new technologies for urban history

The Study of Urban History
Donatella Calabi

If history is the “science of mastering the past and the consciousness of time, it has yet to be defined as a science of change, of transformation.” Jacques Le Goff

Visualizing Venice aims at conceiving new ways of studying urban history: that—without leaving a single stone in the philosopher's garden of documentary, cartographic, iconographic, and bibliographic tools untamed—can draw on the potential of today’s multimedia technology to piece together complex long-term events otherwise difficult to reconstruct. The research is based on two parallel hypotheses:

1) That the processes of transformation and movement which increasingly characterize but have always conditioned the form and use of urban settlements can be best understood by combining the methods and interpretive techniques of various disciplines, and that the different areas of expertise dealing with the history of built works and open spaces, their uses, the institutions that backed them, the economic forces that made them possible, and the companies that used them can and must be brought together with the technological know-how capable of visualizing changes in access, routing, perspectives, and fruition.

2) That anyone is capable of appropriating knowledge about the formation and successive stratification of the places in which they live, play, go to school or to work, that scholars of “urban history,” professional/research associations, and institutions responsible for conserving and transmitting memory (museums, libraries, archives) often observe the transformations of physical urban space in sophisticated ways, but that, in both cases, it must be understood that today’s interlocutor is a broad audience made up not only of specialists but, first and foremost, of citizens old and new, of children in search of their grandparents’ “real” stories; of the elderly in pursuit of their memories, of newly or less recently arrived immigrants seeking the identity of the city in which they live; of decision makers requiring support in sustaining local economies, protecting cultural heritage—building infrastructure, and managing tourism; of tourists curious to know how the cities they explore came to be and developed. The divisions between academic disciplines make it hard to work collectively on bringing the history of institutions together with that of economics, society, and architecture. The history of the city, however, is built through the entanglement of these forces, and it is only on the basis of how they intertwine that the city can truly be studied. Visualizing Venice aims at studying long-term urban transformation by privileging dynamic considerations of space and time and the effects of movement; this exhibition is a first step in disseminating its results.

Visualizing Venice is focused on one exemplary case study—Venice, the lagoon city and its mainland, both as a whole and in some of its highly complex historical, institutional, economic, and morphological parts, over a chronological period spanning from the twelfth to the twenty-first century. It focuses on areas of the city in which the layering of many different interventors and uses can be documented: sites of power, markets, the naval shipyards, industrial developments, residences for foreigners and religious minorities, and places for viewing art. It demonstrates how buildings and institutions—such as hospitals, markets, churches—interact with space, transforming flows and movement in a city. It is possible to devise a descriptive and analytical tool that can map this? A tool that can then be applied to other cities and urban environments? Do existing technologies for handheld devices make it possible to develop apps that can explain the city to a multitude of users? The singularity and exemplarity of Venice—one a “world metropolis” and today the most extreme example of a monoculture based on tourism—provides a model for studying, visualizing, and integrating knowledge about urban transformation. While focused on one particularly significant case study, Visualizing Venice also poses the problem of the method’s comparability in completely different economic, institutional, and residential contexts.

The Exhibition
Alessandra Ferrighi

What will History say? History, sir, will tell lies.

The Devil's Disciple, 1897

Visualizing Venice, new technologies for urban history is the first exhibition entirely devoted to history to be mounted in the Gino Valle exhibition space at the University Iuav di Venezia. The exhibition offers, on the one hand, a cross-section of the research of Visualizing Venice focused on a new way of “making history” through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and, on the other, an opportunity to test just how effective the most innovative communication systems can be in recounting urban transformation.

