

Comune di Venezia with Insula spa

Presentation of the bilingual edition

Venice Urban Maintenance

Insula: 10 years of public works for the city

martedì 6 luglio 2010, ore 17.30

UNESCO Venice Office, Palazzo Zorzi, Castello 4930, Venezia

Greetings

Engelbert Ruoss director of the UNESCO Venice Office

Introduction

Alessandro Maggioni Councilor for Public Works of the City of Venice

Speakers

Renata Codello Superintendent for the Cultural Heritage and Landscape of Venice and the Lagoon

John Millerchip Representative of The Venice in Peril Fund, London

Giampaolo Sprocati President of Insula spa

The event is open to everyone; all those attending will be given a copy of the book

Venice Urban Maintenance gathers ten years of experience in preservation, offering specific descriptions of the problems that were encountered and the solutions that were adopted. Intended not only for specialists in the field, the objective of the new bilingual edition in Italian and English, the publication of which was sponsored by local contractors, is to widen interest in issues regarding preservation at the precise moment when the Special Law for Venice is in the process of reassessment, and the routine maintenance of the city is becoming increasingly urgent. The English edition therefore becomes a metaphorical bridge towards international institutions, private committees and individual citizens.

The book “tells the story” of the buildings, the canals, the paving, the embankments, the bridges, the utility grids, the system for channeling waste water, all the elements that “shape” Venice to make it both alive and livable.

Understanding how these elements of the urban fabric work is to realize how unique a city Venice is, and how important it is to ensure constant planned maintenance.

press information

Insula spa

Manuela Lamberti

041 2724134

347 8628886

manuela.lamberti@insula.it

Comune di Venezia with Insula spa

Presentation of the bilingual edition

Venice Urban Maintenance

Insula: 10 years of public works for the city

Venice is a city immersed in the primary cause of its urban decay, salt water. The erosive power of the sea and its salinity pose a daily threat to the preservation of the city and its livability. The results lie before our eyes: the constant erosion of the foundations and structural faults that are often critical.

There is no city in the world that requires the work that Venice does, where streets, squares, canals and *piazze* are as important as the monuments. This heritage must be defended and preserved day after day. Paradoxically, one might say that the city's ordinary maintenance is – in and of itself – absolutely extra-ordinary maintenance, and it therefore becomes indispensable to rely on specialized contractors and strategically planned and coordinated interventions, and to identify a specific category of “*functional restoration*” for Venice, that goes beyond “ordinary” and “extra-ordinary” to address a range of problems within the single objective of preservation.

At a time when the Government and the City of Venice have resumed their discussion of the Special Law which – now more than ever – is essential for the maintenance of the city, at a time when funding is dwindling making it impossible to plan the processes in the long-term, Insula has decided to print the English-language version of its book “Venezia manutenzione urbana – Venice Urban Maintenance”. The reason is quickly said: this is a surprising and spectacular overview of the most sophisticated urban maintenance process in the world. Drained canals, raised streets, pedestrian paths, ancient foundations that tell centuries of history. And the English language helps to bring these projects to international attention, to spread the message of how important it is to create a systemic network that gathers all the public and private entities who truly care about the preservation of this heritage of humanity. For this very reason, the presentation of this new book in the headquarters of UNESCO, at Palazzo Zorzi, is intended to raise international awareness of the culture of urban maintenance and the preservation of the scientific and cultural heritage of Venice.

Historically, from the Austrian occupation to the post-World War periods, the preservation processes have been fragmentary and unstructured: the interventions demonstrated little coherence, and there was never any attempt to make the works systematic; they were carried out with dissimilar techniques, and with inadequate assessments of their impact, which was often negative for the territory.

The change documented by this book consists in having provided an organic systemization for the skills and typologies of intervention, and related them to their context. And this made it possible to overcome this limitation which, on another occasion, Superintendent Renata Codello defined as the “myopia” of past interventions, which were often “done for the sake of doing”, making it necessary to “de-restore” them.

This made it possible to pave the way towards the definition of intervention typologies and modalities which later delineated actual “protocols”, such as the one on handling the *masegni*, the paving stones, but they need to be further developed for other typologies such as embankments and bridges, situations that are now perfectly understood, in all of their implications. It must not be forgotten that these experiences raised the awareness that the preservation of the heritage does not just concern the more important monuments, but – as in the case of Venice – also concerns the city squares, streets and bridges.

As Insula and the City of Venice have often pointed out, Venice requires an incisive complex of works for the preservation of its urban and architectural heritage, from the restoration of the embankment walls to the continued operation of its sewer system, from the restoration of the bridges to raising the level of the paving stones, from upgrading the underground utilities to the completion of new grids. And last but not least, the importance of preserving the building heritage by works involving maintenance, restoration, preservation, renovation and new construction. Today, however, dwindling resources have transformed the planned maintenance operations into extraordinary and costly projects, with the risk of seeing the return of the severe conditions of deterioration that the city has experienced in the past.

Insula, the public company whose mission since 1997 has been to plan and execute the urban maintenance works for Venice and its islands, boasts 10 years of activity which have produced not only a complex of works whose purpose was to preserve the integrity of the foundations and to improve sanitary conditions and the quality of life, but a legacy of technicians and contractors who over the years, have created a virtuous cycle of production, expertise and qualified, hyper-specialized labour.

