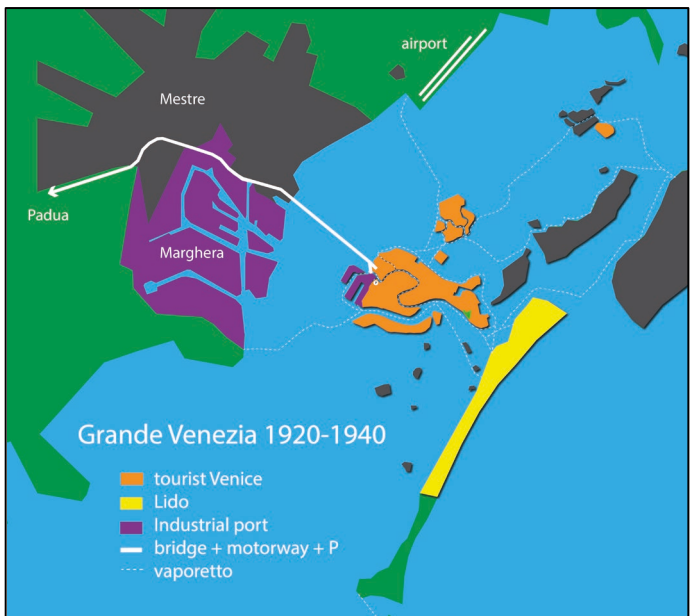


## A deliberate choice

### Venice

While Mussolini remodelled Rome as the nation's capital, with tourism as a side benefit, Venice went all-in on international mass tourism.

That started with the construction of the new industrial terrain of Marghera on the mainland as a site for modern industry. Businesses on the islands that comprise the historic city centre of Venice also had to relocate there to make room for the tourists.

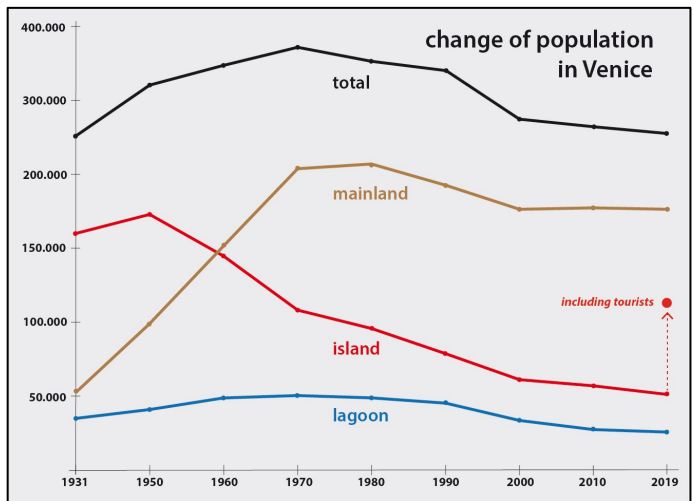


New residential districts were also built on the mainland. This led to a mass displacement of locals from the islands.



Incidentally, the district of Mestre that they moved to is still part of the municipality of Venice.

This process of relocation continued up to 1970, after which the population on the mainland stabilized, although numbers of permanent residents on the touristy central island continued to decline.



In recent years, videos have started to appear on television and social media implying that overtourism is responsible for locals fleeing the tourist-dominated central island. That conclusion seems premature. When residents who had moved out were asked in a survey why they had left, they gave various reasons. Examples were that renovating historic buildings is too expensive, the jobs are on the mainland, there is not enough room for the children to play, and they prefer to have a car parked out front because the water transport is slow and indirect. Mass tourism barely registered as a factor. Incidentally, rent controls were abolished in Venice back in 1923, long before Lisbon (2007). As a consequence of the decline in the local population, some 5,000 of the 30,000 homes in Venice's tourist centre are unoccupied.

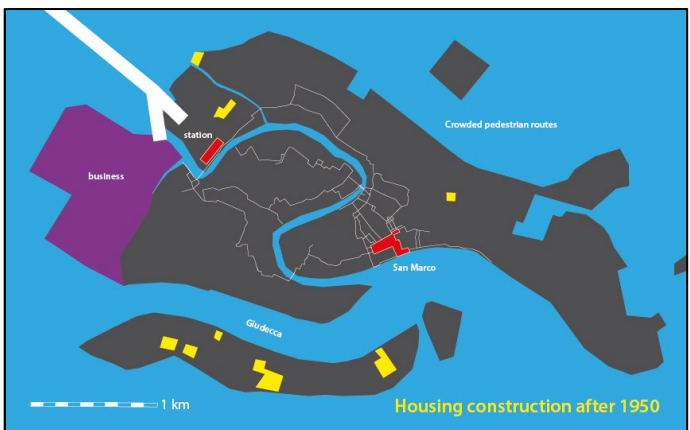


Now private homeowners, often living in Mestre, are using the proceeds from holiday rentals to do up their dilapidated properties in the centre — so

that's thanks to tourism rather than despite tourism. Or they sell their former homes to investors and property developers, who then do the same.

This has led to an increase everywhere in holiday rentals of private accommodation (two-thirds of all homes). This form of tourism gentrification is also seen in Lisbon, Berlin and other cities with a lot of cheap private accommodation in a poor state of repair near the tourist centre.

With industry vanishing and residents relocating to Mestre, the municipality decided after 1950 that it would have to build new homes to stop Venice from going into an irreversible decline. Corporations built various social housing complexes on the southern island of Giudecca in particular, the place with the most industry. The residents here were not affected by the tourism because most tourists congregated in the area between the station and Piazza San Marco.



Students and artists disrupted the harmony, however, during the Venice Biennale in 2018 by highlighting the unacceptable behaviour of the housing corporations, which had stopped maintenance work on their properties due to a lack of funds.



Venice, it seems, is constantly on the back foot. Now all the media attention is focused on the overcrowding due to the day trippers.

They treat the city with its ubiquitous tourist shops like a theme park. This is mainly what we mean when we speak of 'Venicization'.



Amsterdam and Bruges, among other places, have plenty of experience with this too. Cities with a historic centre and UNESCO world heritage status are hugely popular with tourists anyway. But try living there.

Venice is fortunate in that most of the recreational tourists have gone by the evening.



The cruise ships with their hugely damaging waves have moved on elsewhere. In contrast to the annual floods, we hear relatively little about the pollution and general wear and tear caused by the tourists. The municipality is trying to keep that under control with various campaigns.

But while the municipality realizes there is little it can do to reduce overcrowding on the vaporetti, this issue is a major sore point for local residents. Here in particular we see the flip side to the feeling of alienation and estrangement.

Mass tourism is a business model that cannot be stopped.