The exhibition reconstructs Venice’s research over the last three years through a series of “cantieri” (construction sites). Moving through the space, visitors can trace the history of certain parts of the city: the insulae of SS. Giovanni Paolo and the Accademia, the areas of the Giardini della Biennale and the Arsenale. These sites have become the grounds on which to test a new way of doing historical research: they are sites of major change and sites on which Venice is proving to be a future-oriented city, a city that is ready to try out new ways of being, reinterpreting and recreating entire sections of its urban fabric. The changes in these parts of Venice’s historical building tissue are staged—at both an urban and a building scale—in the dramatic spaces created by the niches of the exhibition gallery, allowing viewers to experience urban transformation in both space and time. Visitors can observe the major changes in each area on a dual register through the relationships created between images from archival documents and digital reconstructions (3D models and 3D models). Historical sources are seen in relation to interpretations and accompanied by the scanning of time through the phases considered most crucial to each area’s transformation.

There’s nothing static in this exhibition, nothing that brings up images of dusty display cases protecting hardly decipherable documents. Quite the contrary. The exhibition holds the surprise of finding the historian’s tools in step with the times. There’s everything that is needed to interpret events dynamically: maps, models, videos with moving images; rigorous reconstructions of the city’s changes; bird’s-eye views of the cantieri and their histories. The exhibition has been conceived as an enthralling journey through time, a learning experience that lets visitors track events and stratifications, recomposing the tiles of the grand mosaic of Venice’s millenary history. Professor Donatella Calabi has set a challenge and likens the research now on display as a still photograph of a study just begun, a snapshot of a work in progress. These partial results, however, test and validate the use of a new methodology for studying urban history, an approach that will be necessary for researchers of tomorrow. That is, of course, if they are willing to take urban history off the library shelves and let it become part of the cultural heritage and identity of a community that recognizes itself in these stories.

The exhibition panels documenting the histories of the cantieri are accompanied by videos and an offline app (designed for an iPad), which—through the experiences of the professors and students who have participated in VV workshops—traces the parallel story of VV’s training program.
The insula of Zanipolo, the first case study
Alessandra Ferrighi

The insula of SS. Giovanni e Paolo faces north toward the island of San Michele (Venice’s cemetery). It was chosen as the first VV case study (July 2010), on the basis of its historical complexity and the layering of various institutions and uses from the twelfth century on: the complexes of the Dominican Order and the Mendicants, the Scuola Grande di S. Marco, the church of S. Maria dei Derelitti (dell’Ospedaletto), the Byzantine and Gothic residential buildings overlooking the canal from the south, the spaces for storing lumber on the Barbaria de le Tole, and, most recently, the social housing project in the area of the Ospedaletto. In the late sixteenth century, the insula was also the site of a major urban development and land reclamation project, which resulted in the construction of the Fondamente Nuove—a paved pedestrian walkway that solidified the city’s northern border. The island’s greatest transformation, however, took place after Napoleon’s occupation (1797), when the religious orders were suppressed (1806) and the complexes of SS. Giovanni e Paolo and the Mendicants were converted into hospital facilities. The insula has continued to undergo constant transformation since that time.

The insula of SS. Giovanni e Paolo provided an ideal case study with which to test the application of new information technologies to urban history. The aim was twofold: to provide scholars with non-traditional research tools capable of uncovering new knowledge, and to explore new means of communication that might reach a widely diversified audience of all ages and backgrounds.

The research methodology was designed to track and eventually visualize change over time. The first step was to collect a bibliography on the state of the art and to create a database by compiling textual and iconographic datasets including primary and secondary sources, historical maps, paintings, and photographs. The second was to redraw the map of the insula, layer by layer (island, canals, buildings, and walkways), working backwards in time from the city’s technical maps (CTC) through the use of existing representations of specific phases of the island’s history. The choice of historical cartography (maps by de’ Barbari, Ughi, Combatti, and municipal cadasters, to cite a few) was guided by the following criteria: 1) the full-scale representation of the entire city (which could ensure future comparability) and 2) the accurate reflection of the historical reality of the time period presented. All of this information was to provide the basis for creating a Geographic Information System (GIS).

The second phase of the research (July 2011) focused on designing and building two 3D models: one at an urban scale, including all the buildings on the island, the other at a building scale, including just the structures around the church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo and its campo. The criteria adopted for the 3D modeling depended on the available data: well-known buildings were represented according the existing documentation; lesser-known buildings for which sufficient information did not exist were interpreted and modeled with simplified forms.