An acknowledgment is deserved by the craftsmen, the contractors, by all those who have worked to sustain these qualitative processes and have thus built a legacy of expertise to preserve and to improve day after day. To defend the contractors and the professionals operating with a strong sense of responsibility in the area of Venice, we believe it is important to conceive a method that would make it possible to forge the necessary “protocols” to introduce adequate requisites and parameters of quality and professional expertise, in order to preserve the Venetian heritage from under-qualified contractors.

The book

Venice Urban Maintenance tells the story of Insula's first ten years, focusing on the problems caused by deterioration in Venice and on the methodologies adopted by Insula to prevent it. This is an account of what the City of Venice has done for the city, through Insula, after decades of neglected urban maintenance.

The book describes all the activities of Insula divided into macro-themes (canals, embankments, sewer system, bridges, paving, etc.), with a language that can be understood by laymen: from dredging the canals to restoring the embankments, from raising the level of the paving to the modernization of the sewer system, from upgrading the underground utilities grids to building bridges.

From the very beginning, the company decided to carefully document the works, creating a vast photographic archive with over 15,000 pictures, classified individually by category of intervention, place and other search criteria.

Thanks to this initial decision, Insula now has at its disposition a "history" of the works it has completed in Venice from 1997 to the present, of which this book offers a reasoned selection.

Venice Urban Maintenance is an important tool for understanding the complexity of the city and for divulging and sharing the legacy of expertise that has been accumulated over ten years of work. A legacy of experience that will be indispensable in years to come, because the maintenance of the city must be constant and planned, to avoid the conditions of severe deterioration that the City was faced with ten years ago.

At a time when the Special Law is under discussion, urban maintenance takes first place in the need to preserve a fragile and complex reality such as Venice.



The second edition of this book, with the full translation in English, would have been impossible without the contribution of:
Gregolin lavori marittimi srl
Lavori marittimi e dragaggi spa
Rossi Renzo costruzioni srl
Sicop costruzioni e restauri srl

Publisher Vianello Libri
208 pages in colour
format 24x29 cm
400 illustrations
languages Italian and English
Texts by Massimo Cacciari,
Renata Codello, Paolo Sprocati,
Lionello Barbuio
Photography by Daniele Resini

Insula

Insula is an entirely public company, the operative arm of the City of Venice for the maintenance of the city and the public real-estate assets.

Insula plans, designs, contracts and coordinates the execution of public maintenance works, concentrating the responsibilities for planning and tendering the works in one single subject. The complexity of the city's structure in fact requires a superior systemic specialization of the subjects involved in both planning and coordinating the work, and in the material execution.

To solve the problems created over time by neglect and the inexorable corrosion by the salt water, Insula operates on the territory with a complex of works to preserve the city's urban and architectural heritage:

- from restoring the embankment walls to guarantee the stability of the canal edges and buildings, to keeping the historic sewer system in working condition to ensure optimal hygienic and sanitary conditions;
- from restoring bridges and raising the level of the paving, to keeping pedestrian circulation clear even when the tides are high, to the modernization of the underground utilities systems (water, electrical power, gas and telephone lines) and the completion of new networks;
- from small maintenance works to restoration, conservation and reconstruction processes to preserve the building heritage.

History

Insula was founded on July 10 1997 as a consequence of the Special Law for Venice n.139/1992 which mandated a structural approach to the city's maintenance, establishing that the works were to be implemented so as to guarantee technical homogeneity in the planning phase, coordination during the construction phase, and integration of the financial resources.

The founding partners were the City of Venice (with 52% of the capital) and the utilities companies (Italgas spa, Aspiv spa, Ismes spa and Telecom Italia spa). On October 6 the City of Venice stipulated a ten-year service contract with Insula, which regulated the rights and obligations of each part. Insula's shareholders remained substantially the same through June 2007, when the private partners relinquished their shares to Vesta spa (now Veritas spa), and Insula became an entirely public company, reinforcing its role as the operative arm of the City of Venice in the implementation of urban maintenance works and infrastructure.

Edilvenezia was founded in 1983 as directed by the Special Law for Venice n.171/1973, and in particular by the Dpr n. 791/1973 as an operative instrument dedicated to the regeneration of minor buildings in the historic city centre.

Until early 2008, the shareholders of Edilvenezia were the Government (with Fintecna spa), the City of Venice, the Regione Veneto, the Provincia di Venezia and private partners (Ance – Associazione costruttori edili e affini, and Co.i.p.e.s spa - Consorzio di iniziative e promozione dell'edilizia sociale). Over the years, the company has become a reference in the field of management and maintenance of public housing.

As a result of Insula's acquisition, in the first semester of 2008, of the shares held by the private partners, followed by the conferral to Insula of the shares held by the City of Venice, Edilvenezia became an entire public company.

The merger between Insula and Edilvenezia

To rationalize the system of the City's participations and considering the new legislative scenario in the matter of public companies, on 22 December 2008 Insula and Edilvenezia merged to create a single important public company.