

Together for Change

Inaugural Address by the Rector Tiziana Lippiello

“Sire, now I have told you about all the cities I know.”

“There is still one of which you never speak.”

Marco Polo bowed his head.

“Venice,” the Khan said.

Marco smiled: “What else do you believe I have been talking to you about?”

The emperor did not turn a hair. “And yet I have never heard you mention that name.”

And Polo said: “Every time I describe a city, I am saying something about Venice.”

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

Honourable Minister of University and Research Annamaria Bernini, civil, military and religious authorities, president of the CRUI, rectors, vice-rectors, delegates, department directors, presidents and directors of the Benedetto Marcello Conservatory and of the Academy of Fine Arts of Venice, colleagues from the teaching, technical-administrative, scientific and library staff, students, PhD students, dear guests and friends, welcome to the opening ceremony of the 156th academic year of Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Greetings to the President of the Teatro Stabile del Veneto Giampiero Beltotto; thank you for hosting us and for your robust collaboration.

1 Our Research to Meet Global Challenges

In his book *Invisible Cities* (1972), Italo Calvino evokes Marco Polo, whose seven hundredth anniversary we are celebrating this year, and the city of Venice, always present on his journey to the East. I wish to dedicate the inauguration ceremony of the academic year to this important anniversary, which is so significant for our city and for our country.

I would like to thank and greet our guest, professor Nicola Di Cosmo of the prestigious Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, who studied at Ca' Foscari and is now an expert on relations between Europe and Asia, and between Venice and the Mongols in the late Middle Ages in a global perspective.

“ ***The challenges faced by Venice and its metropolitan area today are as global as those faced by Marco Polo as he ventured into unknown and hostile lands*** ”

The challenges faced by Venice and its metropolitan area today are as global as those faced by Marco Polo as he ventured into unknown and hostile lands: we feel a civic responsibility to safeguard and protect our city in order to promote a sustainable future, actively guiding the ongoing transition.

Venice is unique: though it's fragile environmentally and socio-economically, it also offers a unique and privileged space for experimentation.

In this regard, I would like to mention some of our ongoing projects, financed with European, national and regional funds.

The first three projects I would like to present are financed through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, supporting this extraordinary and fragile city, in a region that is a treasured cultural heritage unlike any other in the world.

Together with local communities and institutions, we plan how and how much to promote, unveil and narrate the story of our territories. It is an immersion in the past and the future, from archaeology to management and cultural heritage, from the global dissemination of the Italian language, culture and art - this year in particular through the figure of its ambassador par excellence, Marco Polo - to social, economic and environmental sustainability. We are the leader of “Spoke 9 Cultural Resources



Islands of the Lagoon: Lio Piccolo



The Bauhaus of the Seas Sails Consortium

Sustainable Tourism” of the *Cultural Heritage Active. Innovation for Sustainable Society (CHANGES)* project of the extended partnership dedicated to cultural heritage innovation for a sustainable society that can meet the challenges of climate change and digital transformation.

With a view to protecting and promoting the cultural heritage of the area, Ca’ Foscari is the leader of “Spoke 6 Tourism, Culture and Creative Industries”, which is part of the *Interconnected Nord-Est Innovation Ecosystem* project.

The *Future Farming* project, financed by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and by the partner company, focuses on industrial innovation and hi-tech: it provides a technological infrastructure for innovation to support industrial research and the transfer of technology in an area spanning the disciplines of life sciences, chemistry, engineering, information technology and design to identify industrial applications using nature as a production platform.

These are supported by projects on cybersecurity (*SERICS*), on sustainable finance (*GRINS*), and on the theme of ageing (*AGE-IT*), together which are being carried out in collaboration with many Italian universities and research centres.

The future of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan is very uncertain. That said, many researchers and fellows in the Italian university system are engaged in projects supported by it, and their future is key in our priorities.

Continuing on the topic of sustainability and environmental impact: Ca’ Foscari has been one of the first Italian universities to study the environmental effects of climate change, and

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our commitment goes back many years. The *ICE MEMORY* project aims to collect, save and manage ice cores from glaciers in the Antarctic dating back to the last million and a half years, now in danger of degradation or disappearance, with a view to preserving the information they contain. Their safeguarding is key to providing scientific advances: the knowledge on past climate and environment history, obtained through the ice cores, will continue to guide policy decisions that will contribute to the well-being of humanity. Our PhD programme in Polar Sciences, which has now become of National Interest, is also dedicated to research on these issues: the project, unique in Italy and among the few in the world, trains scientists to understand the effect of ongoing climate change on the polar areas. I would like to thank the universities that have joined the project.