The research on the insula of SS. Giovanni e Paolo (July 2010/July 2011) produced different forms of output, including 2D maps, 3D models, and videos. These results have been presented at international conferences and workshops, attesting the potential of new technologies in transmitting new knowledge on urban history both within the academic community and to the public at large.

Future research might approach the insula of SS. Giovanni e Paolo through the application of HGIS (the methodology adopted in 2012 for the Accademia and the Arsenale). This would make it possible piece together the various contexts and the insula they represent to recompose the mosaic of the city’s historical transformation.

Images
Isabella Friso, Cosimo Monteleone editing/translation
Marlene Klein
The discipline engaged in the geometric representation of architecture and the city often parallels that of the history of art or the history of architecture, attempting to furnish information that can broaden our understanding of specific sites in specific moments of history. Perspective, in particular, is a mathematical–geometrical method that makes it possible to represent three-dimensional space on a flat surface. From the fifteenth century on, research by Brunelleschi, treatises by Piero della Francesca and Leon Battista Alberti, and experiments by various artists all led to codifying this method, making it possible to render—correctly and according to precise rules—the space that had previously been depicted on a two-dimensional surface in an incoherent and empirical way.

Through an inverse process of perspective known as perspective restitution, geometric construction allows us to correctly re-present illusionistic space and what it contains. Accurate restitution and sophisticated computer programs make it possible to retrieve the intimate link established between reality and representation, on the one hand, and reality and the observer, on the other.

All of this is governed by the artist’s ability, by their geometric–mathematical training, by their intentions in organizing the space, and by their use of devices. If done correctly, the restitution of a perspective image allows us to reconstruct the model of the architectural and urban reality represented. This, in turn, makes it possible to understand shape and size, to grasp analogies with and differences from the present, and to understand relationships and impressions that have often been lost.

This particular study focused on Campo SS. Giovanni e Paolo. The campo itself is defined by the church of the same name, the Scuola Grande di S. Marco, the rio dei Mendicanti, and a row of residential buildings. At its center, erected on a pedestal, stands the equestrian statue of Bartolomeo Colleoni. The Scuola Grande di S. Marco presents a Renaissance facade, the lower order of which—through the extensive use of polychrome marbles and false perspectival views—creates a pictorial effect that gives it depth. It and the other buildings of the campo were one of the most represented areas of the city of the Venice, second only to St. Mark’s. Of particular renown are the many painting and engravings by Canaletto (second half of the eighteenth century).

The goal of the research was to verify the documentary potential of “representational” spaces in the reconstruction and re-presentation of campo SS. Giovanni e Paolo and, thus, of urban space in general. This was done by exploring the illusion of space created by the marble inlays of the Scuola Grande di S. Marco, on the one hand, and the interpretations of the campo by Canaletto on the other.

The study on the Scuola Grande di S. Marco reconstructed the otherwise barely perceptible virtual spaces represented in the marble inlays decorating the facade. By re-positioning the vantage points in the space of the campo, it was possible to understand that the illusion carved on the Scuola’s facade is part of an “initiatory” or “processional” path followed by observers as they move toward the church.

The study on Canaletto’s work verified the documentary potential of the artist’s paintings and engravings of the campo. Canaletto’s knowledge of perspective and his use of the camera obscura made accurate perspective restitutions possible. These, in turn, proved what art historians had maintained about the tricks he had used to create emphasis or, through the use of multiple points of view, make the parts of the city he represented more dynamic. Perspective restitution also made it possible to draw out elements that were useful in metrically reconstructing the buildings of the campo and in understanding why and according to what logic Canaletto gave priority to or left out specific information about the city and its architecture.

