisms

The second key theme is the way in which participants respond to, cope with, or otherwise negotiate tourism impacts on everyday walking mobilities and, by extension, on accessibility, health, and active ageing opportunities. Building on earlier works about coping strategies, negative sentiments and discontent (Boissevain 1996; Novy and Colomb 2016), we distinguish their occurrence in lived mobility experiences and contextualised in mobility biographies. Participants’ walking mobilities clash physically with tourism and tourists, as participants mention “making useless efforts” (Vittorio), “danger” and rude behaviours, especially after midday (Milena), and keeping their walking to the very essential trips (Aya). This results in bodily mobilisation, ‘fencing’ of activities within closed social and spatial circles, and temporal decision-making, all negotiations that make walking and other mobile functions less likely, less pleasant, and increase levels of cognitive pressure.

Beyond direct tourism impacts, the hindrances to walking mobility also extend to heritage conservation and climatic events. Regarding the former, many bridges and stairs do not contain accessibility ramps given their presumed aesthetic impact. As Raffaella (71) comments, “the city has to be lived (…), always within certain limits, but these limits do not mean touching anything at all”. High water and bad weather are further hindrances to walking mobility, especially when walking spaces are easily saturated. One participant recalls how these hindrances amplified when she used crutches:

> “To cross the bridges was a disaster, because I had to [go with crutches]. There were people taking pictures. It's not that they are bad people, [but] they don't see you. You don't exist. You are outside of their world, they are on holiday and others don't exist. We had to ask them to move because I had to hold on [to the railings] to cross the bridge. If you have mobility problems, that's a real problem.” (Sandra, 68)

This striking invisibility in plain sight of the tourist gaze is what further complicates the use of an already inaccessible urban structure. Firstly, these hindrances shape the rhythm, pace, and company in which older adults traverse the streets. They define the choice of transport, as some prefer to walk longer distances rather than take the *vaporetto*, to avoid the ‘hassle’ of waiting on crowded platforms until the next one arrives. Secondly, participants’ spaces of activity and mobility may shrink or expand following the structural changes to the city. Besides preferring to walk to avoid the overcrowded ferries, they may need to walk further or access the mainland connection to find essential products, electric appliances, or do the weekly shopping. Dalila (60) used to do the latter with her boat, but she has lost her mooring space to boat taxis and gondolas. At the same time, some participants take measures to go out as little as possible or stock up food supplies. This excerpt from the interview with Edoardo [E] shows the fusion of mobility negotiations with rising prices, housing concerns and class issues, as he encounters a friend [F] while the talks about his broken washing machine:

> [E:] We stock up on food and wine in Venice. And if we need to buy an electrical appliance, which we will this afternoon because the washing machine has raised the

white flag [sees a friend]. Good morning! [explains to interviewer:] You see, that's one of the good things about Venice.

[F:] What's up?

[E:] That you find friends!

[F:] To meet and get lost in talking. We're all the same. (…) Comrades, equals in the wind.

[E:] I was telling you that for certain things in Venice you can't get supplies. For example, there are no children's shops, because the Venetians are old and there are few children. There are no cheap electrical appliance shops, just one or two in total. And because rents are so high, products are also expensive. I was looking at an advertisement of a real estate company yesterday and the rents for the shops ranged from €5,000 a month upwards.

Other coping mechanisms do not always show themselves explicitly, as they seem part of a wider sense of resignation towards the changes that have taken place in residents' lifetime. For instance, many participants repeatedly mention the homes of neighbours, shops, cafes, bakeries, workshops, factories, etc. that are now closed or turned into tourist shops, private schools or other facilities serving the short-term economy, often conscious that the memories of these places will disappear over time. An exception to these implicit coping mechanisms is the participation of some interviewees in activism and vindication activities to celebrate or remember Venetian traditions such as gondola rowing (*voga veneta*) and industrial glassmaking. Owning a boat likewise helps some to escape the city by going on trips in the lagoon or the Adriatic Sea. Dalila (60), in turn, has reoriented her family business as *impiraressa*, stringing beads and pearls, a traditional job for female artisans, to offer products and tours to visitors. Together, the (c)overt ways to cope with tourism, the hiding and invisibility of mobilities, the fencing, the bottled up memories, and the sense of surrender provide a diverse picture of coping mechanisms among the remaining resident collective.