“ **Scientific cooperation and an interdisciplinary approach are at the heart of EUTOPIA, the European alliance**

project, which aims to identify solutions for climate neutrality by focusing on different types of urban environments in Europe related to the sea, ocean, coastal areas and the mouths of important rivers. Here in Venice, the project will see the participation of the major stakeholders in the area of San Basilio and Santa Marta, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, IUAV, the Municipality of Venice and the Port Authority, to study solutions that favour the reconnection of local inhabitants with the lagoon environment.

To strengthen the link between business, economic, and cultural sectors we have created an innovation network called *MOSAICO*.

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In March, we will begin work on the *Horizon 2020 Bauhaus of the Seas Sails*



The *ICE MEMORY* Project in Antarctica



Former Caserma Pepe, Lido di Venezia

2 An Interdisciplinary and International University

We must not wait for the future: we have a duty to shape it together. Ca' Foscari's research and teaching are focused on an interdisciplinary approach.

For this reason, a few years ago we created the Ca' Foscari Research Hub for Global Challenges, which brings together six research fields focused on social, economic, and environmental challenges, with the aim of providing a stimulating and cutting-edge environment for scientific exchange and interaction between disciplines and scientific and geographical areas.

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Scientific cooperation and an interdisciplinary approach are at the heart of EUTOPIA, the European alliance: a network of ten universities, funded by the European Commission, whose aim is to collaborate on the creation of a new, integrated model of education, research, innovation and govern-

ance. Our plan is for the connections among these ten universities to promote teaching and research models that are innovative and interdisciplinary.

An interdisciplinary approach also increasingly characterises our training, with several degree courses being taught in English: e.g. Philosophy, International and Economic Studies; Environmental Humanities and the new inter-university programme Ancient Civilizations for the Contemporary World, jointly hosted with the University of Milan.

In addition, we offer courses that complement the curriculum for all courses of study: Contamination Labs and Minors, also in collaboration with private companies.

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In the last ten years, enrolment of students from abroad has grown by 88%. In the latest Censis Report, Ca' Foscari ranked first in Italy in terms of internationalisation and fourth in Europe for international mobility in the QS Europe ranking. Thanks to the numerous mobility agreements with universities all over the world, Ca' Foscari also offers over 740 international students the opportunity to spend a period of study at our university. In addition, every year we offer 1,150 Italian students the opportunity to study abroad.

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Ca' Foscari grows increasingly attractive to researchers from European and non-European universities. A few days ago we learned news of the 2023 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Post-doctoral Fellowships: our university received twenty fellowships for a total funding of 4.7 million euros, ranking among the top 10 European universities in terms of the number of fellowships won. Since 2014, we have been the Italian university winning the highest number of individual Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowships. To date, there are almost 200 Marie Skłodowska-Curie who now pursue international careers, and ambassadors of Ca' Foscari's research in the world.

There are 27 ERC grantees, having the most varied study paths, who testify to Ca' Foscari's ability to attract international talent and to offer concrete opportunities for professional growth.

Last year we were again recognised the 'HR Excellence in Research Award', a prestigious award given to institutions that are concretely committed to improving the recruitment and career development conditions of their scientific community.

In addition, the university's international policies have recently been recognised by the European Foundation for Management Development: Ca' Foscari's Venice School of Management has joined the five Italian business schools already accredited by EQUIS.

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3 Time to Assess Results

This year marks the halfway point of my term of office: it has been an intense period for all of us, in which universities had to deal with a completely changed world and learn to work together in new ways.

It's a time for deep reflection on the future of universities, and how best to make progress on priorities, organisation, and innovative teaching.

The university has to face a unique challenge - the training of our ruling class, our citizens, the development of the country: are the State, local authorities, civil society, companies willing to acknowledge this role? And are we ready to undertake it?

“ ***The University Housing network is to be understood not only as a service related to attractiveness, but as a surplus value for society, a driver of cultural, environmental and economic development*** ”

The concepts of time and space have taken on new meanings; though knowledge may travel among myriad new channels, the physical university with its face-to-face teaching remains vital. It continues to offer an indispensable and irreplaceable human experience, one that we all value enormously.

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The provision of adequate services for student life is a pressing concern: we committed to the issue in the Strategic Plan, entitled “Ca' Foscari: A Bridge Towards the Future”.