The next step is to use 3D models of the illusionistic spaces on the facade of Scuola Grande di S. Marco and of the image of the campo as represented by Canaletto to augment the reality of campo itself through apps for multimedia devices.
OSPEDALE
The Civic Hospital in Venice, built and unbuilt in time
Gianmarino Guidarelli
Università degli Studi di Padova
Ines Foletti
Università di Bologna

The Civic Hospital develops along the Fondamente Nuove and occupies almost two-thirds of the insula of San Zanipolo. Like the Arsenale, it is one of the largest single-use urban areas in Venice. Given the specificity of the activities concentrated here, the Hospital has a profound impact on the circulation within the insula and, accessed at only a few strategic points, the complex can easily be considered a citadel, or a city within a city. From an architectural point of view, it suggests an incoherent ensemble of buildings, intentions, and styles. The complex is, in fact, the result of a long series of urban master plans and only partially-completed architectural projects, the origins and destinies of which are deeply intertwined with the social, economic, cultural, and political events that shaped the city as a whole.

Taking into consideration almost two centuries of the Hospital’s history, the primary goal was to show how—between the collapse of the Venetian Republic (May 12, 1797) and today—the northern area of the insula of San Zanipolo was continuously and fractally rearranged in the attempt to create a meaningful and functional whole out of the various institutions abolished by Napoleon (the Scuola Grande di S. Marco, the Dominican convent of S. Giovanni e Paolo, the Ospedale dei Mendicanti, and the convent of S. Maria del Pianto). By focusing on a large urban sector instead of an individual edifice, the research also sought to show how the hospital—as an institution with well-defined needs—interacted with the city as a whole, continuously negotiating its presence. Finally, the intention was to define a method of preserving and maintaining distinctive traces of the unique historical and urban past of Venice, even if, over such a long time period, many structures have been irrecoverably modified, completely eliminated, or never built at all.

The research methodology followed both traditional and innovative paths. On the one hand, it required an extensive survey in archives and libraries, collecting both iconographic and bibliographical material related to the history of the Hospital and the area it occupies. On the other, it involved the visualization of the architectural and urban-scale transformations of the Hospital during its almost two-century-long history, attempting to demonstrate the usefulness of new technologies and the possibilities they offer as an instrument for both historical research and the dissemination of its results. Given the lengthy time span taken into consideration and for research purposes, the Hospital’s history was broken down into fragments and a set of specific historical questions identified for each fragment. From the initial phase in which—under the French rule—new healthcare needs were identified (1797–1807), a survey was conducted to identify the Hospital’s physical transformations (1807–1929). The origins and the debates of the projects prepared during what may be considered one of the most intense periods of Hospital’s history (1929–1957) were then retraced, and a reflection upon the meaning of the institution on both the urban (1957–1979) and the regional scale (1979–2012) begun. For each of these fragments, archival and bibliographical documentation was collected and analyzed. Using this material, new technologies were adopted to both interpret and visualize the transformation of the site over more than two centuries.

The Hospital has recently received media attention as the subject of considerable “project financing,” aimed at the modernization of the complex from both the functional and the architectural points of view. In light of these transformations, the future task is to define a method of preserving and maintaining distinctive traces of the unique historical and urban past of Venice, even if many structures have been and/or are being modified or eliminated, or were never built at all.

digital visualizations
Isabella Friso, Alessio Miatto, Cosimo Monteleone
editing
Marlene Klein
1931, Planimetria generale dello stato attuale, colla zona di demolizione, e del nuovo ospedale, in Progetto di riforma ed ampliamento dell’ospedale civile di Venezia, Venice

1940, Antonio Gelmetti, Planimetria del nuovo ospedale civile di Venezia (Soprintendenza B.A.P. di Venezia e Laguna)

1931–1978, Le Corbusier, Masterplan for the new hospital to be located in San Giobbe, Cannaregio (Archivio Progetti, Università Iuav di Venezia)

1979–1994, Luciano Semerani and Gigetta Tamaro, New Hospital in Venice, sketch (Archivio Progetti, Università Iuav di Venezia)