4.3. Ageing-related challenges in slow mobilities

The hindrances and coping mechanisms (4.1 and 4.2) reach a crucial point when we bring in the third theme, grouping specific older age challenges. Besides the reduced walkability, the physical efforts, and the challenge to find familiar spaces and services, participants mention they are unable to adapt their everyday mobilities to the ageing body. While most have relatively active lifestyles in terms of social and cultural activities, tourism mobilities directly amplify the access issues to streets, squares, boats (public transport), carrying goods in a walking-only environment, etc. For instance, they complicate the use of the *carrello* trolleys and its purpose as mobility aid: "The overwhelming majority of Venetians have a trolley at home to carry weight by hand" (Alvise), as users apply a special technique to carry it up and down stairs, ramps and bridges. In other instances, they find how street furniture and boat seats are used by tourists: "I had crutches because I had broken my ankle. I asked a tourist, a young girl, if she could stand up and she said no, she showed me another place to sit" (Sandra).

More indirectly, participants mention the impacts of the progressive loss of permanent residents. It means feeling torn between two options: leaving the city for a place with better mobility options and service levels or persevering in a city where neighbours go away, families can no longer live, and daily mobilities are hindered. Diana mentions how she would be helpless without an elevator in her home, whereas Edoardo anticipates leaving Venice if losing his fitness. Those inclined to stay contemplate how they may become stuck in their apartments like many other older friends and relatives. Eleonora explains that Venice contains many "invisible" older adults with serious mobility issues. They cannot move independently and rely on volunteer associations or companies to bring food and other essentials. Alvise comments on his reluctance towards escaping this confinement: "Either you go out of Venice and live on the mainland, which even the elderly Venetians don't even think about, or you stay at home, basically in a small ghetto area".

The prospective confinement to the home or the immediate step-free surroundings expose an experiential link between the depopulating city and the fate of later life. Nicola (82) explains his mixed emotions, with the city's beauty and his lifelong memories on the one hand, but on the other its abandonment by residents, including loved ones, up to expressing a sense of surrender about his own life and that of the city: "This is it. As for the residents, we are waiting for the end. When I die I will come to a similar end. I have no heirs, I mean I do, but only nephews who live elsewhere, who have a life of their own and who will never want to live here. No one will live here permanently." In turn, Edoardo recalls a painful experience related to the very materiality of Venetian buildings, as he shares the memory of the corpse of his mother being transported through the stairs in a sack, because it was not possible to carry the stretcher through the staircase. Eventually, this mix of structural limitations of an unadapted, old city and the tourism-driven sense of abandonment creates a bittersweet mechanism of dealing with family property as older neighbours pass away:

> "Now they are reforming the last part [of the house] where a lady died. What is the mechanism then? It is: the old person dies living alone, already grown-up children live elsewhere. What do the children do? The children, who already have their own residence and their own life, do not come to live in the elderly parent's house. They have two options: either sell it or make an income. How? Not for the benefit of another resident – that would already be a good thing – no, they put it into short-term rental market, because they earn much more." (Nicola)

The progressive abandonment of the city is accompanied by institutional neglect of the centre's remaining population. Giampiero, a lifelong resident of the former industrial neighbourhood Castello, confirms that the next step would be for Venice to "(...) become a museum. When one also removes, let's say, the institutional representation it won't work anymore." Services that are crucial during old age, or even death, decline due to budget cuts or considerate choices to maintain Venice's heritage untouched. For instance, accessible ramps to cross bridges have been installed only sparsely or temporarily, hospital transport is no longer subsidised, and municipal services for houses without elevators and for assistance with boat access no longer exist. The consequent encouragement of older residents' stuckness and the city's fixity in time, fenced by tourists' intense walking flows, spur the

gradual decay and leave the city devoid of the objects, memories, and social functions that physically attach people to places (Sheller 2018; Urry 2004).

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper manifested older residents' capacities to live in an overtouristed city, despite the infiltration of tourism's impacts into all aspects of its residential life (Salerno and Russo 2022). In addition, it found that, over time, mobility biographies may incorporate negotiation strategies and coping mechanisms that show the ambivalence of the tourist city as an unlimited walking space. Urban projections of slow mobility do thus not unequivocally lead to imaginaries of freedom, as urban space promotes the walking of one type of mobile agent and confines that of another (Salazar 2020; Sheller, 2018). The case of Venice's porous and walkable urban fabric illuminates the ambivalence of immobility in hypermobile contexts – on the one hand, staying put (as residents) in the face of the centrifugal pressure exerted by tourism perpetrates a condition of privilege; on the other, immobilised as a result of unattainable spatial routines hinting at marginalisation. The preoccupations and emotive experiences of becoming frail, as shared in this study, thus resemble the fading of the city as a lived place, devoid of activities and services that support ageing in place and extend to the most basic necessities for residents of any age.