Some of these projects have already been completed, others have been launched.

We remain committed to the Venice Campus City ideal: we are creating a ‘scattered campus’, spread throughout the city, with new spaces, modern libraries and residences where students can fully experience a vibrant university, immersed in its locality and open to the world. In San Basilio, 1,100 new classroom seats and active laboratories for students, teachers, and companies will be created by 2025.

Thanks to Law 338, we will build a new residence on the premises of the former Caserma Pepe on the Lido.

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In Treviso, where Ca’ Foscari has been present for thirty years with the Interdepartmental School of Economics, Languages and Entrepreneurship for International Exchanges, an important project in collaboration with the Municipality is underway: a new building complex in the heart of the city.

Last December, with the collaboration of the Regional Authority for the Right to Education, whom I

thank, we opened a third student residence, in the Scientific Campus of Mestre. It provides accommodation for more than one thousand students, including the residences of San Giobbe and Santa Marta. There is of course still much to be done.

Also in collaboration with the Regional Authority for the Right to Education, by next year Palazzo Badoer will become an innovative service centre for Venetian students. We anticipate many new spaces for study, socialising and conviviality open until late in the evening. A first in the historic centre of Venice.

Students’ right to education must be a priority at national and regional level as education is a primary driver for social and economic development. We’re able to continue supporting the right to education thanks to new economic measures that integrate state and regional funds. In recent weeks a total of 3 million euro has been allocated over the three-year period.

Furthermore, other services designed to support Ca’ Foscari students during their university careers have been strengthened.

The university has launched ‘Spazio Ascolto’, a free counselling service providing students with an opportunity to express their

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difficulties and receive new tools to face and overcome them. The service is in high demand, a sign that young people have a strong need to talk about their fears without feeling judged.

The well-being of our community is at the centre of a number of initiatives that are particularly dear to us.

Recently, we've been collaborating with the Anti-violence Centre of the Municipality of Venice to support young women in recognizing and reporting the signs of violent behaviour. This includes the organization of a series of meetings and various other initiatives at the university.

Ca' Foscari was awarded the UNI/PdR 125 certification for gender equality, receiving the highest score possible, for the actions implemented to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

Additional resources will continue to be invested in support of a Welfare Plan for technical and administrative staff. Working from home is a well-established reality that improves work-life balance and also benefits productivity.

The University's Strategic Plan includes actions aimed at rationalising the consumption of resources and improving the efficiency of campus facilities, reducing energy consumption.

A major programme of interventions has been launched in twenty administrative offices, laboratories and classrooms,

covering a total area of about 500,000 cubic meters. Thanks to a public-private partnership, we will intervene to further reduce consumption.

Lastly, I would like to mention an initiative carried out to protect the health of our community and citizens: *Ca' Foscari cardioprotetta*. The project consisted in installing 24 automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in as many university

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Top:
San Basilio,
Tesa 4, Venice

Bottom:
Palazzo Badoer,
Venice

locations between Venice, Mestre and Treviso, and in training 289 employees on how to use them: these activities are a service for the whole city, and aligned with the University's Strategic Plan.

4 Conclusions

Over the next few years, we've set ourselves an ambitious challenge: to transform the city of Venice into a real campus; one that's able to welcome talents from all over the world and offer them robust services, with student needs at the centre of it all. But we can only do this hand-in-hand with our partner institutions and companies. Together.

I cannot conclude my speech without first mentioning the premature loss in 2023 of extraordinary colleagues and unforgettable friends, those to whom the university offers thanks and deepest gratitude: Federica Cavallo, Marco Ceresa, Mara co Palmieri, and Bonaventura Ruperti.

I've been able to briefly describe only a few of the university's many initiatives. Each one illustrates the skilled and passionate work done by the staff of Ca' Foscari and its Founda-

tion - every day. I want to thank the staff for the extraordinary commitment they bring, and the sense of belonging it uplifts for us all.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the general director and deputy vice-rector, the vice-rectors, the delegates, the directors of the departments and centres, the managers, the members of the Academic Senate, of the Board of Governors and all the university bodies, as well as to the general director of our Foundation.

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I would like to also thank the Representatives of the Student Assembly for the constructive debate and our students, who give meaning to our commitment every day.

Finally, I wish to thank the minister for being here with us and each and every one of you for your attention and participation.

We have once again reached the end of our inaugural ceremony. I declare the academic year 2023-24 of Ca' Foscari University of Venice officially open.