Digital model of the 1931 project and 1940 project for the Civic Hospital in Venice
Located at the foot of the Accademia bridge and circumscribed by the Grand Canal, the canal of the Giudecca, and the rio of S. Trovaso and S. Vio, the insula of Accademia is best known today as the site of the Gallerie dell’Accademia. It took its present form in the nineteenth century through the aggregation of three smaller insulae—S. Maria della Carità, S. Agnese, and the Gesuati—whose forms, in turn, date back to the sixteenth century, the period in which this canzone opens. The slow and gradual process that unified these insular depicted, by land, the various building complexes they housed—the church and Scuola Grande di S. Maria della Carità and the convent of the Lateran Canons; the Romanesque church of S. Agnese; the Dominican complex of the Gesuati, and the fifteenth-century church of S. Maria della Visitazione. The landfill of the canals of the Ca’ Foscari—Iuav Scuola dottorale interateneo Ca’Sagratrice—Iuav—opened at the request of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage (in specific, the Soprintendenza per i BeniArchitettonici e Paesaggistici di Venezia e Laguna), which, in conjunction with the current renovation and expansion of the Gallerie, is seeking to explore the museum site and its integration into the surrounding urban fabric. The goal of the research was to analyze how the overall area of the insula and its buildings had changed over time, attempting to piece together and recount the story of its complex past. This made it necessary to work on two different scales at the same time, focusing, on the one hand, on the insula’s urban dynamics, and, on the other, on the history of the museum’s collections. The final objective was to create content that can be accessible to a wide and varied audience through the use of multimedia devices, accompanying the user through space and time as a modern “forestiere illuminato.” The research began with a detailed study of the insula and its major architectural complexes (site inspections, photographic surveys, bibliographic and archival research). This overview made use of extremely heterogeneous cartographic and iconographic sources as well as textual documents, which provided information at another scale and with a different level of detail. The historical cartography (municipal cadastral and city maps) made it possible to define the macro changes that had affected the area’s physical makeup. The plans and documents of the major magistracies, which included historic views and photographs, provided information on more specific or partial sites. All of these sources were collected in a single database (using the model built for the cantiere of SS. Giovanni e Paolo) and geo-referenced using GIS. This made it possible to redraw the map of the insula over time, delineating the seven major phases of its urban history, and, subsequently, to build 3D models. A more detailed 3D model was produced on a building scale for the area of the Campo della Carità. The research conducted at an urban scale investigated the way in which the individual architectural complexes interact with the insula at large. The use of GIS made it possible to integrate, interpret, and reshape highly differentiated data and information in graphic form (2D and 3D reconstructions) and to create videos. Future research will focus on creating multimedia content capable of disseminating research-based materials in interactive formats, accessible at multimedia stations inside the museum or through apps for mobile devices.
Over time, endless acquisitions and losses continually challenged the criteria for displaying the works of art, and the institution’s dual demands made it necessary to keep reorganizing the layout of the galleries and the way in which the works were shown. Following the museum’s independence in 1882, the collection continued to be reorganized and mounted on the basis of criteria that sought to homogeneously represent Venetian artistic identity. The current restoration of the building complex and the complete redefinition of the museum’s itineraries once again highlight the issues that accompanied the Gallerie’s founding and the loss of the historical memory of its early buildings. This study sought to reconstruct the history and the original vocations of the buildings that now make up the Gallerie. The first goal was to establish the architectural configuration of the buildings in each of the most important phases of the monumental complex’s transformation, focusing, in particular, on their layout and use prior to 1800. The most emblematic case is the church, which, in 1811, was split horizontally and vertically, and is now part of the museum even if its interior design (its apse) is hardly perceptible to visitors. With respect to the complex after its allocation to the Accademia, the aim was to reconstruct the way in which the buildings had been redefined and, in particular, the criteria with which the works were displayed over the years. The research relied on the most important sources pertinent to the history of the building complex, as well as those archival and iconographic sources that emerged ex novo through detailed investigation. The use of nineteenth-century cadasters, drawings, and partial maps from the archives enabled the reconstruction of accurate eighteenth-century plans. A comparative study of literary sources made it possible to define how the display of works had transformed over time, tracing the relocation of those that had originally been found in the buildings of the Lateran Canons (primarily the church) and in the school. The major transformations of the building exteriors were visualized in 2D and 3D, making it possible to understand their original physiognomy and change over time. The same was done for the interiors, focusing, in particular, on a 3D model of the interior of the church before and after 1811, showing the works of art as they had been placed, and a 3D model of the solo cappella before and after 1822, with particular emphasis on the architecture. It was also possible to reconstruct the plan (2D) of the galleries designed by Carlo Scarpa (1950–1953), which was only partially carried out. Future goals include implementing the georeferenced database with all the information on the interior of the museum, the installation of the works of art, and the transformation of each building of the monumental complex. A study on the key figures who facilitated and guided the architectural and artistic transformations over the centuries might also be included.
The insula of San Giuseppe (now the Giardini della Biennale) is located on the eastern fringe of Venice. Known today as the main venue for the international art and architecture exhibitions of the Venice Biennale, the insula was once a marshy area almost exclusively occupied by religious institutions. At the southern edge of island overlooking the water once stood the church and convent of Sant’Antonio Abate (1546), the church of San Nicolò (1480), the Ospedale dei Marinai with the adjoining Seminario Ducale (15th century), and the monastery of the Concessio di Maria (16th century). Behind them rose the church and convent of San Giuseppe (1521) and two rows of houses dating back to the first half of sixteenth century. There were no significant changes in the urban fabric from the mid-sixteenth to the early nineteenth century, when, in compliance with a Napoleonic decree (1807), the area was chosen for the public gardens. The general plan, designed by Giannantonio Selva, called for the complete demolition of the buildings on the island’s southern edge and reclaimed the marshland in the northeast. The project marked a significant change in use: the area once devoted to religious institutions became a place for leisure activities and, at the same time, provided a new, modern image of Venice as first sited from the sea. The opening of the National Art Exhibition in 1895 and the establishment of the International Art Exhibition in 1885 confirmed the area’s allocation to cultural and recreational use, inscribing it within a logic of urban transformation and the city’s re-launch of tourism. The Biennale, which was first housed at a riding school, grew gradually but steadily, filling the garden with the national pavilions of different countries.