What remains, for now, are mobilities and activities of an increasingly thinning and ageing resident population, in which tourism conditions which bodies can (choose to) age actively through a kaleidoscope of coping practices that might be one of the most outstanding traits of the emerging geographies of risk in cities. The extreme case of Venice's overtouristed space thus contributes to an understanding of how 'less motile' citizens negotiate this condition, through increased physical and cognitive efforts, 'invisible' mobilities, confining their activities in time and space, and surrendering to the city's fate. These negotiations happen in the present, through spatial and temporal avoidances of certain places, and as part of future aspirations mediated by experiences and expectations around the ageing body. Within the older population's long-term embodied relationship with the city, tourist mobilities thus complicate 'ageing well', turning the relative privilege of long-term residents into reduced mobility opportunities and (prospective) confinement. This opposition is lived and manifested between traditions, memories, local pride, and socio-spatial limits, which act as culturally sensitive coping mechanisms that echo extreme situations such as pandemic lockdowns (Zuev and Hannam 2021). Transnational mobilities and related place changes enact performances, coping strategies, and (im)mobilities that discriminate between bodily capabilities and uncover the collateral nature of tourism impacts on residents' ageing in place, overpowered by and stuck between global power relations and local tourism management choices (López-Gay, Cocola-Gant, and Russo 2021; Salerno and Russo 2022).

Paradoxically, thus, we learn that the slow city may become a 'stuck' city, as residents' walkability is hindered by 'other' walking mobilities and declining urban services, and as capacities and resources to avoid or escape from stuckness dwindle (Smith et al., 2018). This stuckness amplifies the structural hindrances to being a walkable place (old houses, stairs, bridges, uneven paving, public transport issues). While walking was highly present and multi-purposed as mobility practice among participants, Venice's place features now suppress

access to commercial, cultural, and social spaces and other ingredients for healthy ageing (Van Hoof et al. 2021). Tourism has preyed on these spaces to become thoroughfare channels and consumption spaces, removing their functions as social infrastructures and criteria for walkability. By extension, the bundled effects of dwindling proximity to services and the erosion of solidarity networks culminate with the structural deficiencies of the city into a kind of exclusion that affects a population that stretches beyond the (older) groups usually cited as vulnerable to (tourism-related) urban change. The lock-in of older residents, in our case in a dense walking environment, and the lack of agency in the wake of community change (Buffel and Phillipson 2019; Stjernborg et al., 2015) is thus driven to the extreme and locally experienced as quantitative and qualitative destruction.

In conclusion, this paper exposes the transformative power of touristification in the case of older age mobility. Recently shown in the case of class struggles (Mansilla and Milano 2022; Milano et al. 2023), we extend this to the expression of immobilisation forces that lock-in an ageing population and sidelines its socio-spatial needs. Whereas a compact tourist city may offer proximity, it also reinforces overcrowding risks and passage barriers. This study thus shows the possible downsides of slow mobility in urban environments. The social effects of touristification are diffuse: older residents interviewed in this study may benefit from increasing prices of their property while preserving a sense of belonging engraved upon places and memories, but are, notably in this study, excluded from access to urban mobility, amenities, and services, and find their hometown stripped from social and residential functions. To revert these trends, slower tourism could be part of the solution, not only in terms of mobilities in situ, but implying much lower numbers staying in the city for longer times and being less intrusive to local livelihoods; and at the same time, recuperating 'faster' mobility, to facilitate access to jobs, services, social ties in the hinterland or even reattracting alternative economic specialisations and investments. Both options, unfortunately, are not at hand today, the former for the unstoppable and endogenously transformative expansion of the visitor market (Russo 2002), the latter for the very high degree of preservation to which the city and the lagoon environment are subject.

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[i] The outdoor food market stalls appear as part of socio-cultural activities, as they are described as places of authentic personal relations and resistance, where dedicated and recognisable local farmers sell good quality and sustainably produced groceries.