The goal of the research was to explore the cantiere from four different perspectives: 1) the urban transformation in the insula’s canals, buildings, and walkways; 2) the major phases in the construction and eventual transformation of the national pavilions in the Giardini; 3) the reconstruction of exhibition space through the development of a case study; and 4) the graphic interpretation of art-historical phenomena.

At the urban-architectural scale, the research was based on the methodology that had been successfully adopted by the other centers. At the exhibition scale, two case studies were chosen. The first was selected from the works displayed at the main pavilion of the 36th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale (1972), and relied on archival sources and contact sheets to reconstruct the exhibition mounted by Gino De Dominicis (known in the history of the Biennale as the “scandal room”). The second is investigating the socio-political history of the American pavilion from a critical perspective, judging how and when abstract art fits with a political representation of the country during the Cold War.

The research conducted at the urban-architectural scale revealed the configuration of the area at different times in history, from the fifteenth century to the major transformations of the nineteenth century. It provided a likely reconstruction of the area before the eighteenth-century demolitions and, by delimiting its perimeter over time, mapped the Biennale’s gradual expansion.

At an exhibition scale, the research on the first case study made it possible to present the overall layout of the main pavilion and a 3D reconstruction of the space in which Gino De Dominicis had mounted his installation (in which he had combined real people and objects to represent the concept of immortality). The research on the second case study is still underway. Future goals include completing the reconstruction of the insula before the nineteenth century through further archival research, and creating 3D models of the national pavilions and their use over time by cross-referencing a multitude of archival sources (maps, elevations, photographs, and correspondence).

3D modeling
Cosimo Monteleone
Text revision/editing
Marlene Klein

Map of the Biennale in 1972
Following page
Gino De Dominicis’ installation at the 36th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale, 1972.
Enrico Cattaneo, contact sheet from the 36th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale, June 1972
Newspaper articles:
1 “Gino,” June 24, 1972
2 “Gino,” June 24, 1972
3 “Gino,” August, 1972
4 “Gino,” June 25, 1972
5 “Gino,” June 25, 1972
Rendering of De Dominicis’ installation

Summary histogram:
2 1948, 1951, 1952
3 1954, 1956, 1958
4 1948, 1951, 1952
5 1954, 1956

Abstract (blue) and figurative (red) painters in the US pavilion from 1948 to 1958

Map of the Biennale in 1974

Rendering of De Dominicis’ installation
Summary histogram:
2 1948, 1951, 1952
3 1954, 1956, 1958
4 1948, 1951, 1952
5 1954, 1956

Map of the Biennale in 1954

Abstract (blue) and figurative (red) painters in the US pavilion from 1948 to 1958

Summary histogram:
2 1948, 1951, 1952
3 1954, 1956, 1958
4 1948, 1951, 1952
5 1954, 1956

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3 1954, 1956, 1958
4 1948, 1951, 1952
5 1954, 1956

The most recent cantiere refers, not to a specific insula but, to a vast special-use area at the eastern edge of the city known as the Arsena1e. The Arsena1e’s history is closely bound to that of Venice, and its area is so extensive that—in the late eighteenth century—it actually comprised one-tenth of the city. It was a secret place from the very start (ca. 1104), protected by high embattled walls, a dock, and the tese acque (large buildings fronting on the water) and organized on a scheme that would later be repeated in the Arsenale novo, the Arsenale novissimo, and the Galeazze.

The cantiere was opened in response to a request by Societa Arsenale S.p.A, a joint-venture founded in 2003 between the Italian Public Property Agency and the Municipality of Venice to develop and manage projects for the Arsenale’s reuse (Second Chance Project). Among these projects is the redevelopment of the Torre di Porta nuova. The Torre has been designated as a research center devoted to the study of the scientific, historical, and artistic heritage of the Arsenale. It will also serve as a showcase for the Arsenale’s cultural activities and a virtual museum on its history. The goal of the research is to collect historical data on macro phenomena from various archives, and to redraw and model the maps for each major phase. Emphasis has been placed on the area around the Torre della Campanella because it is in the middle of the Arsenale, both in terms of its geographical location and in terms of history. It is the pivot around which all of the Arsenale’s major transformations have taken place: a place outside the perimeter, a tower meant to defend the perimeter, a logistics center whose bell marked time for the Arsenalotti at work. The phases investigated to date underscore the changes in this area through 1937, when the tower’s lost forms were restored and the last warehouses were demolished to make room for the new Piazza dell’Impero.

Future goals include the use of parametric modeling software (City Engine). This will make it possible to import, verify, and modify data from HGIS. This technique, which is considerably more “industrial” than what has been used to date, is particularly well suited an area like the Arsenale where the buildings and their productive uses are modular and repetitive.

Caterina Balletti, Alessandra Ferrighi

Caterina Balletti, Alessandra Ferrighi

translation/editing

Marlene Klein
Reconstruction of the Torre della Campanella based on Jacopo de’ Barbari’s map (1500)

Reconstruction of the Torre della Campanella based on Maffioletti’s map (1797)

Ca. 1850, reconstruction of area around the Torre della Campanella

1913, changes after the collapse of the tower

The tower was rebuilt in 1936–1937 on the basis of earlier drawings. The demolition of three buildings created space for Piazzale dell’Imparo.
promoted by University Iuav of Venice
Unità di ricerca "Memoria e Rappresentazione"
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Università Iuav di Venezia
steering committee Donatella Calabi, Full Professor
Università Iuav di Venezia
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Università degli Studi di Padova
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team coordinator Biennale Francesca Castellani, Associate Professor
Università Iuav di Venezia
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